

# The *Coming Home Network* *International*

APRIL 2006 NEWSLETTER

## Journeys Home

### Pack in the Past

Reconciliation story by  
Dow Escalante



In 1995, the year my son Ryan was born, I was sitting in our Home Bible Study with some of my best friends. Being a father of three young boys had its terrifying moments, but I could always depend on our small group to be there to help us through the hard times.

The hosts that night were Tim and Pam Randolph. After a half hour or so of laughing and eating, Tim sat us down and told us that he had an important announcement to make. I sat down excited, thinking maybe it had something to do with recording an album together since he had been prodding me to record and suggested that he would produce, so this was on my mind. But what he was about to say was not what I was expecting . . . indeed!

#### *You're Becoming What?*

I sat apprehensively. Tim spoke. "Guys . . . I'll get right to the point. Pam and I, and the family, are re-entering the Catholic Church."

"Did he just say what I think he said?" I remember thinking as I glanced at my wife. "What?" I said, and then asked Tim to repeat himself.

Another friend of ours, Ross, said, "Oh really, why didn't you choose the Orthodox Church?" I remember thinking, "Wait a minute, this is a joke! Tim is a leader in our church, he knows better than to return to the 'Whore of Babylon' (as I was taught in my fundamentalist Bible College). And what's this 'Orthodox Church' Ross was speaking of?"

My heart dropped to the floor in disappointment as I listened to one of my best friends share with our group that it was true and that they were leaving our Non-denominational church immediately. Tim explained that

he had spent significant time with our pastor discussing, arguing, praying, and then finally deciding it was time—it was time to re-enter the Church of his birth, the Church of the first century (as he put it), the Roman Catholic Church. He also let us know that he needed to return to the Eucharist.

I thought, "The what?" Little did I know that this internal question would lead me into further discussions with Tim about his decision.

I was shocked, and stunned beyond belief. I told Tim I'd like to talk to him sometime in private about all this and he agreed.

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## *A First Encounter of the Strangest Kind*

We sat in Denny’s in Fremont, California on a Saturday afternoon. I remember taking my Bible; I felt like David preparing to slay Goliath as I tried to recall all the Bible verses I could to defend my Protestant faith, our Protestant Faith! Tim was humble as I sat there telling him he was wrong. He listened quietly as I told him that it was wrong to rely on the traditions of man, and wrong to worship Mary, and wrong to believe that one man—the Pope—was to oversee the entire church . . . wrong . . . wrong . . . wrong!

Tim’s calm demeanor aggravated me, but also intrigued me as he calmly explained that I was using the Scriptures to defend “my” point of view, not the “historic Church.” I remember saying something like, “What in the world are you talking about, ‘Historic Church?’” He said, “Yes, Dow, the church we’ve been worshipping in (the Christian Church/Churches of Christ) is a church with roots from the late 19th Century, the Church that I am returning to has its roots in the 1st Century.” I was startled to hear something like that. I had never heard anyone talk like that before. I only remember hearing in our Non-denominational denomination that we were “just Christians,” trying to get back to being the Church of the 1st Century (in reality, the Restoration Movement).

I told Tim that he could talk all he wanted to about the “historic Church,” but the real issue at hand was the “authority of the Bible.” He looked at me and said, “Dow, who do you think gave the Bible you hold in your hand its authority?” I said, “Well, God of course.” He said, “Come on Dow, of course it was God and you know better than that! You went to Bible College. Remember that little subject you studied called “the Canon of Scripture”? “Yes, I remember.”

“Well Dow, who was present at the canonization of the scripture...who were the “people” that over saw that decision?”

“The leaders of the Church of course...the ones in authority,” I replied.

He said, “Okay. Do you realize that it was the Catholic Church—the Church Fathers, the Bishops, and the Pope—who were present when they decided which Scriptures would be put into that Bible you hold?”

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll give you that. Yes, I understand.”

He went on, “Dow, there are two fundamental reasons why I left the Protestant church. First of all, I left

because of ‘authority’. The Protestant Reformation was in part a rebellion against the Church. Were there some things not right in the Church at the time? Sure! No one will argue that, but Jesus said, ‘The gates of hell will not prevail against it,’ referring to the Church. So why did certain men feel like the gates of hell had come against the Church in such a way that change could not happen? Dow, there’s much more to the Reformation than you realize. Our college professors didn’t tell us everything.”

I said, “Okay Tim, I get what you’re saying, but I still don’t understand why you think the Bible doesn’t hold its own authority over your life.”

“That’s not the issue, Dow. The issue is that, according to Protestant teaching, the Bible is the believer’s ‘sole’ authority. Have you ever heard of something called sola scriptura?”

“Yes, of course” I replied.

Tim then said, “Well, let me ask you Dow, where does it say in the Bible that the Bible is to be a believers ‘sole’ authority? That’s the second issue that brought me back to Catholicism.”

He looked at me and said, “Dow, who do you think gave the Bible you hold in your hand its authority?”

I couldn’t answer him, but then I remembered, “Well Paul said to Timothy, ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness . . .’” (2 Timothy 3:16).

He said, “Does it say, ‘and should be the believer’s only authority?’”

I had to say, “No”. So there I sat, dumbfounded that I was listening to one of my best friends explain to me that the “authority” of the Scriptures—or rather the authority of the “ones” who gave our Bibles authority—and his yearning to be a part of this Church that Jesus left us in the first century, was causing him to leave our Protestant fellowship and re-enter the Catholic Church.

I sighed as I left Denny’s that day, but I remember not being agitated or upset with my friend. I remember sitting in my car as I started the engine and thinking, “Wait, if Tim is right, what does that mean for me?”

## *Moving On*

Tim and I maintained our relationship. I continued my duties at Green Valley Christian Church as their part-time worship minister, preaching occasionally for our senior minister when he was out of town.

In the Fall of 1996, my family and I returned to missionary training with New Tribes Mission. We were

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# From Listening, through Following, to Receiving

by Marcus Grodi

*“Thus says the Lord: These were my orders:  
Listen to my voice,  
Then I will be your God and you shall be my people.  
Follow right to the end the way that I mark out for you,  
And you will prosper.  
But they did not listen,  
They did not pay attention;  
They followed the dictates of their own evil hearts,  
Refused to face me,  
And turned their backs on me.”*

Jeremiah 7:23-24

This was the first reading for Thursday, the third week of Lent (1994). I was alone on retreat at a local state park lodge, trying to discern peacefully and patiently God's direction for my long-term future. I loved my work as the director of the *Light and Life Foundation*, but the duration of the project was limited by its funding. What should I be planning towards? A Ph.D. so I could teach? Writing? Ministry management? Music? Return to engineering?

It seemed that as I reopened the door for occupational choices, all the previous dreams I had considered over the years began to resurface. I swung emotionally from wondering whether there was anything at all open for me (anything at all that I could even do) to whether there was anything closed to me (anything at all that I could not do if I bravely tried—somewhere in my 42-year old, adolescent brain, I still envisioned myself a folk-singing balladeer, strumming my faithful guitar to the standing applause of weeping, melancholy baby-boomers).

I spent nearly an entire day trying to get myself in focus, but my mind and body kept finding distractions: another book I “needed” to read, a jaunt down to the book table at a Nazarene Pastors Convention that was also meeting in the lodge (Boy, if THEY only knew what kind of infidel was sharing their lodge!), a quick jog around the park in freezing rain followed by a welcome dip in the Jacuzzi, some catch-up tasks from work, and a few games of solitaire on my laptop. By evening, I was much more relaxed but no closer to reflecting on the reason for my retreat. I considered at that late hour diving into it, glancing at my untouched journal over on the table, but instead chose to escape back into a Dorothy Sayers' mystery.

In the morning, I found myself afraid to begin, afraid that I might not hear a “still small voice” or discern the “dew on the fleece.” Nevertheless, I had to at least start the morning with devotions.

For years, my normal procedure had been to read Scripture until some paragraph, some verse or word grabbed me, inspired me. After recording this text in my journal, I would address Jesus directly as my Lord and then prayerfully record my reflections and petitions.

On this particular morning, the above text from the Daily Missal unexpectedly glowed with conviction. It seemed that a virtual pillar of fire and smoke rose from the pages, enveloping me, carrying me away from my self-centered confusion and finally bringing me with eyes free of scales to a new yet old understanding of God's Call for my life.

These prophetic words from Jeremiah spoke of the spiritual journey we all must take:

*From listening . . . through following . . . to receiving.*

God promises a close covenantal relationship, both corporate and personal, if only we would listen to His voice: “I will be your God, you will be my people.” I will be your Father, you will be my child. He promises that if we “follow right to the end” what we have heard, He will bless us: “if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (John 15.10). Normally, I tend to focus more on the “if” side of “if-then” propositions. I tend to focus, for example, on how well I have or have not been listening and following. And in this case, I did begin this way. I recorded:

*I've spent a lot of time and mental energy over the years, maybe most of my life, trying to nail down what I will do once I “grow up.” I must admit that I have failed to be faithful in the obvious—I have not always “listened” and “followed” in the way You have clearly marked out for me in Your Word. Therefore, it is understandable that I may be less than sure about my vocational direction: Why should I prosper? Why should You help me? Why should You direct my paths? (Remember Proverbs 3.5,6)*

But then the pillar of fire seemed to flare up, and through the din of my self-absorption, I heard the still small voice. I wrote:

*Yet, You have done so; You have always directed my paths!  
You have been so good to my family and to me over the years.  
No matter how much I have failed you, You have never failed me!! Maybe sometime long ago You delegated my case to a very patient yet persistent guardian angel!*

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*continued from article by M Grodi on page 3*

It became very clear that my future was really not my concern. I was in fact living in the future I had once fretted over; I was having a wonderful ministry for which I could neither have imagined or planned! As a Protestant seminarian or pastor, I never dreamed I would one day be the North American director of an international Catholic evangelistic outreach to teenagers! Nor that this ministry would bring me into contact with deeply committed Catholic Christians all over the world! And I received this spiritual “prosperity” not because of any insightful career planning on my part, but solely because of God’s faithfulness.

There is no question in my mind—no doubt in my heart—that if God has called Marilyn and me to leave Ur (the Protestant ministry) and follow Him by faith into a strange land (the Catholic Church), He will have something for me to do. He will be faithful! What He expects of us now is to listen and follow faithfully, “right to the end of the way that I mark out for you.”

And this, of course, is true for every one of you that have heard and are following the still small voice of God. Remember: God promises that He will never leave you nor forsake you.

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*continued from conversion story by D Escalante on page 2*

headed for Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania to begin a year long program affectionately called “Boot Camp.” There would be about fifteen other families and singles there along with a staff of eight or ten that would train us for the foreign mission field. Our desire was to go to Papua New Guinea to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to tribal people who were living in darkness and desperately needed the light of Jesus Christ in their lives.

We were all ready to head out on the road for our 2000 mile plus journey with our kids, suit-cases, and 1000 music CDs we had recorded with the help of Tim. When we left, Tim met us in a parking lot to say goodbye. I remember tears welling in my eyes as I was saying goodbye to my dear friend. He hugged me and said “I want you to have this Dow.” It was a book entitled *The Faith of the Early Fathers—Volume 1*. Tim said, “Dow, just read with an open mind and heart, and be a good student of scripture—compare—compare!” I thanked Tim and gave him another hug, and we were off on our journey across the country.

### *My First Discovery*

During our travels from church to church proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and challenging other Christians to give their lives to full time service in missionary work, I began reading this first volume that Tim gave me. I have

As the pillar of fire burned down to an ember and the smoke cleared, I sat in stillness in my lodge room, motionless. My mind began to wander. Once again I found myself dreaming. I was there singing ballads before a crowd of attentive, reflective groupies. And as I strummed my guitar, allowing *Amazing Grace* to explain the truth of my self-insufficiency, I saw before me seated at a coffee table, right up front, Jesus, smiling.

(This article was first published in the March 1994 *Network* Newsletter and later in the first edition of *Journeys Home*. I’m including this updated version as a witness that God is very faithful—as much on this side of the Tiber as He was on the other! In the silence of that retreat lodge, I had no inkling that the fledgling *Network* would become the *Coming Home Network International* with over 25,000 members and that we would have a weekly live witness to the world over EWTN television and radio. Nor could I have dreamed that my wife and I, our three sons, and a cadre of animals would be living on a peaceful small farm in central Ohio.

Please, no matter how desperate things may appear, never doubt that God is always willing to guide if you follow.

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to admit that my first inclination was that the book was only Catholic propaganda, and would be heavily laden with false doctrine — false doctrine I could easily disprove with my Bible. But what I discovered was to the contrary. All I found was that this editor had compiled portions of writings that had been preserved from the early Church officials, or as he called them, Fathers. I was intrigued that these documents were ever written and still preserved and studied! In my college days there had been only a handful of times I could remember any reference being made to church officials, or believers during the period following the death of St. John the Apostle up until the Reformation. I was shocked that in this volume I was reading “letters” written by men who were claiming to be the direct descendents of the original Apostles! If it was true that they were the “descendents” of the Apostles then maybe I should pay attention to what they were writing

One of the first things that popped out at me was a small portion of the *Didache*—a document that scholars say was written in the early part of the 2nd century, and some even think earlier than that—in the 1st century! This document contains instructions concerning baptism: “. . . baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water,

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## *Deep In Scripture Radio*

A great dream is being fulfilled here at the *Coming Home Network International* and it's all because of God's merciful grace, your generous support and prayers, and the bold faith of a contemplative nun.

Our apostolate began in 1993 as a fellowship of clergy converts and their families helping others on the journey home to the Church. From the beginning we have tried to be faithful to the Church's thoughtful understanding of our responsibility to those outside the Church: we are to proclaim with charity ("speaking the truth in love," Ephesians 4) the fullness of the Catholic faith from beside, not from above in judgment or from below with groveling apologies. The *CHNetwork* does not go out after Protestant clergy, they must come to us; we do not push, pull, or prod, but stand beside them. Since 1993, more than 1500 non-Catholic clergy (and many more laymen) from over 80 different non-Catholic traditions have contacted us, now at an average of 2-5 new contacts per week.

However, that being said, we have always encouraged you, our membership, to accept the important roll—as partners in this work—of telling your friends, family, and neighbors—especially the non-Catholic clergy you know—about our work. The reason we began publishing evangelistic literature, *CHJournals*, and books through *CHResources* was to provide you with material to read and then give away to your friends. You have been the primary evangelistic outreach of the *Coming Home Network International*.

I must admit, however, that the biggest boost to our outreach came as a gift from a contemplative nun. In December 1996, Mother Angelica invited Dr. Kenneth Howell and me to talk about the work of the *Coming Home Network International* on her live program. She was so moved by the journeys of clergy converts into the Church that she invited me to host a new weekly live program to feature interviews with converts and reverts, clergy and laity, and in fact I am writing this article on a return flight from my weekly jaunt from Ohio to the EWTN studios in Birmingham, Alabama. We gratefully acknowledge that we owe much of the growth of our apostolate to the exposure we have received worldwide through the *Journey Home* program.

Then through the generosity of Mother Angelica and her staff, the *CHNetwork* and I were granted an additional opportunity to use the media to proclaim the fullness of

the Catholic faith: I was invited to be a host for EWTN live radio. But now this has opened the door for the fulfillment of a nearly life-long dream: since the first week in January the *CHNetwork* now has its own weekly live radio program! Thanks to your generosity in our capital remodeling campaign, we now have a fully functional radio broadcasting and audio-visual studio. (In the last newsletter, we featured a collage of snapshots from our studio broadcast.)

Every Wednesday from 2-3 EST, I'm joined by either Jim Anderson in the studio or a guest commentator over the telephone. For an hour we discuss a passage of Scripture primarily to discern how it helps us grow closer to Jesus Christ and His Church. Even though we are broadcasting over EWTN Catholic radio, EWTN estimates that over 30% of our audience are not Catholic, so my guests and I are intentionally cognizant of this great opportunity of speaking directly to Protestant clergy and laity.

Our program can also be heard over the internet from EWTN's radio website, both live on Wednesdays and when it is rebroadcast on Friday evenings at 9 EST.

If you want a copy of the program, they are all available for FREE download in MP3 format or as a podcast from the [deepinscripture.com](http://deepinscripture.com) website.

We are hoping this program can become a resource for you to share with your friends, Catholic or non-Catholic, so, if you can't download it for free, we are making it available to you by subscription! A subscription is \$60 which covers the production cost and will bring you the entire year of programs in monthly installments. You can either subscribe on our [deepinscripture.com](http://deepinscripture.com) website or call the *CHNetwork* office. You can also send a gift subscription to a friend, which they will receive monthly in your name. All proceeds from these subscriptions go directly to the support of the *Deep In Scripture* radio program. Even though this program is being broadcast through EWTN and its affiliates, the cost is completely underwritten by the *Coming Home Network International*.

Please pray for this program, for the Scripture discussions, and especially for all those, Catholic or non-Catholic, from around the world who will be listening over radio, shortwave, or internet.

Sincerely in Christ,  
 Marcus Grodi





# Please pray for...

## WClergyW

W For George, a Southern Baptist lay minister in Florida who is being strongly called to the Catholic Church.

W For Paul in North Carolina, who has resigned his Lutheran pastorate and is now seeking new employment.

W For Mark a former United Methodist minister who is having some difficulties as he finds a place in the Catholic Church.

W For Joy Pinto who is under treatment for cancer.

W For Christians in Pakistan, where two churches and a Christian school were burned by more then 500 Muslims in the province in Sukkur city.

W For the Holy Spirit's guidance for David, a Charismatic/Pentecostal minister in Tennessee who is seeking to understand the truth of the Catholic Church.

W For Jon, a Quaker youth minister who would convert today, but his wife is hesitant.

W For Harry who has been a pastor in the United Church of Christ for 35 years. He has decided to leave the UCC and become Catholic.

W For Jeff, a Baptist seminarian, who is considering a shift in focus from Protestant seminary studies to a Catholic seminary.

W For Ian, a former Baptist minister who is working on his doctorate in a "Catholic" university.

W For Brent, a Protestant minister whose mother has been praying for his return to the Church for 25 years.

W For Bruce, a former Episcopal priest and his wife Joann who is receiving treatment for cancer. They were both received into the Church on March 3rd.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. Each person mentioned has contacted us and is somewhere along their journey home. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs in general and specific of the *CHNetwork*, its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to :

*CHN Prayer List  
P. O. Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH 43702*

You may also email your prayer requests to:

[prayers@chnnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnnetwork.org)

We will use only first names to preserve anonymity.

W For Beatrice and the witness of Christ's charity and love she brings to this world.

W For Dave and Linda as they look to understand God's calling for them to enter the Catholic Church.

W For Kathy and Dan as they make their first confession.

W For those who are coming into the Catholic Church this Easter, that their hearts be filled with the Spirit of God, and through their lives ever witness the truth they have come to find in the Catholic Church.

W For the needs of all our Helpers and contacts, their families and those dear to their hearts.

W For all those who have sought help from the *CHNetwork* to aid them in their understanding of being called home to the Catholic Church.

W For baby Ambrose and his continual fight for life, and all those children and their parents, families and friends, bearing the cross for the fight of life for a child.

## WQuo Vadis YouthW

W For all youth inquirers to the Catholic Church.

W For Colt and Charlotte who are thinking of converting.

W For Maricruz who is endeavoring to return to her faith.

W For all members of Quo Vadis.

## WLaityW

W For Jim, a Non-denominational minister and his wife. They have made attempts to come into the Catholic Church but have not received a warm welcome.

W For a contact who is being pulled from the Catholic faith by her husband as he looks to enter a Pentecostal Church.



## We Love Conversion Stories

Every month the CHNetwork includes a conversion story, they are usually written by a former Protestant clergyman but sometimes also from a layperson. This part of our newsletter is included for your encouragement, enlightenment and edification. We love conversion stories and would like to read yours. Please send it as an attachment in Microsoft Word, 1800 to 2000 words in length to [jim@chnetwork.org](mailto:jim@chnetwork.org). We look forward to reading your story and possible including it in some future issue of the CHNetwork newsletter.

### Have You Been Receiving Your Newsletters?

A couple weeks ago the CHN staff discovered that there had been a computer problem that had caused several of our clergy members not to receive the CHNetwork newsletter for the last couple of months. We apologize if you are one of our unfortunate members who had temporarily and inadvertently been dropped from the mailing list. If this is the first time you have heard from us in a while, please let us know by contacting Jim Anderson at [jim@chnetwork.org](mailto:jim@chnetwork.org). We will be happy to mail you back issues.

### The 2006 Anglican Use Conference June 5 and 6, 2006

Speakers:  
Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J.  
Dr. David Mills  
Fr. Carleton Jones, O.P.

St. Thomas More Society of St. Clare  
Catholic Church  
2301 North Washington Avenue  
Scranton, PA 18509

Reservations required: Call: 570-343-0634

Attn: 2nd Annual Anglican Use Conference

For a \$60.00 (which covers the production costs) you can receive a subscription for Deep In Scripture radio programs for one year. There are 3 ways to receive this subscription.

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and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit . . .” I remember thinking, “What in the world? I can’t believe that the ancient Church practiced ‘sprinkling,’ but there it was, in black and white, in a document that can be dated back to the 1st or early 2nd century. I thought if this document was truly giving instructions to the Church at large regarding baptism, by legitimate leaders, then how different would it be from say the instructions given to the gentile church in Acts 15 at the first council of the Church. This discovery really shook me to my Protestant core because if it were true that the ancient Church practiced sprinkling something that 21st century Protestants condemned, then what else was I going to find that contradicted what I had formally thought was gospel truth?

### *God Moves Us*

In the fall of 1997, we had to leave our missionary training due to our oldest son’s health. The Lord brought us to Branson, Missouri where I was offered a role in a musical based on the life of Christ. I received a small part as a chorus member, but we praised the Lord that I would be getting paid to use my singing talents and doing ministry at the same time.

We became involved in a Protestant church movement revolving around the teachings of Chuck Smith, founder of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, California. It was there that I learned not to limit the Holy Spirit. Calvary Chapels around the world try to balance the theological differences between conservative churches such as Bible Fellowships or Southern Baptist churches and Pentecostal churches such as Assembly of God or Foursquare churches. It was a good time for me, leading worship in this small community of believers, and occasionally preaching. During this time I continued my studies on Church history, and also continued my relationship with Tim via email.

### *I Make the Call*

In 1998, I finally got up the courage to call the local Catholic Church to see if I could make an appointment with the priest to ask him some questions about Mary. I wanted to get a feeling if he was a worshipper of Mary, and then I could just throw out my growing convictions that the ancient Church was the Catholic Church. Yes,

I was getting frightened to think that I might someday “have” to become Catholic!

I arrived at Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church terrified: terrified that someone might see me in the parking lot, and terrified that I just might like this priest! I wasn’t able to meet the priest that day due to some unforeseen situation he had to deal with, but I did get to meet my first nun! She was a very quiet, unassuming woman that struck me as nice. I told her in brief that I was a Protestant in search of the truth about the ancient Church. She handed me a few pamphlets on the Catholic Church and wished me well. She said if I had any questions about the pamphlets I could call anytime. I left there thinking, “Okay, I did it. I made the call. I came to see him. He’s not here. God must be telling me to just move on.” So I did.

I continued reading and researching Church history, but I didn’t pursue any real conversation with Catholic Christians . . . yet.

I remember thinking, “What in the world? I can’t believe that the ancient Church practiced ‘sprinkling,’ but there it was, in black and white, in a document that can be dated back to the 1st or early 2nd century.

### *A Tidal Wave in My Life*

In January of 1999, my wife and I decided that I should go back to college to finish my degree. I was feeling led to enter the medical field, possibly as a nurse, so I left the theater and began full time study while she found an excellent job with benefits to support our family.

It was in this job that she started turning from her Christian virtues and becoming a woman I never thought was possible for her to become. It started with her smoking. She said that she always wanted to return to this habit she had in high school and the people she worked with enticed her to begin it again. I told her that I didn’t agree with her, that it was bad for her health and a bad example to our kids. She refused to listen and she said she would only smoke outside. Well this started the downward cycle in our relationship.

In the summer of 1999, I took a trip to California to visit my family. At the suggestion of my wife I took my three boys and we made it a memorable “road trip”. While I was on this trip with my boys my wife made some life changing decisions that would forever affect us all. When I returned she said she had to move out and think through whether or not she wanted to be married to me any longer. Shock would be an understatement for how I felt. I was devastated. I felt like a tidal wave had struck our home and I was drowning. She moved out and moved in with her brother, and left me with the boys. After a few weeks of

*continued on the next page . . .*

this, she moved back, but told me that she wanted to move closer to her work which was about a 50 minute drive. She wanted to take the boys with her, but not me.

### *My Life Is Over . . . Until*

She did move. It felt like my life was over. I let her take the boys. I was an emotional wreck. I couldn't fight her. After a 3 week stay in California with my family to get some help emotionally I returned to Branson and got my old job back with the theater and attempted to rebuild my life.

It was during this time that I met the angel in my life. Alesha worked upstairs in the marketing department while I worked on stage. I was still recovering emotionally from my divorce and quite frankly should have only concentrated on that aspect of my life, but when I met her I knew there was more to our meeting than just chance. It took some time but I finally convinced her to just go out for some coffee or dessert. After much prodding and begging (at least on my part) she finally agreed, and I came to find out that she only agreed because she felt sorry for me! But I accomplished my goal. I offered to take her and her best friend out to the movies and dinner, my treat. We had a chaperone on our first date and it was the most wonderful time of my life. We enjoyed wonderful conversation and good laughs.

Our relationship blossomed quickly. We had a lot in common. Her ex-husband, had left her and her daughter. Our commonality drew us closer together, as well as our love for the Lord. When I knew that our relationship was growing closer and closer to the point of marriage, I told Alesha all about my journey to this point; a journey that could possibly take me into the Catholic Church. I explained to her that for some time I had been studying the ancient Church and was becoming more and more convinced that the Church of the 1st century was the Catholic Church. She told me, "Dow, I would trust your spiritual leadership in my life if I were your wife. I will follow you anywhere." That did it for me! I asked her to marry me and to my utter disbelief she said yes! We were married on June 10, 2000, and immediately became a family of six!

In order to make ends meet I took a part time ministry in a church in Springfield, Missouri as their worship leader, and worked for Bank One in their customer service department. During this time my search within the Catholic Church was becoming stronger and stronger. I was reading all the Scott Hahn books I could get my hands on and learning so much about the Mass that I was beginning to really hunger for the "Real Presence of Christ" in the Eucharist. I then remembered Tim's comment to us that night during our Bible study, "I need

to return to the Eucharist." One passage of scripture that just blew me away like it never had before was John 6. I remember reading Scott's comments about Jesus' words to those who had been looking for him after his miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Scott said something like this, "When Jesus told the crowd that he was the living bread come down from heaven and that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood remains in him, he made no apologies for it. And after they grumbled and walked away from him he didn't go chasing them saying, 'Hey guys! I was only kidding. I was only speaking figuratively—symbolically! I didn't mean it.' No he didn't chase after them because he meant what he meant" (My apologies to Scott Hahn for hacking his words with my memory!). For the first time, "I was longing for Jesus' presence in Communion, while only growing more frustrated in my church's teaching that Jesus is only 'present' symbolically."

### *God Grows My New Family*

We were blessed on March 19, 2001 with another boy! It was this year that would change my life forever. September 11, 2001. I sat glued to the television as I watched recovery efforts non-stop on the news of the World Trade Center. I remember sitting there at 1 AM crying, sobbing over the devastation I was witnessing. I remember telling God, "Lord, I will do whatever you desire—use me."

Alesha's home church of Mt. Branson Christian Church in Branson, Missouri, was needing a Senior Minister and a Worship Minister. I told this small congregation I was available and they could use me as they pleased. They offered me a full time position as Associate Minister in December of 2001. I accepted the call.

Despite all my growing convictions about the Catholic Church, I felt that God was telling me to take this. It wasn't until just recently as I reflected on my time with Mt. Branson, that I realized God had done an incredible work in my life. It had been in my four years with this congregation that God had solidified my growing Catholic Theology. Amazingly he had even used my relationship with the Senior Minister to challenge my thinking regarding "covenant." I had the awesome privilege to share the pulpit with this man, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to break open the Word of God for his people.

While in ministry at Mt. Branson the Lord blessed us with another child, my first biological daughter! Emily Faith was born August 12, 2003. I know that I haven't mentioned all of the children's names, but I do with Emily because her birth has something to do with my growing convictions about the Church. I had been studying the

Church's teaching concerning contraception and I told Alesha that I was convicted that we had been using artificial means to prevent pregnancy. Alesha was gracious to me as I explained to her my concerns that we were living in sin. We stopped using contraceptives and Emily was conceived in no time at all! When we went to have our ultrasound we cried tears of joy as the nurse explained to us that we were looking at a little girl on that computer monitor. Alesha looked at me and said, "You finally have your little girl." I thank the Lord that the teachings of his Church stopped me from continuing to prevent life, and he blessed us with such a beautiful gift.

### *The Tiber Gets Nearer*

Since becoming a Christian I had read theology intensively, but I started making discoveries in the Bible, after being challenged by my good friend Tim Randolph, that were really beginning to trouble me as a Protestant. For example, the shocking "Catholicity" of certain verses leaped out at me. I was bothered by Christ's statements about the apostles having the power to bind and loose (Matt. 16:18 and 18:18) and about their having the power to forgive sins (John 20:21-23) and Jesus' own words that the bread was (his) "body" and the wine was (his) "blood" (John 6). I didn't know what to make of these passages, so I would do what my college Bible teachers told me to do: "put them aside until the Lord reveals to you the meaning of these Scriptures . . . don't let them trouble you . . . God's Word will not return void." So I did. I stuffed my troubles. For that's what these discoveries were doing for me . . . troubling me.

As Catholic apologist Jimmy Akin says about his own journey to the Catholic Church, "Eventually, when the time came to deal with them, I had to conclude that Jesus had meant exactly what he had said His ministers really do have the power to forgive and retain sins. I had to admit to myself that the Catholics were right about the sacrament of confession, and Presbyterianism was simply out of synch with Scripture on this point." And I (Dow) had to admit that the Catholic Church was right on when they taught the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Bread and Wine.

### *We REALLY, REALLY make the call*

In the summer of 2005, I told Alesha, "It's time honey." She knew exactly what I meant. I called Our

Lady of the Lake Church and made an appointment with Monsignor Bucher. I met him in his residency and I cried. I cried because I told him that I wanted to come home. I shared with him my story and he sat in amazement, not at me, but at God's unfathomable grace. I told him that I wanted to enter the Church of Mary's Son! Yes! I had even begun to grasp Marian theology, yet I still have so much to learn. He told me that we have only one big hurdle and that would be our prior marriages. I knew we were going to have to seek annulments for them, and I told him that we were ready for the process. He smiled and said, "Good."

And that's what I thought as well, "Good. I feel good." It feels right. The struggles we've had to face since making this decision, since beginning the R.C.I.A (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) process in September of 2005, which will culminate for us during the Easter Vigil of 2006, all feels right. We've had struggles with our church family at Mt. Branson. Some don't understand,

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some avoid us, and some are trying to save us from the worse decision of our life (according to them). Even though some discussions have been very difficult, they still feel good. It felt good to finally come out of the closet, so to speak, regarding our entry into the Catholic Church. It feels right telling people we love and respect that we are only listening, and trying to do what the Lord is telling us to do. It feels right, having to go through the annulment process, facing the pain of our prior relationships, and

submitting ourselves to the authority of the Church. As of this writing we'll be entering the Church, the Church of the 1st century, the Ancient Church, the One, Holy, Apostolic Church during the Easter Vigil this year (2006). Am I excited? Oh my, words could not describe to you how excited I am. To enter into Mass with God's people, humbly bow down before the Tabernacle, and wait patiently for the appointed time, the Eucharistic prayer, and then partake of my Lord's body and blood, soul and divinity as it was done that fateful night of the Passover with the Lord and His disciples, and now, again with us, as we listen—"This is my body, this is my blood—take and eat—all of you." Yes Lord! Yes!

*Dow Escalante, his wife, and children were received into full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass, 2006, in Branson, Missouri.*

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