

# The Coming Home Network International

AUGUST 2007 NEWSLETTER

## Journeys Home

### MUSINGS OF A CATHOLIC CONVERT

BY ANDY MCNUTT

A FORMER SOUTHERN BAPTIST PASTOR FINDS  
FORGIVENESS, HOPE, AND ASSURANCE THROUGH THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH



I grew up in a strong Christian home in Knoxville, Tennessee. My parents were, and still are, two of the most devout Christians I have ever known. They not only instilled in me the importance of knowing about Christ, but the importance of knowing Him personally. When I was 10 years old, I pledged my life to Jesus and was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. My teen years were filled with opportunities for spiritual growth thanks to the encouragement and example of my parents and youth leaders.

When I was seventeen I dedicated myself to full-time Christian service. Because I assumed my future ministry would be that of a pastor, I felt I needed a four-year degree in Christian studies and graduate studies in ministry. My family was not in a position to send me to a four-year school, much less an expensive private school. But my trust was in God. If He wanted me to be there, I believed He would provide the means for me to get there. In what can only be described as a miracle, I was awarded a four year presidential scholarship and also found a job as a resident assistant. These paid for all of my expenses.

In college, I experienced a conversion of sorts. Having the opportunity to study under some of the brightest minds in the Evangelical world, I discovered a deep love for learning, especially Scripture, History, and Theology. I became so enamored that I quickly gained a reputation for being a know-it-all. Unfortunately, I had earned that reputation with a head full of pride and a heart lacking in charity when it came to dialogue. I discovered that because of the charism of knowledge, study came very easy to me. Things just seemed to be absorbed as if my mind were a dry sponge. There is nothing wrong with that, except for the fact that I was not tempering

my newfound knowledge with humility and personal piety. This flaw would prove to be a major factor in my conversion.

I was so wrapped up in ministry preparation, language studies, and reading that I wasn't even looking for a wife. That's probably a good thing, because while I was distracted with studies, God was preparing my wife over in the ladies' dorms. I met Kimberly the summer of my freshman year while we worked at a youth camp called Centrifuge. It was as close to "love at first site" as I can imagine. We took things slow and filled our non-work time with long walks, talks, and Bible studies. I quickly knew that this was the woman and proposed to her in Union University's library. God had chosen my wife. Less than two years later, we were married and began our life together.

Since we were new to married life, not to mention new to bills and everything else that comes with marriage, life wasn't

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always super easy for us. God helped us through our first years, however, with few if any major problems. One thing we had been convinced of as a couple was that God was to be in charge of blessing our lives with children. Because of this, we did not use contraception, choosing instead to practice the Billings Ovulation Method. Oddly enough, we were not the only ones at our Baptist school who felt that way.

As I neared graduation, God blessed us with the news that we were expecting our first child. I now would be a father as well as a husband. Apparently, there were more lessons for me to learn outside of the classroom. In spite of a tough course load, three part-time jobs, and school related ministry opportunities; I still managed to graduate on time with a BA in Christian Studies and minors in both Greek and History.

Following this, I enrolled in Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Seminary life was exciting. The school was gaining the reputation for being a magnet for top scholarship and theological soundness, which was something many Baptist affiliated schools could not claim. Once again, my desire for knowledge had me taking difficult courses and loving every minute. My professors were challenging my heart as well as my mind, and I'm forever grateful. Their example, along with that of my college professors, led me to pursue a future in theological education. I believed that it was in the classroom and lecture hall that I would be most useful to God as a minister. While I was gaining all this knowledge and continually fueled by a desire to become a great teacher, I was also letting my growth in holiness decline. Daily prayer and Bible study became mere opportunities for lesson planning and sermon writing. I was looking at the Bible for its academic properties and neglecting much of my spiritual encounter with God in the Scriptures. Busier than ever with a new baby, a new job, and with school, I was beginning to substitute activity for piety. But I didn't notice my mistake.

What I did notice was that my denominational "constituents," for the most part, were historically and theologically myopic. I vowed to myself that a major portion of my ministry would be to take Baptists back to the practices and beliefs of the Baptist founders, which, I believed at the time, to be synonymous with the beliefs and practices of the early Christians. In order to prove this, and to prove the historicity and rightness of Baptist theology and polity, I decided to study the earliest Christian writings I could find in addition to the Bible, namely the Church Fathers.

I had first met the Fathers in college as translation work in advanced Greek classes. Translation of extra-biblical Greek texts honed our skills and eliminated our "crutch" of cheating on translations for which we had memorized the English scripture verses. I first met Saint Polycarp and was so intrigued by him that I wanted to read more. In seminary, I would read the writings of St. Polycarp, St. Clement, St. Ignatius, St. Irenaeus, and St. Justin Martyr. My studies of the Fathers would reveal to me a sacramental Faith, a tangible Faith, a

structured Faith, a faith that I was having trouble reconciling with my present denominational affiliation. But my patristic studies would have to wait because shortly after the birth of our 2nd child, I had found a pastoral ministry opportunity to be an associate pastor of youth and education near my hometown.

Church ministry was great because it helped force me back into the devotional practices I had been only weakly observing. Aided by the forceful words of men like John Piper, Charles Spurgeon, and C.S. Lewis, I was challenged to adopt the principle of "incarnational" living. I wanted the truth to be so ingrained in me that it permeated every portion of my life. This proved to be my final undoing, but at the time, it was spurring me to make changes in my life. Still, I held some things back from God, including my role as a father. I was so busy studying and doing ministry work that I wasn't making time for the kids or my wife, so busy that I didn't even notice my neglect.

In my studies, I continued to read the pre-Nicene Fathers of the Church. The spiritual might I saw in these men showed me that I was lacking something in my life, but I couldn't place it. What I was realizing, however, was that their Church and mine looked totally different. They had an authority structure, bishops, priests, and deacons. They had a liturgy that was rich in beauty and meaning. They had sacraments, most especially the Eucharist. It was the Eucharist that intrigued me most. The more I read, the more I became convinced that Christ was not speaking figuratively in John 6 at Capernaum or in the Upper Room. I was convinced of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, something we as Baptists did not have, but that I wanted.

What I surprisingly began to see in my future was a life as a Catholic, but that couldn't happen yet. I still had way too much ministry to accomplish. I decided to shelve the "Catholic thing" so I could concentrate on finishing my work there. I figured that after five or six years I could step down quietly and then pursue my Catholic studies. I had no desire to cause a scandal. In fact, to make sure no "papist" teaching came out in my ministry; I made a point to provide my senior pastor with copies of all my lessons and sermons before I taught them. It was important enough for me to finish my ministry agenda before pursuing anything else. In fact, I told no one about my desire to know more about the Catholic Church. I studied on my own time, alone, to see if the ancient Church and the modern Catholic Church were one and the same.

My search was very lonely. There was no one I could talk to because if word got out that I was even considering the claims of the Church, I could easily have lost my job, putting my family in jeopardy. I wasn't willing to risk that, even though I was becoming more and more convinced of the Catholic Faith. After a while, I found myself going to

*continued on page 6...*



# Martin Luther's Devotion to Mary

*Dave Armstrong*

Despite the radicalism of early Protestantism toward many ancient Catholic “distinctives,” such as the Communion of the Saints, penance, purgatory, infused justification, the papacy, the priesthood, sacramental marriage, etc., it may surprise many to discover that Martin Luther was rather conservative in some of his doctrinal views, such as on baptismal regeneration, the Eucharist, and particularly the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Luther indeed was quite devoted to Our Lady, and retained most of the traditional Marian doctrines which were held then and now by the Catholic Church. This is often not well-documented in Protestant biographies of Luther and histories of the 16th century, yet it is undeniably true. It seems to be a natural human tendency for latter-day followers to project back onto the founder of a movement their own prevailing viewpoints.

Since Lutheranism today does not possess a very robust Mariology, it is usually assumed that Luther himself had similar opinions. We shall see, upon consulting the primary sources (i.e., Luther's own writings), that the historical facts are very different. We shall consider, in turn, Luther's position on the various aspects of Marian doctrine.

Along with virtually all important Protestant Founders (e.g., Calvin, Zwingli, Cranmer), Luther accepted the traditional belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary (Jesus had no blood brothers), and her status as the *Theotokos* (Mother of God):

*Christ...was the only Son of Mary, and the Virgin Mary bore no children besides Him... “brothers” really means “cousins” here, for Holy Writ and the Jews always call cousins brothers (Sermons on John, chapters 1-4, 1537-39).*

*He, Christ, our Savior, was the real and natural fruit of Mary's virginal womb...This was without the cooperation of a man, and she remained a virgin after that (Ibid.).*

*God says...“Mary's Son is My only Son.” Thus, Mary is the Mother of God (Ibid.).*

*God did not derive his divinity from Mary; but it does not follow that it is therefore wrong to say that God was born of Mary, that God is Mary's Son, and that Mary is God's mother...She is the true mother of God and bearer of God...Mary suckled God, rocked God to sleep, prepared broth and soup for God, etc. For God and man are one person, one Christ, one Son, one Jesus, not two Christs... just as your son is not two sons...even though he has two natures, body and soul, the body from you, the soul from God alone (On the Councils and the Church, 1539).*

Probably the most astonishing Marian belief of Luther is his acceptance of Mary's Immaculate Conception, which wasn't even definitively proclaimed as dogma by the Catholic Church until 1854. Concerning this question, there is some dispute over the technical aspects of medieval theories of conception and the soul, and whether or not Luther later changed his mind. Even some eminent Lutheran scholars, however, such as Arthur Carl Piepkorn (1907-73) of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, maintain his unswerving acceptance of the doctrine. Luther's words follow:

*It is a sweet and pious belief that the infusion of Mary's soul was effected without original sin; so that in the very infusion of her soul she was also purified from original sin and adorned with God's gifts, receiving a pure soul infused by God; thus from the first moment she began to live she was free from all sin” (Sermon: “On the Day of the Conception of the Mother of God,” 1527).*

*She is full of grace, proclaimed to be entirely without sin—something exceedingly great. For God's grace fills her with everything good and makes her devoid of all evil (Personal {“Little”} Prayer Book, 1522).*

Later references to the Immaculate Conception appear in his House sermon for Christmas (1533) and *Against the Papacy of Rome* (1545). In later life (he died in 1546), Luther did not believe that this doctrine should be imposed on all believers, since he felt that the Bible didn't explicitly and formally teach it. Such a view is consistent with his notion of *sola Scriptura* and is similar to his opinion on the bodily Assumption of the Virgin, which he never denied—although he was highly critical of what he felt were excesses in the celebration of this Feast. In his sermon of August 15, 1522, the last time he preached on the Feast of the Assumption, he stated:

*There can be no doubt that the Virgin Mary is in heaven. How it happened we do not know. And since the Holy Spirit has told us nothing about it, we can make of it no article of faith...It is enough to know that she lives in Christ.*

*continued on next page...*



*"Martin Luther's Devotion to Mary" continued...*

Luther held to the idea and devotional practice of the veneration of Mary and expressed this on innumerable occasions with the most effusive language:

*The veneration of Mary is inscribed in the very depths of the human heart (Sermon, September 1, 1522).*

*[She is the] highest woman and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ...She is nobility, wisdom, and holiness personified. We can never honor her enough. Still honor and praise must be given to her in such a way as to injure neither Christ nor the Scriptures (Sermon, Christmas, 1531).*

*No woman is like you. You are more than Eve or Sarah, blessed above all nobility, wisdom, and sanctity (Sermon, Feast of the Visitation, 1537).*

*One should honor Mary as she herself wished and as she expressed it in the Magnificat. She praised God for his deeds. How then can we praise her? The true honor of Mary is the honor of God, the praise of God's*

*grace...Mary is nothing for the sake of herself, but for the sake of Christ...Mary does not wish that we come to her, but through her to God (Explanation of the Magnificat, 1521).*

Luther goes even further and gives the Blessed Virgin the exalted position of "Spiritual Mother" for Christians, much the same as in Catholic piety:

*It is the consolation and the superabundant goodness of God, that man is able to exult in such a treasure. Mary is his true Mother, Christ is his brother, God is his father (Sermon, Christmas, 1522)*

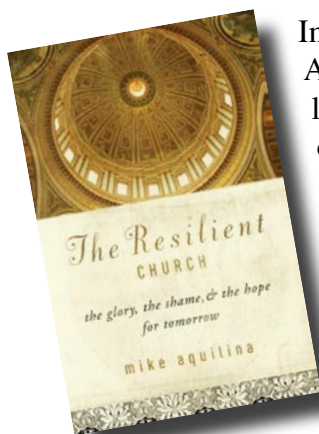
*Mary is the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of all of us even though it was Christ alone who reposed on her knees...If he is ours, we ought to be in his situation; there where he is, we ought also to be and all that he has ought to be ours, and his mother is also our mother (Sermon, Christmas, 1529).*

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## This Month's Featured Resources

### ***The Resilient Church***

***The glory, the shame and the hope for tomorrow***  
by Mike Aquilina

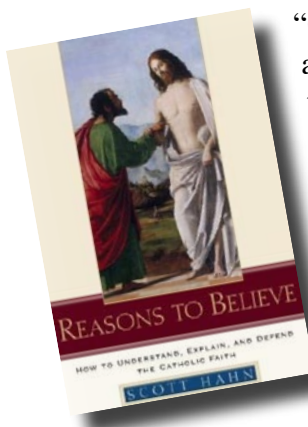


In *The Resilient Church*, Mike Aquilina offers a fascinating look at the trials and triumphs of the Catholic Church over the past two thousand years. Captivating sketches of critical periods in the Church's history shines light on the challenges faced by the Church today.

Mike Aquilina does not shy from dealing with the harsh realities of some of its past leaders. Yet he leaves readers with hope for the future with the promise that God remains faithful and fulfills his promise to remain with his Church always.

### ***Reasons to Believe***

***How to understand, explain, and defend the Catholic Faith***  
by Scott Hahn



"Often we are asked to give an account of the hope that is in us, to explain our Catholic faith. In *Reasons to Believe*, Scott Hahn offers that explanation in a clear, cogent, and compelling manner, by answering the most frequently raised questions about aspects of Church teaching. It is a must-read for Catholics who want to be able to explain the faith they hold

and cherish. This work should be of immense value."  
—Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl (Archdiocese of Washington, DC)

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*From the Office of the Pope...*

*The following is a very important document recently released by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI. It directly addresses many questions that arise often in our work, and we felt it was important to bring this to your attention. In other words, it is important, and still the teaching of the Church, that we help our separated brethren come home to the Catholic Church ...*

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH  
RESPONSES TO SOME QUESTIONS REGARDING CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE  
DOCTRINE ON THE CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council, with its Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, and its Decrees on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*) and the Oriental Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*), has contributed in a decisive way to the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology. The Supreme Pontiffs have also contributed to this renewal by offering their own insights and orientations for praxis: Paul VI in his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam* (1964) and John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (1995).

The consequent duty of theologians to expound with greater clarity the diverse aspects of ecclesiology has resulted in a flowering of writing in this field. In fact it has become evident that this theme is a most fruitful one which, however, has also at times required clarification by way of precise definition and correction, for instance in the declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973), the Letter addressed to the Bishops of the Catholic Church *Communio in notio* (1992), and the declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000), all published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The vastness of the subject matter and the novelty of many of the themes involved continue to provoke theological reflection. Among the many new contributions to the field, some are not immune from erroneous interpretation which in turn give rise to confusion and doubt. A number of these interpretations have been referred to the attention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Given the universality of Catholic doctrine on the Church, the Congregation wishes to respond to these questions by clarifying the authentic meaning of some ecclesiological

expressions used by the magisterium which are open to misunderstanding in the theological debate.

## RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS

**First Question:** Did the Second Vatican Council change the Catholic doctrine on the Church?

**Response:** The Second Vatican Council neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine, rather it developed, deepened and more fully explained it.

This was exactly what John XXIII said at the beginning of the Council[1]. Paul VI affirmed it[2] and commented in the act of promulgating the Constitution *Lumen gentium*: “There is no better comment to make than to say that this promulgation really changes nothing of the traditional doctrine. What Christ willed, we also will. What was, still is. What the Church has taught down through the centuries, we also teach. In simple terms that which was assumed, is now explicit; that which was uncertain, is now clarified; that which was meditated

upon, discussed and sometimes argued over, is now put together in one clear formulation”[3]. The Bishops repeatedly expressed and fulfilled this intention[4].

**Second Question:** What is the meaning of the affirmation that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church?

Response: Christ “established here on earth” only one Church and instituted it as a “visible and spiritual community”[5],



that from its beginning and throughout the centuries has always existed and will always exist, and in which alone are found all the elements that Christ himself instituted.[6] “This one Church of Christ, which we confess in the Creed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic [...]. This Church, constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him”[7].

In number 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* ‘subsistence’ means this perduring, historical continuity and the permanence of all the elements instituted by Christ in the Catholic Church[8], in which the Church of Christ is concretely found on this earth.

It is possible, according to Catholic doctrine, to affirm correctly that the Church of Christ is present and operative in the churches and ecclesial Communities not yet fully in communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the elements of sanctification and truth that are present in them.[9] Nevertheless, the word “subsists” can only be attributed to the Catholic Church alone precisely because it refers to the mark of unity that we profess in the symbols of the faith (I believe... in the “one” Church); and this “one” Church subsists in the Catholic Church.[10]

**Third Question:** Why was the expression “subsists in” adopted instead of the simple word “is”?

**Response:** The use of this expression, which indicates the full identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, does not change the doctrine on the Church. Rather, it comes from and brings out more clearly the fact that there are “numerous elements of sanctification and of truth” which are found outside her structure, but which “as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic Unity”[11].

“It follows that these separated churches and Communities, though we believe they suffer from defects, are deprived neither of significance nor importance in the mystery of salvation. In fact the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as instruments of salvation, whose value derives from that fullness of grace and of truth which has been entrusted to the Catholic Church”[12].

**Fourth Question:** Why does the Second Vatican Council use the term “Church” in reference to the oriental Churches separated from full communion with the Catholic Church?

**Response:** The Council wanted to adopt the traditional use of the term. “Because these Churches, although separated, have true sacraments and above all – because of the apostolic succession – the priesthood and the Eucharist, by means of which they remain linked to us by very close bonds”[13], they merit the title of “particular or local

Churches”[14], and are called sister Churches of the particular Catholic Churches[15].

“It is through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches that the Church of God is built up and grows in stature”[16]. However, since communion with the Catholic Church, the visible head of which is the Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Peter, is not some external complement to a particular Church but rather one of its internal constitutive principles, these venerable Christian communities lack something in their condition as particular churches[17].

On the other hand, because of the division between Christians, the fullness of universality, which is proper to the Church governed by the Successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him, is not fully realised in history[18].

**Fifth Question:** Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of “Church” with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?

**Response:** According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery[19] cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called “Churches” in the proper sense[20].

The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ratified and confirmed these Responses, adopted in the Plenary Session of the Congregation, and ordered their publication.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, June 29, 2007, the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

William Cardinal Levada, Prefect

Angelo Amato, S.D.B., Titular Archbishop of Sila, Secretary

#### Footnotes:

[1] JOHN XXIII, Address of 11 October 1962: “...The Council...wishes to transmit Catholic doctrine, whole and entire, without alteration or deviation...But in the circumstances of our times it is necessary that Christian doctrine in its entirety, and with nothing taken away from it, is accepted with renewed enthusiasm, and serene and tranquil adherence... it is necessary that the very same doctrine be understood more widely and more profoundly as all those who sincerely adhere to the Christian, Catholic and Apostolic faith strongly desire ...it is necessary that this certain and immutable doctrine, to which is owed the obedience of faith, be explored and expounded in the manner required by our times. The deposit of faith itself and the truths contained in our venerable doctrine





⦿ Clergy ⦿

✠ For an Anglican priest in New Brunswick, Canada who is seeking the guidance of the Catholic Church.

✠ For Jim a Non-denominational minister in Wisconsin, and his wife, both ex-catholics who are feeling a call to return to the Church but have many questions to work through.

(SP) Spanish Network Requests

✠ For Nancy, a United Methodist minister, who is learning the beauty of Catholic faith and worship.who were all received into the Catholic Church this Easter.

⊕ Laity ⊕

✠ For our helpers throughout Latin America and Spain: may the Lord bless them for their generous contributions in work and time (\*sp)



# CHNI Bulletin Board



on EWTN television and radio  
Mondays live at 8 PM EST  
Tues 1 & 10 AM, Wed 1 PM, Sat 11 PM

August 6 **Open-line**  
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*Revert from Nominalism*

August 13  
**Ralph Martin**  
*Revert from the World*

August 20  
**Fr. John Holleman**  
*former Episcopal*

August 27  
**Margaret Berry**  
*former Southern Baptist*

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Marcus will begin at 6 PM

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bisrael01@qwest.net



November 9-10, 2007

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*continued from page 2...*

Eucharistic Adoration at the Catholic Hospital during my hospital visitation rounds. I set up appointments to talk with priests “under cover of darkness” because I had questions. But I still had no one to share with. I was alone and, quite frankly, terrified of what the future might hold.

I stumbled upon the *Coming Home Network International* almost by accident and was encouraged to find that there were other ministers like me who were asking questions. I found two friends with whom I felt comfortable sharing my struggles. One was a Baptist pastor, like myself. The other was a recent convert from an Evangelical Free background. They became my prayer partners and my sounding boards. When I finally got the nerve to call CHNI, I was encouraged by Jim Anderson, who not only talked with me, but also provided books and study materials to aid me in my search. I thank God for the CHN*etwork*. I didn’t feel quite so alone anymore.

Things continued smoothly, just as I had planned, until we had to travel to California for a wedding. The wedding was beautiful and San Francisco was amazing, but something was not right with me. God was pressing His thumb upon my heart and I noticed it. The whole time we were there, I found myself in constant debate with Him over the state of my spiritual life. The night before we were scheduled to leave, God had His final say with me in what I can only describe as an emotional confrontation. He revealed to my heart, in no uncertain terms, that I was shipwrecking my life. He clearly showed me that my heart was not with my wife or with my children, but with myself and my activities. I was a shallow and selfish man who blamed his ministry for not having enough time to read to or play with his own kids or spend time conversing with his wife. I was living my dream as a teacher, but I was failing to practice the very truths I taught. I was living a lie and I had no excuses.

I wept all night before finally asking God, “What am I supposed to do now?”

“You’re going to have to resign.”

“But I don’t want to resign.”

“If you don’t step down on your own, I’ll remove you myself.”

“What am I supposed to do for a living? How will I support my family?”

“Trust me.”

That was all I remember before crying myself to sleep. It was a deep cathartic cry because my hard heart was finally seeing the message God had been trying to get through my thick skull for almost eight years. He was trying to help me get my life together, not just my personal life and my family, but my eternal life and the eternal lives of my wife and kids. I had

to obey. Yet as scared as I was, I had a calm peace that kept reminding me to trust God.

I didn’t say a word to anybody about this or my decision until I was in the car with my wife, driving from the Memphis airport to our home across the state. We were able to have a seven hour discussion of all God had been showing me. I asked for her forgiveness and for my kids’ forgiveness, and I made a commitment to earn their trust and win their hearts.

I still had to resign. There were no flashing signs or helpful books to guide me into the unknown. However, I did find strength from my friends at the *Coming Home Network*. I also found a job. God was reminding me again to trust Him. The resignation itself wasn’t that hard, because I had the confidence that I was being obedient. I was determined to be the man God wanted me to be and not to occupy a leadership position until I demonstrated true leadership and not mere academic acumen.

To shorten this story a bit, after resigning and relocating for my new job, I was able to meet with a priest for instruction and formation as a Catholic. I knew that the answer to my spiritual hunger was the Eucharist. On Christmas Eve 2002, my wife and I were received into the Catholic Church. Since then, I have been growing, sometimes by small steps, but sometimes by great leaps. Most precious to me are the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. God has heaped His grace on me and I can see a change in my heart. He has brought balance into my life. He has saved my marriage. He has reconciled me to my children. He has also, a little at a time, allowed me to resume ministry, this time as a lay catechist and evangelist. I still have my struggles, as we all do, but now I have something I did not have before, hope. I have hope for the future and strength for today through the Eucharist. God continues to teach me to trust in Him and to depend on Him. Through the Sacraments, I continue to grow in my faith, hope, and charity.

People have asked me, “Was it worth it?”

Absolutely.

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continued from page 4...

Luther did strongly condemn any devotional practices which implied that Mary was in any way equal to our Lord or that she took anything away from His sole sufficiency as our Savior. This is, and always has been, the official teaching of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, Luther often “threw out the baby with the bath water,” when it came to criticizing erroneous emphases and opinions which were prevalent in his time—falsely equating them with Church doctrine. His attitude towards the use of the “Hail Mary” prayer (the first portion of the rosary) is illustrative. In certain polemical utterances he appears to condemn its recitation altogether, but he is only forbidding a use of Marian devotions apart from heartfelt faith, as the following two citations make clear:

*Whoever possesses a good (firm) faith, says the Hail Mary without danger! Whoever is weak in faith can utter no Hail Mary without danger to his salvation (Sermon, March 11, 1523).*

*Our prayer should include the Mother of God...What the Hail Mary says is that all glory should be given to God, using these words: “Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus Christ. Amen!” You see that these words are not concerned with prayer but purely with giving praise and honor...We can use the Hail Mary as a meditation in which we recite what grace God has given her. Second, we should add a wish that everyone may know and respect her...He who has no faith is advised to refrain from saying the Hail Mary (Personal Prayer Book, 1522).*

To summarize, it is apparent that Luther was extraordinarily devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is notable in light of his aversion to so many other “Papist” or “Romish” doctrines, as he was wont to describe them. His major departure occurs with regard to the intercession and invocation of the saints, which he denied, in accord with the earliest systematic Lutheran creed, the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (Article 21).

His views of Mary as Mother of God and as ever-Virgin were identical to those in Catholicism, and his opinions on the Immaculate Conception, Mary’s “Spiritual Motherhood,” and the use of the “Hail Mary” were substantially the same. He didn’t deny the Assumption (he certainly didn’t hesitate to rail against doctrines he opposed!), and venerated Mary in a very touching fashion which, as far as it goes, is not at all contrary to Catholic piety.

Therefore, it can be stated without fear of contradiction that Luther’s Mariology is very close to that of the Catholic Church today, far more than it is to the theology of modern-day Lutheranism. To the extent that this fact is dealt with at all by Protestants, it is usually explained as a “holdover” from the early Luther’s late medieval Augustinian Catholic views (“everyone has their blind spots,” etc.). But this will not do for those who are serious about consulting Luther in order to arrive at the true “Reformation heritage” and the roots of an authentic Protestantism. For if Luther’s views here can be so easily

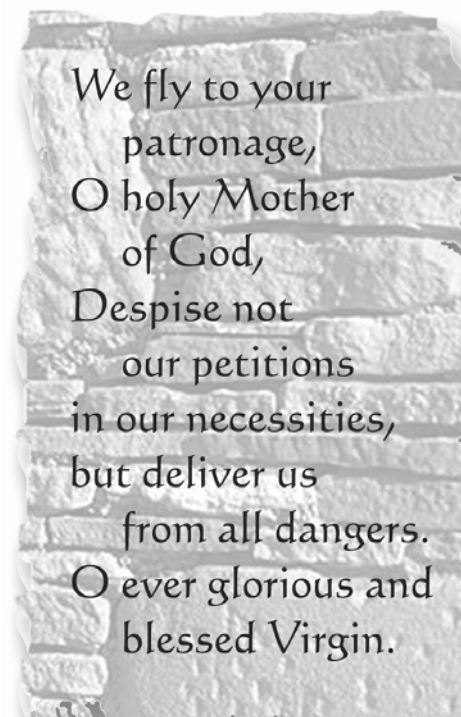
rationalized away, how can the Protestant know whether he is trustworthy relative to his other innovative doctrines such as extrinsic justification by faith alone and *sola Scriptura*?

It appears, once again, that the truth about important historical figures is almost invariably more complex than the “legends” and overly-simplistic generalizations which men often at the remove of centuries—create and accept uncritically.



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*Dave was received into the Catholic Church in 1991 from Evangelical Protestantism. His complete conversion story can be found in Surprised by Truth.*



This article is taken from the Journal, “Mary” available now through *CHResources* and the *Coming Home Network International*. Contact us for information about obtaining this valuable resource that explains how Catholics truly understand Mary,

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