

The Coming Home Network International

FEBRUARY 2007 NEWSLETTER

Journeys Home

From Shadows and Symbols

by Paul V. Abbe

Former Lutheran Pastor

How does one recount a turning which, like the turning of the earth, happened so slowly as to almost escape notice? How does one rehearse a mystery which remains hidden deep within oneself, the inscrutable longing that draws from darkness to light, from shadows into realities, from falsehood and corruption into truth and beauty? How do I retrace a journey that I never planned to take; being drawn down a path which has led me – step by halting and hesitant step – to a place I never intended to go?

THE EARLY PATHS

Baptized as an infant “in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost” by a Lutheran pastor, I grew up as a very active member of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church (LC-MS) in Carroll, Iowa. Every Sunday the entire family — Dad, Scott, Clark, Steve, Mom, Grandma, Grandpa, and I — filled the fourth pew on the lectern side. My brothers and I were always in Sunday School, going faithfully to confirmation classes, and serving as acolytes. Every summer, after we were nine or ten, we spent a week at the Lutheran camp on Lake Okoboji, where as a high-schooler I served one summer as a counselor. I know that I must have heard the Gospel, that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world, but I’m not sure I ever heard that He died on the cross for me, that I needed to confess my sins and confess faith in Christ as my Savior. That lack of “connection” between head knowledge and heart knowledge, and the lack of any personal, spiritual formation, left me with a superficial faith. By the time I graduated from high school, my spiritual life was a Sunday-only suit of clothes. By the end of my freshman year at college, I had walked away, not only from the



Lutheran church, but from the Christian faith altogether, and was running after the pleasures of this world.

It was during my sophomore year in college that this path away from God ended where all dead-end paths must end — in a crash and an explosion — and in the flash of the explosion, a late-night epiphany brought me face to face with two realities: (1) there was a Holy God, who knew who I was, and (2) I was unholy, filthy with sin, broken, and lost. Needing a fresh start mentally and emotionally, I dropped out of school, and enlisted in the USAF. I was on a spiritual journey, wanting to be right with God, but not knowing how... not yet realizing that the cleansing and wholeness I was seeking was to be found only in the Cross.

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THE NEW PATH

Two years after entering the Air Force, I was assigned to the National Security Agency in Ft. Meade, Maryland. This was not the assignment I had wanted, and I thought my life had taken a wrong turn, but God was guiding my steps. Shortly after my arrival there, I became acquainted with an ex-GI who was active in, and who introduced me to, the local ministry of the Navigators. To say that “the Nav’s” played a pivotal role in my life would be an understatement. Through their outreach I came to a re-conversion of heart, and to a commitment of will “to know Christ and to make Him known.”

I became active in the Nav ministry at Ft. Meade — small group Bible studies, one-on-one “follow-up” and discipleship, weekend rallies, and conferences — slowly catching the vision of building relationships with a few faithful men in order to have the greatest long-term impact. That vision shaped me as a lay minister while in the Air Force, laying the foundation for further work as a pastor and youth counselor.

For the next four years, and through several assignments, I was actively involved in leading Bible studies in the barracks, in personal outreach, and in man-to-man discipling of young believers. While stationed in Berlin, Germany, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the sense that God was calling me out of the military and into some sort of full time Christian ministry. I applied for an early discharge in order to pursue education to follow that call. God miraculously parted a sea of red tape (a story in itself), and I was honorably discharged six years to the day that I enlisted. I began classes five days later. I would ultimately graduate from Miami Christian College after serving a year on staff with the Miami Area Youth for Christ.

THE PATH LEADS TO LUTHERAN

At the beginning of my last year at Miami Christian College, I became convinced that God was calling me specifically into the ordained ministry; the problem was, I wasn’t sure where I belonged denominationally.

I had not been active in the Lutheran church for years and wasn’t sure I belonged there, but I also knew that there had to be something with a deeper sense of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” than the small, independent, Bible churches which I had experienced. Then I made the acquaintance of an M.C.C. alum who had ultimately become a Lutheran pastor. He encouraged me to study

the Lutheran Confessions, and see for myself if I did not find them to be faithful to Scripture. I spent the rest of the school year studying the Book of Concord line by line, and by graduation, had decided to pursue preparation for ministry at a Lutheran seminary. When I entered seminary in the fall, I was still wrestling with issues of sacramental theology, until — during my first quarter — I happened to read Thomas Howard’s book, *Evangelical Is Not Enough*. By the time I got to the second chapter, I had become convinced that sacramental theology was inherently Christian because it is inherently incarnational — the “burden of proof” lay on those who would deny that

God can provide spiritual blessings through physical means.

“I had become convinced that sacramental theology was inherently Christian because it is inherently incarnational — the “burden of proof” lay on those who would deny that God can provide spiritual blessings through physical means.”

In seminary, I began to understand “Lutheran” as (and understand myself as) meaning “evangelical Catholic.” I saw “Lutheran” not primarily as a denomination, but as a reform movement, centered on the Gospel of justification by grace through faith, in and for the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. At the fore-front of the evangelical Catholic movement was a well-

known Lutheran pastor, theologian, author, and editor by the name of Richard John Neuhaus. I read almost everything he wrote or edited, as did many of my fellow seminarians. As I was beginning my last year of seminary, the news broke: “Neuhaus is going to Rome!” It was a thunderclap that came out of nowhere and it shook me to the core. “If Neuhaus can go to Rome,” I thought to myself, “I must’ve missed something, somewhere!” I literally sat down with a blank piece of paper and began to re-examine Scripture, the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Lutheran Confessions. I looked carefully to see if I could find the same path that Neuhaus had found, but in the end I couldn’t figure out how he had been able to go from “here” to “there.”

I had been taught that the Reformation was based on two principles. The “formal” principle was *Sola Scriptura*, i.e., all of the Church’s teaching was to be “formed” by Scripture alone. The “material” principle was *Sola Fide*, i.e. the substance or “matter” of the Church’s teaching was to be centered in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. On these two principles, like pillars, the theology of the Reformation was founded; on these two pillars I built my theological foundation as an “evangelical Catholic”. I was ordained on August 28th, 1992, (the Commemoration of St. Augustine), by Bp. Mark Menees

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Spanish Coming Home Network

www.chniprodigos.org

According to a recent study by the Conference of Catholic Bishops in California (CEC) in 1990, there were 53.6 million Catholics living in the US. That number increased to 65.3 million in 2005. This represents a growth of about 22 percent in fifteen years. The force behind this extraordinary growth appears to be immigration. Catholics from Latin-American countries have been migrating to the United States in steadily increasing numbers since the late seventies and some are bringing their Catholic faith along.

Although Latin America is still a Catholic continent, the presence of Protestant missionaries and various cults is increasing year after year. Most of these missionaries come from the United States. Other cultural exports of the US are also affecting the Catholic Latin-American population, most importantly the political action groups that seek legalization of abortion in the countries south of our border. Those influences are also targeting Spanish-speaking Catholics living in the US.

Our new web page in Spanish was launched on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas. The page is the first effort we put forward to promote our apostolate in the Spanish-Speaking world. Well over 300 million people speak Spanish as their first language; the vast majority of them were born in the Catholic Church. Our page seeks to cover three main themes: Catholic Doctrine and Scriptural Interpretation, Catholic Church and Christianity in History, and Catholic Christian Life. In our page, these themes are reflected in articles, conversion stories, and answers to frequently asked questions. We plan to publish new content quarterly in

December, February, May, and August. The page is located at www.chniprodigos.org. "Pródigos" is the Spanish word for prodigal.

The content is organized in columns. Marcus will write a quarterly column called *Cartas al Sur*. Other columns are *To Know the Church, Bible and Doctrine*, *Christian Fullness*, *History and Church*, and *The Church in the Americas*. Additionally we provide a number of sections with useful information. These sections reflect their equivalents in our English page.

We have trusted this new focus of our apostolate to the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe and to Blessed Sor Maria Gabriella Sagheddu whose words we embrace in prayer:

*In simplicity of heart I gladly offer everything, O Lord.
The Lord put me on this path; He will remember
to sustain me in battle.
To His mercy I entrust my frailty.
I saw in front of me a big Cross...,
I thought that my sacrifice was nothing in
comparison to His.
I offered myself entirely and I do not withdraw
the given word.
God's will whatever it may be, this is my joy,
my happiness, my peace.
I will never be able to thank enough.
I cannot say but these words: "My God, your Glory."*



Happy 2007!

Greetings and a belated Happy New Year! Already, 2007 looks to be another blessed year for us at the *Coming Home Network International*. Thanks to your support in prayer and giving, we continue to open up new avenues through which we can bring the Truth of the One Body of Christ to those who are seeking the fullness of Faith.

Many do not realize that this fullness is ultimately found within the Sacramental life of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And that's why we are here. We want to help them as they make this life changing discovery; help them learn, help them cope, and help them through the trials that invariably come from making such an important life-changing decision.

Already we have new ways to reach those who are on this path. In December, under the leadership of Carlos Caso-Rosendi, we established a Spanish *CHNetwork* webpage (see page 3). Coming in March, *CHResources* will publish Bruce Sullivan's new book describing his journey to the Church, "*Christ in His Fullness*." And, Lord willing, other new resources will follow before the end of the year - all aimed at giving support and answers to those on the journey home.

Our *Deep In Scripture* radio program continues to grow and reach out to those who are hungry for the teachings of God's Word. And our Staff and Helper's Network are here to lend a hand, a prayer, or whatever help we can give when someone contacts us and begins those first small steps back into communion with Christ and His Church.

None of this would be possible without your help. And always remember that this newsletter can be a first chance to share our apostolate, and the stories of those who have made the journey, to someone who has been asking questions or is seriously looking at the blessings of the Catholic Church. We do not send newsletters or other unsolicited materials to anyone unless they ask us directly. But you can! This is the reason we format the newsletter with a removable inside *Members Section*. You help us tremendously when you share the newsletter with a friend who otherwise may never know about our work. Thank you again for your prayers and your generous partnership in our work.

Thank you again, and may God richly bless you in the coming year.

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of the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I would serve as a pastor in the North Carolina Synod for almost fourteen years.

WALKING AS AN "EVANGELICAL CATHOLIC"

In March of 1997, I became a member of The Society of the Holy Trinity, (Societas Trinitatis Sanctus), a "ministerium" of Lutheran pastors. Members of the STS subscribed to "The Rule" which committed us to living out our ordination vows by praying the Daily Office, exercising mutual private confession, faithful pastoral practice, etc. The STS was founded by a group that included – and was greatly influenced by—the late Bishop Emeritus of the North Carolina Synod, the Reverend Dr. Michael McDaniel. During his time as bishop, (1982-1991), Rev. McDaniel played a key role in establishing the North Carolina Lutheran-Roman Catholic Covenant. It was this ecumenical vision that would also shape "The Rule" of the Society, so that Chapter VIII would affirm "the Lutheran ecumenical destiny of reconciliation with the Bishop and the Church of Rome."

This concern for the catholic and apostolic faith was not shared by the majority of my ELCA colleagues, however — including, sadly, many of the bishops. The principle

of *Sola Scriptura* was intentionally and insidiously undermined by the use of destructive historical-critical hermeneutics, then wedded to a warped understanding of "the priesthood of all believers" such that every individual became their own infallible interpreter of Scripture. The principle of *Sola Fide* was used as an excuse to ignore all moral precepts of Scripture as "law", to turn a deaf ear to the universal call to holiness, translating the Gospel into "Good News, your sin isn't sin." As a result, interpretations which denied the clear sense of Holy Scripture and the "rule of faith" became legion; practices contrary to the moral theology which the Church has taught in all times and in all places became officially sanctioned. Where the Augsburg Confession had committed the "evangelicals" to the catholic and apostolic Faith, the actions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had clearly committed it to another "faith."

As I experienced the increasing theological disintegration occurring within this "Lutheran" body, I began to discern direct connections between the contemporary chaos, and the historic Reformation principles. The disintegration I was experiencing seemed to be the

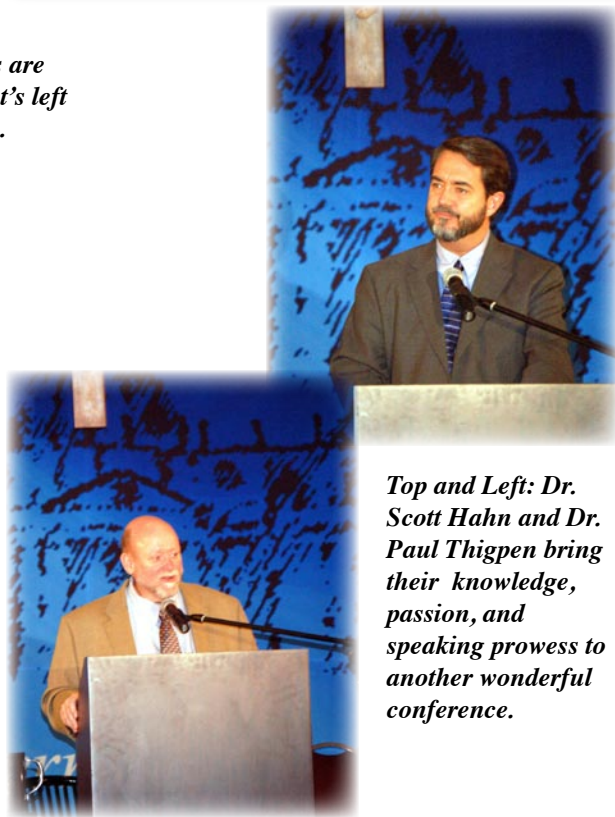
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Deep in History

Marcus Grodi

By Joanna Bogle

The conference was organized by the Coming Home Network International, headed by Marcus Grodi, himself a former Presbyterian pastor who converted some thirteen years ago and now hosts a weekly television show on Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television network.



Top and Left: Dr. Scott Hahn and Dr. Paul Thigpen bring their knowledge, passion, and speaking prowess to another wonderful conference.

Speakers included British author Joseph Pearce, whose book *Literary Converts*, looking at Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and others, has had considerable influence on attitudes to Catholicism among Evangelicals. He spoke on Shakespeare's Catholicism, on which he has a new book coming out next year.

Other speakers included former Evangelical pastor Paul Thigpen, who spoke about the English martyrs. He explained that this is an aspect of British history that is virtually unknown among people in the USA: heroes such as Edmund Campion and Margaret Clitheroe are ignored and the realities of the history of the Reformation are not understood.

Former Anglican minister Dwight Longenecker – who was for some years vicar of the parish of Brading on the Isle of Wight – spoke about the history of the Church in Britain, explaining its roots back to Roman times, and the significance of early British saints and their loyalty to papal teachings.

The number of former Evangelical pastors now associated with the Coming Home Network is over 1,250 and still

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Top: Bustle at the CHNI booth. Thanks to all the helpers who made this year's conference so succesful.

Right: Do you see what we see? Fr. Connor delivers a magnificent talk on the English Counter-Reformation.

“For many men who have been active in the ministry of some busy church, discovering the roots of their faith and examining the claims of Christ at a deeper level can bring real anguish as they confront issues that will not go away,” said Mr. Grodi. “For example, the recognition that Christ himself made it clear that he would be truly present in the Eucharist can bring a massive re-think which challenges all sorts of precious notions.”

Left: Joanna Bogle brings a fresh perspective on the English Reformation in her talk.

A group of people are gathered outside a building with large glass doors. A woman in a white hijab is walking towards the entrance. A man in a blue jacket and khaki pants stands with his back to the camera. A woman in a blue vest and khaki pants stands next to him. A white van is parked on the right with its side door open. A large terracotta pot is in the foreground. The building has a sign that says "Wine & Spirits".

See You All Next Year!



⦿ Clergy ⦿

- ✠ For the wife of a Nazarene minister who desperately wishes to be Catholic but is forbidden, by her husband from coming into the Church.

- ✦ For Harry, a retired Anglican in Illinois, who is planning to enter the Roman Catholic Church.

- ✦ For a Baptist seminarian in Florida who is strongly attracted to the Catholic faith. His question is how much does he have to believe in order to be Catholic?

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

We use only first names to preserve anonymity, and the following codes:

(QV) Quo Vadis Requests

(SP) Spanish Network Requests

- ✦ For a Missouri Synod Lutheran youth minister in New York who loves the traditions and liturgy of the Catholic church, and finds that when he attends Mass, his spiritual life is deepened.

⊕ Laity ⊕

- ♣ Mike and Sharon who are coming back to the Catholic Church (Mike is a craddle Catholic). They have met with a local deacon and plan to start going to Mass.

- † Father Bradey, Frather Draling,
and Father Emmett

- ♣ Jeff, and the needs of his family
as he continues his journey

- ⬢ Those helping within the Helpers Network

- ✠ John, and his family, Sharon, Martha, and Maria in their fellowship through the CHNetwork that it might help them to understand the truth of our Catholic faith.

- ✦ A family in the Chicago area who are on the journey and also dealing with some serious health issues for one of their daughters. Pray that the Lord will give them strength and faith to sustain them (SP).

- ✦ The new Spanish CHNI website that was launched on December 12 (Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe) that it may be of help to many to return to the Catholic Faith (SP).

- ✠ The Spanish speaking helpers and volunteers around the world that the Lord will bless them and their work (SP).

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unavoidable result of the formal principle and material principle being taken to their logical outcome. And so the journey began — unexpected and unplanned — forced upon me by ecclesiastical events which revealed that the theological foundations of the Reformation were crumbling.

THE UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

In the midst of my growing struggle with the theological and moral meltdown of my denomination, two separate events began to open my heart and mind to the claims of the Roman Catholic Church. In September of 2004, the STS held our annual General Retreat at Mundelein Seminary, north of Chicago. The theme of the retreat was the unity (or “disunity”) of the Church, and one of the speakers was a very articulate Roman Catholic priest by the name of Jay Scott Newman. He presented an empathetic perspective on Luther and the dynamics at work during the Reformation, and,

(borrowing a metaphor from G.K. Chesterton), admitted that during the Reformation “the barque of St. Peter was in pretty bad shape; the sails were torn and the rigging was tattered, and the captains had not been keeping her on course, so Brother Martin had some legitimate concerns and criticisms. Unfortunately, instead of being able to repair the ship and reform the course, Luther and his followers had to create a lifeboat — still tied to the barque — and get in it.” He then reflected that now, over 475 years later, the barque of St. Peter had been righted, and reformed ...

meanwhile, the lifeboats were losing their seaworthiness, and were taking on water. “Maybe,” he suggested, “it’s time to get out of the lifeboat and come back aboard the ship.” Some of my Lutheran clergy colleagues took umbrage at his remarks (“overzealous” was one of the kindest criticisms), but there were many, including me, who took his words to heart; in the weeks and months that followed, I would begin to seriously re-examine the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

In January of 2005, the results of an ELCA study on sexuality, and recommendations of the study “task force” were released. The recommendations were scandalous. The rapid theological implosion of a church body that called itself Lutheran drove me to a deeper examination

of the pillars upon which Lutheranism had been built. Through long days and longer nights, I spent hours and hours reading and searching and researching, digging deeply and sifting slowly — day after day, week after week, carefully examining the integrity of the theological pillars, continually testing the depth of the doctrinal foundations, tracing them from Holy Scripture through the early church Fathers, from the early church Fathers through the entire history of the Church. For months I wrestled with the issues of Scripture, Tradition and authoritative interpretation; issues of grace and faith and justification and salvation; issues of apostolic succession in the episcopal office, ecclesiastical authority and valid orders of ministry — intensely examining the very foundations of Reformation theology and thought. The long journey brought me to a startling and unpleasant discovery: the principles upon which the Reformation was built, the very pillars of its theological house, are deeply and inherently flawed.

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I examined first the formal principle, and asked: “If we affirm that ALL doctrines must be drawn from Scripture alone, where does Scripture alone teach that doctrine?” One might respond immediately by quoting St. Paul’s second letter to St. Timothy:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 (ESV)

Granted, the passage does tell us that all Scripture is “inspired” by God, and “profitable for teaching ... reproof ... correction, and training in righteousness;” but does it say Scripture alone is profitable? Does it say that Scripture alone is “sufficient”, that all doctrines of the Faith, all teachings of the Church are to be drawn from Scripture alone? Is there any passage of Scripture that does clearly teach *Sola Scriptura*? Is there any passage in the New Testament, for instance, that clearly lists which books are to make up the New Testament canon? If not, and if the principle of *Sola Scriptura* demands that all teachings be drawn from Scripture alone, then it would seem *Sola Scriptura* is a flawed principle, logically.

continued on the next page . . .

On the other side of the question, are there passages which indicate that there was an authentic, apostolic tradition of teaching, which was passed on and passed down by the apostles orally? I found evidence within Holy Scripture that such an authoritative apostolic oral tradition existed. In the same letter to Timothy which contains the verse above, St. Paul makes reference to oral tradition three times (see 1:13-14; 2:2; 3:14). The same apostle who affirmed the inspiration of “sacred Scripture” also affirms the inspiration and authority of “sacred Tradition” — in the same letter! And this passage is not unique — St. Paul also affirmed the authority of “oral tradition” in his other letters; (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Thess. 3:6). St. Paul provides clear, consistent, apostolic witness to the two-fold delivery system of the deposit of faith — “either by our spoken word or by our letter.” Clearly, *Sola Scriptura* is denied by Scripture itself; the principle is inconsistent logically, and therefore invalid theologically.

Beyond that, it is indefensible historically. The early church Fathers consistently affirm the authority of an oral, apostolic tradition; they speak of “sacred Scripture” and “sacred Tradition” in the same breath. St. Basil, (c. A.D. 330 – c. A.D. 374), in his defense of the deity of the Holy Spirit writes:

Of the dogmas ... preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the Apostles, handed on to us in mystery. In respect to piety, both are of the same force. (Holy Spirit 27:66)

St. Epiphanius, (ca. A.D. 315 – ca. A.D. 403), Bishop of Salamis, wrote in his work against various heresies:

However ... tradition must be used too, for not everything is available from Sacred Scripture. Thus the holy apostles handed some things down in Scripture but some in traditions, as St. Paul says, ‘As I delivered the tradition to you,’ [I Cor. 11:2] and elsewhere, ‘So I teach, and so I have I delivered the tradition in the churches,’ [I Cor. 4:17] and, ‘If ye keep the tradition in memory, unless you believed in vain.’ [I Cor. 15:2] (Panarion 61)

And even earlier, St. Irenaeus, (ca. A.D. 140 – c.a. A.D. 202), Bishop of Lyons, affirmed the authority of tradition in his letter “Against Heresies” (AD 189).

... the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although she is disseminated through out the

whole world, yet guarded it, as if she occupied but one house. She likewise believes these things just as if she had but one soul and one and the same heart; and harmoniously she proclaims them and teaches them and hands them down, as if she possessed but one mouth. For, while the languages of the world are diverse, nevertheless, the authority of the tradition is one and the same ...

A crash and an explosion — a late-night epiphany of seismic proportions, and at my feet the crumbled ruins of *Sola Scriptura*. This unexpected and unhappy epiphany left me with an earthshaking question: “If the ‘formal principle’ of *Sola Scriptura* — one of the two pillars upon which the Reformation was built — is invalid, then what of the ‘material principle’? Is *Sola Fide* invalid as well?”

I then began scrutinizing the pillar of *Sola Fide*, searching the foundations of this teaching in Scripture and in the writings of the early church Fathers. I grappled with the reality that there is only one place in Scripture where the

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words “faith” and “alone” appear side by side — St. James, chapter 2 — and there it is not affirmed as a way of salvation, but rejected. (I had always known that, but had become adept at the usual interpretive “tap-dance” which renders the passage harmless.) I began to see all the other passages throughout the New Testament which clearly teach that we will be judged by our works, by our obedience to the commandment of love for God and our neighbor, and not

by “faith alone.” I began to discern that in those passages where St. Paul teaches “justification by faith, apart from works of the law” he is not thereby teaching “faith alone”. And a search through the early church Fathers — from St. Clement and St. Ignatius to St. Augustine — made it clear that from the time of the Apostles, the Church has taught that we are justified by faith, but not by “faith alone”. It was the second unhappy epiphany of seismic proportions: *Sola Fide* was a pillar of straw.

THE FORK IN THE ROAD

The pillar of *Sola Scriptura* is logically inconsistent, theologically inadequate, and historically indefensible. The pillar of *Sola Fide* contradicts both the witness of the whole of Scripture and the witness of the apostolic Tradition. That these pillars are inherently flawed is evident in the contemporary collapse of the structures built on them. If, and it is true that, the very pillars of Reformation theology and thought are fatally flawed, then

where does one look to find that expression of the Body of Christ that embodies the fullness of the catholic and apostolic Faith? The answer was obvious. While there is truth that may be found in the Lutheran church, and in some other Protestant denominations, and while there are no doubt many faithful disciples which may be found within them — the fullness of the Christian faith is to be found in the Roman Catholic Church, that visible entity built on Peter and the Apostles, that “pillar and bulwark of Truth” (I Tim. 3:15), that ancient See “with which, because of its superior origin, all churches must agree — that is, all the faithful in the whole world...” (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 189 AD)

THE HIGHWAY HOME

John Henry Newman, an Anglican priest in England during the mid-1800's, who at first denied the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, stated — after an intense study of the history of the Church in light of the claims of Roman Catholicism — “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” After more than a year and a half of intense research and study, after months and months of prayer and reflection and wrestling with many theological and historical issues, I came to the same conviction, and I had to follow where that conviction led. I resigned from the clergy roster of the ELCA on April 25th, 2006, the Feast of St. Mark. My wife, Marie, and I were received into full communion on September 14th, the Feast of The Holy Cross, at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. At my confirmation, I took the name “Michael”; my sponsor was Fr. Jay Scott Newman.

Do I believe the Protestant Reformation was a mistake? To borrow a phrase from the late, great Lutheran historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, (who in his latter years converted to Orthodoxy), I believe that the Reformation was “a tragic necessity.” The necessity of the tragedy was confessed by no less a person than Pope Adrian VI, through his Legate at the Diet of Nuremberg, in 1523:

We freely acknowledge that God has allowed this chastisement to come upon His Church because of the sin of men, and especially because of the sins of priests and prelates ... We know well that for many years much that must be regarded with horror has come to pass in this Holy See: abuses in spiritual matters, transgressions against the Commandments; indeed, that everything has been gravely perverted.

Pope John Paul II, in his 1995 ecumenical encyclical *Ut Unam Sint*, asserted that “intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking

at the same reality” (no. 38). A year later, speaking to Lutherans in Paderborn, Germany, he stated:

Luther's original intention in his call for reform in the Church was a call to repentance and renewal to begin in the life of every individual. There are many reasons why these beginnings nevertheless led to division. One is the failure of the Catholic Church ... and the intrusion of political and economic interests, as well as Luther's own passion, which drove him far beyond what he originally intended into radical criticism of the Catholic Church, of its way of teaching. We all bear the guilt. That is why we are called upon to repent and must allow the Lord to cleanse us over and over.

In 1999, the Lutheran World Federation, (rather, a majority of its member churches), and the Roman Catholic Church, signed The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. That document clearly affirmed a consensus in the Gospel, echoing Eph. 2:8-10:

Together we confess: *By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part*, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while *equipping and calling us to good works*. (JDDJ 15)... [Emphasis mine]

Over 475 years ago, because of the fault of sin, the fire of personal temperaments, and the fuel of political intrigues, a sad division arose within the Body of Christ over the theological definition of the Gospel, resulting in separation from the apostolic See of Rome “with which, because of its superior origin, all churches must agree.” If indeed we have come to a consensus on the Gospel, then separation from the apostolic authority of the Bishop of Rome is no longer necessary, and if no longer necessary, then — for the sake of the Gospel — no longer permissible.

Paul is currently working at the Catholic bookstore resource center of the Diocese of Raleigh, “IN HIS NAME,” while awaiting God's perfect provision for a new career in the fullness of time. Please keep Paul and his wife Marie in your prayers as they continue to adjust to the various changes that their entrance into the Catholic Faith has brought.

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