



April 2013 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The Corpus & the Cross: My Conversion to the Catholic Faith

By Jackford Kolk

I was baptized and grew up in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), a Calvinist denomination in the Dutch Reformed tradition. I cannot express how much I learned from this faith tradition and the inexpressible value of the foundation it provided for my life. If it had not been for my parents' dedication to Christ, teaching me to know and love Him with all my being, I doubt I would be as dedicated to Jesus and His truth as I am today.

An enthusiastic young Christian

Thanks to my parents, I fell in love with Jesus at a young age; I still remember asking Him to come into my heart around age six or seven. I also learned to take Scripture seriously and to allow it to shape my life, rather than let my life shape my understanding of it. Another incredibly valuable lesson I learned from my Calvinist upbringing was that God is rational, meaning that everything about reality is also subsequently rational; God created us as rational beings so that we could better appreciate and participate in the rationality of everything He made. This is one of the true strengths of the Calvinist worldview.

In high school, I was an enthusiastic young Christian. I knew the Bible astoundingly well, prayed all the time, and was in several Christian

peer groups, including my youth group's worship band. I remember making a commitment at one point to read the Bible every morning before I went to school. I don't remember exactly how long that lasted, maybe a few months at most (like most Christians, my life is a constant tale of spurts of zeal intermixed with stretches of laziness). However, this promise inadvertently exposed me to Catholic teaching for the first time.

One Saturday, I realized that I had not spent time with God in prayer and in meditation on His Word during the past school week. I had neglected to spend time with my Lord and God, the one who calls Himself "the Bridegroom." Thinking about it in terms that I could better apply to my life, I thought, "If I had a girlfriend, how would I make up for forgetting to spend time with her as planned?" I would take the time I had right now to take her on a special date, giving her the attention she deserved. Therefore, since I had neglected God in a similar manner, I decided to spend the better part of that day making it up to Him by spending several hours in prayer and Scripture study. As it turns out, my primitive, natural understanding working to fix a relationship is actually a fairly accurate description of the Catholic practice of penance, ... *continued on page 2*

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

which is probably why I never had any problem accepting that practice upon becoming Catholic.

After a while, my mom came upstairs to check on me. I explained what I was doing and why. She told me it wasn't necessary, but I insisted on doing it anyway. For whatever reason — I assure you, she was not at all prone to emotional outbursts — she said in a strong, almost tearful voice, “We're not Catholic! We don't believe in penance!”

She then turned away, closed my door, and went back downstairs in a huff. I pondered that statement for a moment, fairly perplexed. I had no idea whether or not what I was doing constituted “penance,” but what I did know, was that I was fixing a relationship. I believe I may have even said aloud to myself and God, “Well, if this is penance, I do!” Content with that assessment, I went back to my Bible-reading and praying.

Shaken up during college

At my first institution of higher education, Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, I gave practically every church in the small city a try. They were almost all Christian Reformed, but I nevertheless had the toughest time finding a church in which I felt welcomed or even noticed. Eventually, I stopped trying and for about two and a half years, suffered through a very dark time in my life. I kept praying, but mostly just to beg God to make my life better (especially by letting me meet and fall in love with my future wife). Although I tried to at least finish my prayers with, “Not my will, but yours be done,” it was still a dry time for me.

I had started my college career as a pre-seminary, English-Writing major, based on my love for writing, God, and the Bible. Before the end of my first year, I had dropped the “pre-sem” label and switched to English-Literature, because I had not liked the theology classes I had taken (Calvin's *Institutes*, which I failed, and a basic Bible overview class) and I enjoyed the historical, linguistic side of English which emphasized the classics like Chaucer and Shakespeare.

By the end of my time at Dordt, I was only certain of two things: the “God and me” lifestyle wasn't working for me (I needed a faith community to encourage me along a Christian path) and I had not yet met my future wife. In fact, the girl with whom I had been infatuated for about six years had finally explained to me, in no uncertain terms, that she would never, ever be interested in me.

The latter sent me into a bit of an angry depression for a few months as I was heading into my fourth year. When school started, one of my classes required me to read *Heart of Darkness*. I had the presence of mind to see that that book was probably the worst thing I could read when facing a depression. That, coupled with the unexpected news that I would not be able to graduate by the end of that school year, led me

to pull out, pack up, and go home to Seattle to re-evaluate my educational goals.

When I returned home to Shoreline, Washington, I got a job at Target for the Christmas season and took a few classes at Shoreline Community College. While at Dordt, I had visited my brother at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I learned that they had recently created a film department. I was a movie enthusiast, so I decided to take a film class and a theater class at Shoreline. Since being a writer held rather nebulous, financial prospects, I wanted to see if some aspect of performance arts might be worth pursuing. I enjoyed the film class immensely and decided to transfer to Calvin to pursue Film Studies the following semester.

Objections arise

Orientation at Calvin included a brief introduction to the Five Pillars of Calvinism, commonly referred to as “TULIP” (which I had learned “all about” at Dordt, so I didn't pay them any more thoughtful attention than I had four years before). TULIP stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. I had even begun referring to myself as a Calvinist by the time I started at Calvin College.

As it turned out, a friend of mine from Dordt, Tom, had just begun attending Calvin Theological Seminary, which shares a campus with Calvin proper, so I resumed hanging out with him. Over the next few years of talking to him about what he was studying, I slowly began to understand the TULIP doctrines and I realized that I didn't actually agree with any of them. As a good Protestant, I knew that I could question every tenet of the faith that I had been brought up in and still be a good Christian, so as I gradually began to doubt Calvinism, I never questioned my relationship with God, nor His love for me. I also never posed those objections to Tom. Rather, I pondered them in my heart. I slowly and unconsciously ceased referring to myself as a Calvinist, but never re-labeled myself in a different denomination.

A capricious and hate-filled God?

Eventually, Tom began dating Rebecca, my future wife's roommate, which meant that he and I hung out at their on-campus apartment a lot, watching movies, doing homework, and talking. Tom and Elisa, my future-wife, were practically theological opposites. They would ceaselessly debate TULIP, especially Predestination and Limited atonement. It was no longer an occasional theological conversation spliced into the daily chatter; now, it was drawn out, in depth discussions. In walking with the two of them as they made their cases to one another, listening to and digesting both positions, I found myself not only unable to defend the Calvinist position, but uninterested in doing so. That was when I truly

...Journeys Home Continued...

started to realize that I did not believe any of the Five Pillars of Calvinism (FPC). I began making arguments in favor of Elisa's Wesleyan position, pointing out the inconsistencies and ramifications of Tom's as I saw them. It was at that point that an "either/or" proposition regarding Calvinism first began to dawn on me.

The question revolved around the interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6, "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened ... since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt." So much of this passage flies in the face of FPC. First, if those who cannot be restored "have once been enlightened, ... tasted the heavenly gift, ... become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come," then, according to FPC, either they were among the Elect and therefore cannot ever fail to be restored (based on the "P" of TULIP), which directly contradicts the passage. Otherwise, they were never part of the Elect in the first place, making God an evil trickster who not only deliberately wishes utter torment and damnation upon those who have no choice but to sin (based on "T," "U," "L," and "I"), but He goes above and beyond that kind of heartless condemnation and makes their torment eternally more painful by forcing them to first taste bits of heaven before tossing them back into the pit of hell. Thus, I *either* had to accept the Calvinism that was being presented to me, and in the process necessarily believe that the God I loved and whom I thought was all-loving, was actually far, far more capricious and hate-filled than any of the ancient Greek or Roman gods, *or* I had to reject the Calvinism in which I thought I had believed all my life.

Ironically, though, it was a lesson that I learned from my Calvinist parents and teachers that allowed me to break with Calvinism: I had to let what the Bible said shape me; I could not let the traditions of my upbringing reshape the Bible. I simply wanted to believe the truth of God, and I knew with a growing certainty that Calvinism was not it. I knew that the God I loved, the God who loved me first so much so that He willingly offered His own Son in my place (see 1 John 4:8-10), could not do the things that Tom was ascribing to Him. I knew that His love would not allow Him to commit such callous treatment of His beloved creations, His adopted children and those to whom He offered adoption, even if they rejected it.

Approaching the liturgy with an open mind

When Tom and Rebecca stopped dating, I kept spending time at her and Elisa's place, because Rebecca let me use her computer for homework, which happened to be kitty-corner to Elisa's computer. The two of us were night owls; we stayed up late completing projects and talking. Fairly soon we started dating and going to church together, and because of Elisa's love of liturgy, we mostly attended a nearby, liturgical CRC congregation called Church of the Servant. Their liturgy was structured according to the basic outline of the Mass, but most of the parts were written — or at least tweaked — weekly.

At the beginning of my college career, I had been turned off by liturgical worship. It felt impersonal and forced, so I never attended a liturgical congregation more than once. I had even attended Church of the Servant one time when I first transferred to Calvin and had avoided it from then on, but when I began spending time with Elisa, ... *continued on page 4*

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television and radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

April 1

Dr. Steven Smith*
*Former Non-Denominational
Evangelical*

April 8

Dr. Richard Sherlock*
Former Mormon

April 15

*The Journey Home
International*

April 22

Randy Ory*
Former Church of Christ

April 29

Leo Brown*
*Former Baptist and
Evangelical*

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

little by little, she explained what she had learned about the meaning behind the liturgical structure in a Christian Worship class at Calvin. She explained about the back-and-forth conversation between God and His people. With her example, I began to open my mind to it. It still felt odd at first, especially at Church of the Servant, where I wondered who had chosen the words that the congregation would recite, which often resulted in having to ask myself if I agreed with what I was saying each week. Elisa tried to explain the different parts of the liturgy to me at that time, but they wouldn't sink in until much later. But I did learn and I began to appreciate the idea of a give-and-give-back conversation between us and God.

"That makes perfect sense."

Then in the summer of 2006, Elisa graduated and moved back to the Ann Arbor, MI area while I stayed at Calvin to finish up one final semester. That's when life really started getting interesting. We were two hours apart, but we talked over the phone and via instant message every night and I drove out to see her most weekends. Being from different faith traditions, we had casually discussed in which tradition we would raise our kids, but since I had become disillusioned with Calvinism, the decision seemed fairly simple — we would be Wesleyans. But, then, she discovered *Catholic Answers Live*.

Doing homework and getting good grades was not a piece of cake for me; I needed to work hard and stay focused. However, Elisa was so fascinated by what she was learning from the *Catholic Answers Live* radio program that she sent me podcast after podcast, saying, "You have to listen to this!" To this I would usually respond, "I don't have time. I have too much homework to do. Could you just explain it to me?" Therefore, when I visited her during the weekends, she would explain the Catholic viewpoint to me on issues like purgatory, Mary, the papacy, etc., always prefacing it with, "Well, I'm not sure I agree with them, but here's what they believe and why." She did such a great job laying out their reasoning that I almost always responded with, "Huh. That makes perfect sense." I think I was more resistant to the Marian doctrines, asking more clarifying questions along the way, but once I understood the Catholic case for each teaching, I saw no reason *not* to accept it.

She definitely talked me into the Catholic Church before she talked *herself* in, but, somehow in my heart, I could tell fairly early in her discovery that she would give her full assent sooner or later. I knew that she really did agree with all that the Church taught; she just wasn't ready to leave her faith tradition — and more especially her faith *community* — yet. I, on the other hand, for years had been hundreds of miles away from my childhood community. In addition, my parents had since stopped going to that church and began

attending a Pentecostal church. The only interpersonal reason for me to remain non-Catholic was Elisa and her family. Intellectually, I just wanted to follow the truth, and it became clearer day-by-day that God's truth was found in the Catholic Church.

The Mystical Body of Christ

I was realizing that the Catholic worldview was probably the most internally consistent and coherent system I had ever run into. The common thread I saw woven in each topic was the Catholic conception of the biblical idea of the Body of Christ. From reading the Bible, I knew that, primarily, the Body of Christ referred to the Church as a whole, the entire Christian community, but I always thought it was just a title, like "Church" or "community." But in listening to Catholic radio, I began to see that the Body of Christ is much, much more than that. The Church taught that we truly, mysteriously become members of Christ's Body just as certainly as each cell in the human body is a member of that person's body. Because of the hyper-reality of our unity with Christ, through Him and with each other, the Catholic understanding of every other doctrine made even more sense.

For instance, because we are members of the same Body, our prayers for each other here on earth are actually the prayers of Jesus, the "One Mediator between God and men" (1 Timothy 2:5) who is the head of the Body (see Ephesians 4:15-16). Not in that we pray and Jesus relays those prayers, but we actually are Jesus' Body praying as He prays. For the same reason, the prayers of "those also who have fallen asleep in Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:18) are also the very prayers of Christ, and we are still in communion with them through the unity of the Body of Christ, because "He is not God of the dead, but of the living" (see Matthew 22:32, Mark 12:27, & Luke 20:38). Just as Jesus calls Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — long deceased by the time of His ministry — "the living," so too are the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us among the living. I came to see that if those faithful departed are still living and united to Christ, even bodily death cannot stop them from participating in the life of the Body through the same intercession of Jesus' prayers to the Father.

I repeatedly saw how the belief in the mystical Body of Christ shaped practically every other teaching of the Catholic Church — Baptism, Communion, the ministerial priesthood — everything! With this new, deepened understanding of the Body of Christ, I likewise finally saw how all the seemingly disparate things I had previously believed as a Protestant were all linked and gained a new fullness. I had believed them all, but they had seemed disjointed, unfinished. But now, whatever questions I had about any of them were answered and fulfilled by this unifying theology. ... *continued on page 5*

CHNETWORK CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

This year, 2013, marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Coming Home Network International. To commemorate this event, in the coming months we will be featuring material from some of our earliest newsletters in an effort to give our membership a glimpse into our past.



Conveners Corner

by Marcus Grodi

FROM THE ARCHIVES *This article was originally published in the very first issue of the newsletter in July 1993.*

This is the first of hopefully many NETWORK NEWSLETTERS. As the first, this one will be brief in length, devoted to initial info, inquiries, and queries for your ideas. We hope that both this newsletter and the NETWORK fellowship itself will become what is most helpful and beneficial to you. Therefore, we need your comments and constructive critiques.

For my part, the idea for this type of fellowship came about as the result of my own struggles along the faith journey from ordained Protestant ministry to the Roman Catholic Church. I felt like I was making my way along a scarcely walked path, only to be pleasantly surprised to discover the great number of others also

being called by God to make similar journeys. But it's kind of like driving a long distance to a meeting only to find out upon arrival that dozens of others from your same town also made the same journey, each driving along, oblivious to the other travelers. We could have car-pooled! We could have chartered a bus and fellow-shipped along the way!

The purpose of this newsletter and fellowship is to help those who, once called to ministry in the Protestant faith, are now on the road to or have already become a member of the Catholic Church, and want to continue serving Christ in ministry in the Catholic Church. This desire brings up many questions concerning protocol, finances, educational needs, opportunities, etc., in an ecclesial structure and systems that is strange and foreign to many of us. We hope the NETWORK will serve as the "charter bus", or at least the "car pool", so that you and I don't have to face these challenges alone. ■

Reflections

By Fr. Ray Ryland

FROM THE ARCHIVES *This article was originally published in the September 1993 newsletter. Fr. Ryland celebrates this year his 30th anniversary of his ordination as a Catholic priest.*

During his pilgrimage, the most distinguished Catholic convert of modern times wrote a hymn which beautifully expressed his longing to know and to follow God's will. All of us know John Henry Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light," the first stanza which says:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home:

Lead thou me on:

Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene: one step enough for me.

Another well-known Anglican priest, Peter Cornwell, formerly a modern-day successor of Newman as vicar of St. Mary's Church in Oxford, entitled the story of his own conversion, One Step Enough.

In the last year or so of our own sixteen-year pilgrimage, we finally realized that the Roman Catholic Church is our destination and our true home. Then we encountered many of the same problems all clergy face when they contemplate becoming Roman Catholics. We were continually sustained by the grace of God

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working through the basic Christian wisdom so well expressed in Newman's hymn:

Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

When vast changes loom or begin to occur in our lives, we naturally wonder where all this is leading us, what will become of us. In the face of such anxiety we need more than ever to take one step at a time. If we can honestly say with the Apostle, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," (Acts 26:19): if we are in fact earnestly seeking the grace through which we can do God's will, one step will be enough for us.

The Church teaches us that once we see the truth that she is indeed the Church established by Jesus Christ, empowered by Him to teach in His name, we have no alternative but to act on that knowledge. To turn away from that

truth is in fact to imperil our salvation (Constitution on the Church, section 14).

In our own pilgrimage, through our obedience to "the heavenly vision," God gave us a sense of what I then call "inevitability." That is, God was calling, we had no alternative but to respond. The sense of inevitability brought with it a deeper sense of simple assurance. We knew that God never leads one of His children down a blind alley; that He never gives a call without also giving the means by which the person can carry out the calling. The sense of inevitability brought with it a deeper sense of simple assurance and peace.

For all who are consciously or unconsciously trying to find their way home to the true Church of Jesus Christ, we earnestly pray that God's assurance and peace will fill your hearts. ■

The Better Half

By Ruth Ryland

FROM THE ARCHIVES *This article accompanied her husband's in the September 1993 newsletter.*

The thirteen years Ray served as an Episcopal priest were exciting, fulfilling years. We had both come from a Disciples of Christ background and we found the intellectual and liturgical ethos of the Episcopal Church very satisfying. Our five children came along during that period. We loved the people in the various parishes and the school where Ray served. The people were great, good people who struggled along with us to live the Christian life. There were, of course, the usual ups and downs, joys and sorrows of living and serving, but through it all we felt most blessed by our Lord in all the important ways.

Through these years of study, prayers and simply living with God's people, we gradually moved to a more "catholic" view of the Church ("low church" to "high church"). There began a search for the historical "roots" of the Church. We became more and more aware of conflicting views and teachings in the Episcopal Church, not only in doctrinal matters but in moral ones as well. Some teachings were quite heretical. Questions arose: who was right? Which were the teachings faithful to the Gospel? Who was to say what teachings were true or false? Where was the locus of authority?

When we began to see where the search was leading, we resisted. We didn't want to go. We didn't want to turn our comfortable life upside down. We didn't want to go into the "unknown," into a "foreign land" We loved the Episco-

pal Church and all it meant to us: the people, the beautiful churches, the grand music and liturgy. Then there were all the questions of how to support our family, of leaving dear friends. (When we entered the Catholic Church we knew not even one Catholic, only the two priests who instructed us.) What about our families who would grieve and be shocked that we had "lost our minds," etc.? Those who have travelled this road know all about the sufferings. And yet, and yet...we could hear the insistent beat of the "following feet" of the Hound of Heaven as He pursued, keeping their steady and unhurried pace.

When the Holy Spirit showed us, through sheer grace, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the Roman Catholic Church is indeed the true Church, founded by Jesus Christ Himself on the Rock of Peter, could we say anything but "yes!" to Him? Praised by Jesus Christ for His mercy and grace!

In 1963, together with our five young children, we were received into the Catholic Church. We had truly come home. In those days, it was rather rare for a Protestant clergyman to take that step. Except for the angels and archangels, we had no one with whom to celebrate our joy. But joy it was and is.

Dear brothers and sisters who are on the Way, or contemplating the Way, the path may be dark for you, the problems seemingly insurmountable, the sufferings great. But if you are looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith, you can be certain of this: He will never betray your trust. **Trust Him.** ■

Member-Specific FEATURED RESOURCES

Cardinal Newman: So Great a Remedy for So Great an Evil — Fr. Ray Ryland



In this insightful talk from the 2009 Deep in History conference, Fr. Ryland discusses Cardinal Newman and the authority of the Catholic Church.

Drawn From Shadows Into Truth: A Memoir — Fr. Ray Ryland



Just released! A fascinating autobiography in the spirit of Bl. John Henry Newman, *Drawn from Shadows Into Truth: A Memoir* is the intriguing story of how a married minister in the Disciples of Christ eventually came to be an ordained priest in the Catholic Church. This captivating narrative of Father Ryland's quest for Jesus Christ and the One Church He founded is a spiritual and intellectual adventure—from a poor Oklahoma farm boy to a naval officer to a Protestant minister to a Harvard lawyer to a married Catholic priest with five children, twenty-two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Pick it up, and you'll be unable to put it down!

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive the *Cardinal Newman CD*.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *Drawn From Shadows Into Truth*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive the *Cardinal Newman CD* and *Drawn From Shadows Into Truth*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Staff Update

by Jim Anderson, Senior Advisor: History & Theology



Working with the Coming Home Network International for the past 12 years has been for me an opportunity for many wonderful blessings. Our Lord has permitted me to witness and be a part of the journey of many brothers and sisters as they have discovered and come to love the many graces and truths of the Catholic Faith.

Since coming to CHNetwork in 2001, when we had just over 500 clergy members, I have been immensely blessed to witness the Holy Spirit continue to draw an ever increasing number of Protestant clergy to consider the Catholic Church as their home, to the point where our membership of former or current non-Catholic ministers has reached almost 2,200!

The stories of the journeys of discovery of these folk are as varied as the individuals themselves. Even so, there is nearly always one common denominator for all, that being the issue of authority. All have learned through their Protestant tradition to love and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior and to revere the Holy Bible as the Word of God. The question then arises as to how are the Sacred

Scriptures faithfully to be understood and put into practice as our Lord God requires? Since the beginning of this year, CHNetwork has been contacted by Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, Anabaptist, Non-denominational and Anglican clergy who are seeking to serve and follow our Lord Jesus and His people. They have grown weary of the cacophony of contradictory teachings that they have inherited from the Protestant Reformation. They have read our Lord's promise, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn. 16:13) and they contrast this promise with the nearly endless contradictory "truths" taught from pulpits. The consistent authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church is welcomed as a liberating alternative to their previous confusion and a true realization to our Lord's promise to send the Spirit of truth to His people.

Please remember to pray for our brothers and sisters who recently came into full-communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil as well as for those who are still discerning the Lord's will for them as they continue on their journey home. ■

Prayer List



Clergy

- For Dan, a Presbyterian minister, that Jesus will guide his heart and mind towards the Catholic Faith.
- For a Non-denominational minister in Liberia, that the grace of our Lord Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit would grant him an open heart for the fullness of the truth and show him to a faithful Catholic brother or sister to guide him into the Holy Church.
- For José, a lay minister in the Dominican Republic, that he may come to grasp the meaning of the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love which will come to him in the Sacraments of the one, holy, Catholic, Church.
- For Ryan, as he transitions from Episcopal ministry to the Catholic Church.
- For Steve, a former Mennonite seminary professor, that the Holy Spirit would soon guide him to a teaching position as a Catholic.
- For Hugh, a Baptist minister in the Midwest, that he might know what the will of his Heavenly Father is for him and that our Lord would grant him the grace to act upon the knowledge given.
- For Darryl, a former minister of the Church of England, that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide him and his family as he prepares for ordination as a Catholic priest.

- For Chris, an Anglican minister in Michigan, that as he and his wife continue to attend Mass the Holy Spirit would draw them ever more deeply into the Faith.
- For the wife of a United Methodist minister in Kansas, that the Lord would grant her the wisdom to know how to witness the Catholic Faith to her husband and that he would be given the grace of conversion.
- For Joshua, a Christian and Missionary Alliance youth minister, that his new job would enable him and his family to be free to enter into full-communication with the holy Catholic Church.
- For two Non-denominational missionaries in Paraguay, that the Lord would guide them to strong, faithful, and dynamically orthodox Catholic brothers and sisters who will be willing to lovingly welcome them.

Laity

- For Jeff & Kate to return to the Catholic Church and that their children be baptized.
- For Brian, his wife, and their sons to return to the Catholic Church and receive the sacraments.
- For Jennifer, that she continues to grow in holiness as a Catholic and especially through her reception of the Eucharist.
- For Francis and his wife, that Jesus brings them into union with the successor of St.

Peter and makes it possible for them to serve Him in the Catholic Church.

- For Linda, that the Holy Spirit make clear to her God's will for her faith journey and how best to draw closer to Him.
- For Mac, that his questions and concerns about Catholic teaching be answered and that he will fully embrace all that the Lord has to offer him.
- For Sue, that the obstacles to her returning to full communion with the Catholic Church be removed and that she once again be able to receive the graces of the Sacraments.
- For all members of the CHNetwork who were received into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter, may their new life as Catholic Christians be strengthened by God's grace, especially through receiving Jesus' Body and Blood in the holy Eucharist.
- For George, that he be able to find a way to best use his gifts and talents to build up the Body of Christ as a Catholic.
- For Darla, that God will open the doors to her to be united with the See of St. Peter.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702. Or email prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org.

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

Please also pray for the Coming Home Network International's staff and Board of Directors.

President/Founder, Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor)

Chaplain, Fr. Ray Ryland (former Anglican priest)

Chief Operating Officer, Kevin Lowry (former Presbyterian)

Director of Pastoral Care and Resident Theologian, Dr. Kenneth Howell (former Presbyterian pastor)

Senior Advisor: History & Theology, Jim Anderson (former Lutheran)

Director of Studio/Media, Scott Scholten (former Presbyterian)

Financial Coordinator, Ann Moore

IT/Facilities Coordinator, Bill Bateson (former Mormon)

Publications and Laity Coordinator, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Communications Coordinator, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart (former United Methodist)

Board of Directors: Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor), Fr. Ray Ryland (former Anglican priest), Dr. Charles Feicht (revert from Evangelicalism), Dr. Robert Geiger (revert), Bruce Sullivan (former Church of Christ minister)

...Journeys Home Continued...

... continued from page 4

I also came to understand the reality that the Mass is a participation in the Eternal Now of Heaven. I began to feel the presence also of the “great cloud of witnesses” at every Mass (Hebrews 12:1). I felt they were a real, living, vibrant, loving people! No matter where we attended Mass, no matter our physical surroundings, I knew with a sense (explicable only as the knowledge of the soul) that the same saints were always around us, always worshiping God along side us at every Mass. This was something I never experienced in any Protestant community. That, to me, was what made the Catholic Church truly *catholic* (i.e. universal), as well as truly one in the mystical Body of Christ.

Christ's Body

By 2007, I had learned that the Catholic Church taught that the host (the bread-like wafer) truly became the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ at the moment of Consecration during Mass, but I had not yet been able to wrap my mind or heart around that idea. I knew that the Church also believed that the Eucharistic Presence of our Lord Jesus was reserved under the guise of that consecrated host in every tabernacle in the world. That year, Elisa and I spent a fair amount of time praying in the Eucharistic Chapel at Christ the King Parish in Ann Arbor before our Lord's Eucharistic Presence.

During one occasion, I noticed a strange, cross-shaped case with brown stained-glass panels in the corner of the chapel. At the time, I had no idea that it was a reliquary, much less one that contained a piece of the true cross on which Jesus actually died! For months, I had sat in the chapel praying, trying to understand how the large circular wafer in front of me could be Jesus. I often prayed, “Lord, I don't know if that's You, but if it is I adore You in it,” all the while deliberately *not* looking at this “ugly” cross-shaped box in the corner, because, while I knew it was probably meant to help people think of Christ's loving self-sacrifice on the cross, its ugliness seemed only to distract me from His Presence in the Eucharist.

At the Good Friday Liturgy of 2008, I learned what that “ugly” cross contained. I was struck to the heart. To suddenly

find out that this ugly thing that I had disdained and avoided *had actually touched the very skin of my God* made me feel utterly ashamed and remorseful. Something that was crucially involved in the moment of human history at which our God died so that we might live, still existed and had been just a couple feet from me — and I had ignored and even *despised* it! I suddenly felt like the Jews cursing Jesus as He died for them. I looked at that cross and saw God reaching through time to connect *me* to His saving Passion and I had repeatedly turned my back on that trans-temporal gift. I wept that night and will never forget that moment.

The Easter Vigil the next night was the final straw for both Elisa and myself. We were awestruck by the liturgy and decided that night to be Catholic by that time next year — and we were! Three months after being joined in marriage, we were confirmed at the Easter 2009 Vigil Mass and we have never regretted it.

We have since made a number of great Catholic friends and become members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. I am also considering becoming a lay-member of a religious order and hoping to get the formation necessary to become a Lay Ecclesial Minister. I have begun a modest apologetics website and blog as a way of trying to slowly expose my non-Catholic friends and family to the fullness of the Faith that we have found in the Church of Rome. ■



In June 2012, Jackford quit his job and is now a full-time father of one. He is currently in the process of discerning a vocation as a Lay Dominican and, when he has time, writes blogs and articles on his websites, Macarian Apologetics and Soul Trek: TNG, to help facilitate a better understanding of the Catholic Faith.

BLOG

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RECENT CONVERT?

If you have been received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil please notify us so we can update our records. Please e-mail Jim at jim@chnetwork.org if you are a former Protestant minister or Mary Clare at maryp@chnetwork.org if you are a lay person who has become Catholic. We look forward to hearing from you!

CHNETWORK MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Coming Home Network International (CHNetwork) is to help inquiring clergy as well as laity of other traditions to return home and then be at home in the Catholic Church.

To learn more about our work, please go to www.chnetwork.org

Reflections

by Marcus Grodi

FROM THE ARCHIVES Since this year is the 20th anniversary of our apostolate, we are reprinting this article from the very first issue of the newsletter in July 1993.

As a Protestant pastor, I was deeply committed to presenting the truth of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. I took this very seriously, and, building my teaching and preaching upon the foundation of Scripture “alone”, I believed that what I was feeding my congregation was safely palatable. As I look back, I am amazed at how blind I was. There are so many Scripture texts I either unconsciously missed, conveniently avoided, or consciously explained away.

Some of these, such as Matthew 16:18-19, John 5:51-69, 20:23, 1 Timothy 3:15, and others are fairly obvious to me now, since I’ve become more apologetically aligned. However, one particular text has become very significant to me: 2 Thessalonians 2:15: “So, then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.”

To Paul and the Christian to whom he wrote, the touchstone for theological, doctrinal, and ecclesial truth was the words and teachings being passed, preserved, and revered, orally and sometimes by hand. Similar texts, such as 1 Corinthians 11:2 and others, actually indicate that the readers were to accept the written testimonies BECAUSE they were in agreement with the oral testimonies: the oral traditions were the authoritative template.

Modern Biblical scholarship, such as that stemming from works by Dunn, has thrown out not only the trustworthiness of early traditions but the validity of any original “deposit of faith.” This, of course, is the expected trajectory of the Protestant emphasis on Scripture alone as the only trustworthy testimony of early Christianity.

However, what makes me pause is the fact that Paul and the other New Testament writers were moved to write almost entirely because they needed to address specific imminent problems which they could not correct in person. This has several very important implications: (1) there were probably many problems the New Testament authors took care of personally which they never wrote about; (2) there were probably many things that were going well which they also never mentioned; and (3) if they COULD have handled all the problems in person, we may not have had much of a New Testament! When we Protestants limited ourselves to only the testimony of the written word, we made ourselves naively susceptible to the problems and stubbornly resistant to the solutions that, in fact, tradition alone has preserved.

The reality is that *sola Scriptura* exists nowhere, in no Protestant denomination: in every case we encounter new traditions erected to fill the void left by the rejection of Sacred Tradition. And when the validity of an authoritative “deposit of faith” is rejected, the basis for establishing any authority even in Scripture is short-circuited, leaving us where modern scholarship has left us, slaves to individual opinion.

I have come to joyfully accept the reality that the tradition that Paul so often commanded the early Christians to hold fast to was the inspired truth Jesus promised that the Church would receive through the guiding, protecting presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14-15). I believe a portion of this became recorded in the written Word, but most remained present in the oral tradition. This has remained one of the primary reasons for the existence of the Church throughout the ages: the protection and preservation of this Truth. May we remain faithful to Paul’s command, and actively do our part to “stand firm and hold to the traditions.” And may we also protect and defend the institution Christ established as the steward of these truths. ■

Benedict XVI: A Shocking Pope

By Dr. Kenneth Howell



I was interrupted in the middle of my morning prayers on February 11th by a phone call from my son in Rome. “Dad, did you hear the news? The Pope has resigned.” Still half asleep, my mind could not quite take it in but clearly my son was affected. And indeed all Rome was a buzz that day with the news. The entire world was shocked. For me, it took a while to sink in.

When Pope Benedict became the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church 19 April 2005, it was after the longest pontificate of the twentieth century, that of John Paul II. He was

John Paul’s close personal friend. The future pope had faithfully served the Church as the Prefect (head) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since the 1980s. In 1997, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger asked John Paul II if he could retire to Germany and resume his quiet scholarly life. John Paul denied his request. The German Cardinal was needed in Rome. Nor would it be the last time he was needed. The College of Cardinals in 2005 saw in Joseph Ratzinger a worthy successor to John Paul and ultimately to Peter. Cardinal Ratzinger was again being called to greater love and sacrifice. And he responded with love.

... continued on page 7

It wasn't surprising to those who knew Cardinal Ratzinger, then, that his first encyclical as Benedict XVI would be *God is Love* (Deus Caritas Est). Here Benedict drew upon his years of reading three sources of Catholic teaching: Scripture, St. Augustine, and St. Bonaventure. It was rumored that Cardinal Ratzinger could be seen on the Metro in Rome reading his Greek New Testament, apparently cherishing every moment of contact with Sacred Scripture in a busy schedule. Earlier in life he had written a doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine's doctrine of the Church and then a second one on St. Bonaventure's theology of history. All this knowledge had allowed Benedict to articulate the love and grace of God to a world increasingly hostile to religion and moral rectitude.

Benedict's profound sense of history also permitted him deep insights into present day secular climate in Europe and the West. In 2006, his address to the University of Regensburg again affirmed the Catholic estimation for the interplay of reason and faith. In what must be a bit of irony, here was a man of great faith calling the Western world back to rationality, to the expansive use of reason to find the answers to life which ultimately reside in the Logos, the Eternal Son of God. Without a knowledge of history, Benedict XVI would have been incapable of seeing this need to return to reason.

Beginning in 1978 with the accession of Karol Wojtyla to the Chair of Peter, we have had two successive popes who have been consummate intellectuals. John Paul II was a philosopher of the first order, able to articulate the ancient faith in a modern idiom that all generations could grasp. He especially and successfully related to a new generation of Catholics who were raised in a morally confused world.

If John Paul was a great philosopher, Benedict XVI is an equally great theologian. Both had been expert advisors at the Second Vatican Council. Both had been university professors in their respective countries. But Benedict's work had

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focused more specifically on theology. A man immersed in St. Augustine, Benedict sought to reinvigorate the modern day church with an Augustinian vision, emphasizing that the structure of the Church flows from its essence, from the mystical reality of Christ in His body to the structure of bishops and popes. This structure is not arbitrary or a human invention. Benedict knew long before he assumed the ministry of Peter that it was essential to the welfare of the Church.

The welfare of the Church has been uppermost in Benedict's mind for a long time. So, while his resignation may have shocked many of us, it shouldn't have. Once he perceived that he would do more good for the Church by finishing earthly sojourn as a man of prayer, he knew that his public ministry was over. And in that act he taught his final lesson as a professor, the lesson that prayer is what sustains the life of the Church. That is shocking to the secular world but it should never shock those who live in union with the See of Peter. The Church is sustained, not by human ingenuity or personal charisma, but by its union with God through prayer.

On March 13, 2013 we heard the words "habemus papam" and we welcomed Pope Francis as the successor of St. Peter. Let us pray for him and the universal Church during this Easter season. ■

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2013 marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Coming Home Network International. Please keep our work in your prayers for we believe that our apostolate to help Protestant clergy and laity come home to the Catholic Church is more needed than ever.