



April 2014 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Christ is the Light of East and West: One Man's Search for the Apostolic Faith

By Greg Cook

On a blazingly-hot day in August, 2012, at Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church in Tacoma, I was received into the Holy Catholic Church and my marriage convalidated. It was the culmination of a lifetime journey of faith and the beginning of a new life within the fullness of the Apostolic Faith, which I had pursued for years. Prior to that day, I had been an Eastern Orthodox Christian and, before that, part of an evangelical faith community. Since the day of my reception into the Catholic Church, I have been seeking to serve the Church and, in some small way, to build bridges between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

“The light of the East has illumined the universal church,” wrote Pope John Paul II in the apostolic letter *Orientalis Lumen*. Pope John Paul II, proud of his Slavic heritage, saw no need for division between East and West, and yet it remains. In much of the East, one's faith community is defined both by what it is (an ethnic identity) and by what it is *not* (in communion with Rome). But in much of the West, the light of the East never shines or, if it does, it is misperceived. Common explanations of this tragic schism dwell on issues of power and subordination, privilege and transgressions, progress and tradition. My life encompasses a journey from West to East and back again to the West. My guides are Popes John Paul II and Gregory I, revered by both West and East. I hope to find the

spot where light from both directions meets to dispel the encroaching darkness of our age.

The need for “Someone”

From the vantage point of where I was born in 1961, the East was non-existent. My family lived in a rural corner of New York, almost on the border with Quebec. My mother's family were French-Canadian Catholics and my father's family were non-practicing Methodists. I was baptized and raised in the Methodist Church and credit that experience with learning the basics of the Christian Faith through attendance at Sunday services and religion classes. I was confirmed but soon after stopped going to church with my mother. It was a confusing time in my life (being a teenager) and, in our local Methodist church, *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

the traditional clerical collar-wearing pastor moved on and was replaced by someone who shunned tradition and sought to be “relevant.”

Even though I did not go to services, I felt a longing for *something* (or actually *Someone*) on Sundays. A classmate brought me to a few fundamentalist Protestant prayer meetings but what I heard there did not compel me. My great-aunt Marion, who became aware of my connection with those who promoted reading *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, fired back by giving me a copy of a book about the catacomb Church in Rome. Aunt Marion was perhaps the only “militant” Catholic in my family. None of the other relatives on that side made much outward show of their faith and their homes were not overtly decorated with Catholic items. In all, when I graduated from high school in 1979 and entered the Navy, I had a vague awareness of God, the need to “be saved,” that there would be an end of history culminating in the triumph of God, and that there was something special about the Bible.

Life in the Navy showed me I was in need of discipline. I was smart, curious, and a good worker, but my introverted and contemplative nature combined with a strong rebellious streak meant my life under authority was a difficult one. The “plus” side of the military was that I got to work and live with men from all over the country and even from other countries. Before this, my life was sheltered and decidedly lacking in cultural awareness. I became acquainted with some shipmates who were fundamentalists and they attempted to take me under their wings, but the lure of the world (sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll) far from home exerted a stronger pull than their proselytizing booklets by Jack Chick and others (Chick was especially opposed to Roman Catholicism and taught that it is a false and satanic religion separating people from Christ). I was also exposed to other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, in the countries to which we traveled. Influenced by thinkers such as Thoreau

and unable (and unwilling) to restrain my passions, I was discharged from the Navy under other-than-honorable conditions.

Restlessly searching for God

After the Navy, my life included occasional attendance at a Catholic parish to which some friends belonged. Early adulthood proved to be a time of dreams shattered by my ongoing lack of discipline. I attended a state college and became enamored of the Middle Ages. That era’s literature was the basis of much of the fantasy literature I liked to read and the history was complex and replete with battles fought for sometimes-honorable reasons. The architecture drew me in as well. I even co-wrote a paper on St. Augustine, which was presented at a conference. However, my lack of discipline undermined me yet again: a good medievalist needs to be fluent in Latin and other languages, and I did not learn any of those.

Although I managed to graduate with a bachelor’s degree, my personal life was in a shambles. A relationship that began with cohabitation and my complicity in an abortion led to marriage and then divorce. I floundered in graduate school studying Latin American historical geography and fell into more sinful behavior. I occasionally remembered St. Augustine’s descriptions of his own youthful depravity, but without his remarkable conversion experience. By age 30, I sought something strong and assertive. I read an English translation of the Quran and re-visited the Bible. I called out to God and, to my surprise, He answered me. I did not have a mystical experience; however, I had a clear sense that God was real and personal.

Then things got really interesting: an unhealthy relationship ended and I found myself homeless. As an aspiring rock musician, the more I strove to do God’s will, the more I found myself estranged from people in my milieu. I finally swallowed my pride and re-connected with my family. I moved back in with them in 1994.

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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 7

Brother Rex Anthony Norris*
Former Presbyterian and Episcopalian

April 14

Paul McCusker*
Former Baptist and Anglican

April 21

Devin Rose*
Former Atheist and Southern Baptist

April 28

Marie Joseph
Revert, re-air from 1/24/11

**Schedule is subject to change.*

Easter and the Joy of the Resurrection

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell



A priest friend of mine once told me that it was the Resurrection which convinced him of the truth of the Christian and Catholic Faith. He was raised in a Lutheran family and for a while attended a Baptist church in his childhood. Although he had heard the message of Christ, he abandoned his childhood faith as he grew into adulthood. As a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University in England, he encountered a group of joy-filled Catholics who seemed to take their faith as seriously as they did their academic life. Being a man of extraordinary natural gifts, he had become self-reliant but the problem with self-reliance is that the demon of pride always lurks in the shadows. The joy of these faith-filled Catholics would not let him alone. Why were they so involved in and committed to their faith? Why was Christ so real to them and not to him?

As he read through the history of social and political thought, he noticed that all the great thinkers he was reading were Catholic. Coincidence? Maybe not. Over time he realized that it was faith in Christ's Resurrection which animated and moved these faithful Catholic scholars to live life on what seemed like a higher plane. As he puzzled over this fact, he put two and two together. If Christ really and physically rose from the dead — a humanly impossible feat — that fact changed everything. Life was no longer about self-promotion but about living for a higher cause. For him, that higher plane manifested itself in a vocation to priestly service of the people of God.

The Resurrection is supernatural. No natural law or human power can raise people from the dead. Nor did any other famous religious leader ever claim to be risen from the dead. Jesus Christ alone is the Resurrected One who is different than all other philosophers and religious teachers. This is the claim of traditional Christianity, be it Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. But is it a reality? Did Christ truly rise from the dead? One thing is certain. If Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity is a farce and the atheists and skeptics are right. They say that it is a fairy tale, and a destructive one at that. And they would be absolutely right if Christ's body decayed in the grave as all others do.

The sheer incredibility of the Resurrection is perhaps what motivated each of the Evangelists to include accounts of Christ's post-resurrection appearances. Each story — from Christ's meeting the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24) to His appearance in a room of locked doors and windows (Jn 20) — contains precious theological truths growing out of the Church's faith in the Resurrection. Without the reality of Christ's rising, however, none of that theology would make much sense. My priest friend also told me that the fervor and effectiveness of those twelve apostles, which allowed them to transform their world, suggested that their faith had an objective truth behind it. Indeed, if faith in Christ's Resurrection were merely subjective or imagined, it would have been hard to sustain over time.



The Resurrection - Titian, 1542-1544

Much of modern liberal Protestantism attempted to make Christianity more palatable to modern sensibilities precisely by softening or denying the physical Resurrection. Rarely was there an out-and-out denial of its truth. Usually, the Resurrection was simply relegated to the realm of the subjective. Whether Christ really rose from the dead was not important, so it was said. What was important is that we Christians *believed* in the idea of new life and new power. This radical reinterpretation left much of mainstream Protestantism anemic and susceptible to a whole host of other heterodox tendencies. One of the most prominent of these attempts that included both denial and reinterpretation was due to the famous German Lutheran New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann acknowledged openly that the world of the New Testament was permeated with mythology, including the mythology of the Resurrection. The only way to salvage the

message of Christianity, the Gospel if you will, was to reinterpret it according to the Existentialist philosophy of someone like Martin Heidegger. Bultmann truly believed that he was doing a great service to Christianity. He was flat wrong, as one of his prize students, Eta Linnemann, came to see. I remember her lecturing here in the United States in the 1990s in which she publicly repudiated Bultmann's program.

St. Paul seemed to be well aware of all this. In 1 Corinthians 15, he affirms without one moment's hesitation that Christ has really risen from the dead. He even anticipated modern attempts to soften or deny the physical Resurrection when he said, "Now Christ is indeed raised from the dead, the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20). And he considers the counterfactual possibility, "If Christ is not raised from the dead, then our preaching is futile and your faith in vain" (15:14). Paul's words indicate that some in Corinth had either denied the Resurrection altogether or had claimed that the Resurrection was of a spiritual nature and was already past. The latter view seems eerily close to some Christian churches in modern times. One thing is certain from 1 Corinthians 15. A Christianity without the Resurrection is no Christianity at all. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is not a pious belief or wishful thinking. It is historical fact that Christians must hold on to (Jude 3). Christian faith is supernatural.

The Resurrection in Our Time

The fact of the Resurrection is only the beginning of its significance. Its deeper, metaphysical meaning is what is celebrated on Easter Sunday. Easter is the highest holy day of the Church year for a good reason. The Risen Lord Jesus still lives to bless His Church as He did that day on the Mount of Olives before He was taken up into heaven (Lk 24:50). All the liturgies of Easter, both east and west, celebrate "the Light that shines in the darkness." The Easter vigil candle is a concrete expression of Christ as the Light of the world. St. Paul again seems to glow in the light of Easter when he speaks of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4: 4 as "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." It is this same gospel that today, as in Paul's time, "shines in our hearts to bring the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Easter and the Risen Lord are a reminder and assurance that God never, never abandons us. In a world ravaged by the effects of sin, it can seem that we Christians and the Church are sometime losing the battle. But the Resurrection calls us back to the fact that Christ is victorious over sin, the devil, and death. The end is not in doubt. The victory has been won. But we do know that we have not always experienced that victory. How can we do so? By knowing first, as St. John says, that the victory is also within us because we have received the gift of faith (cf. 1 John 5:4). Then, the more we grow in love, the greater our victory will be. St. Augustine understood this well:

Why did he come in the flesh? Because he had to show us the power of the resurrection. He was God and he came in the flesh. God cannot die; flesh can die. So, he came in the flesh to die for us. But in what manner did he die for us? "Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends." So, it was love that led him to the flesh. So, anyone who does not have charity denies that Christ came in the flesh.

Christ came in the flesh to die and to rise again that we may grow in love and show the same charity that he showed on earth. The Resurrection is the surety of His love continuing. And the Eucharist is the surety for us today. When we fail to perceive his presence in our daily lives, we can always remember that it is the Risen Christ who is given us in the Eucharist – that's objective. There is no need to despair. Christ is risen!

Many great spiritual guides throughout history have said that discouragement is one of the biggest obstacles to sainthood. So important was this that St. Ignatius of Loyola said emphatically that discouragement was never from God. The Resurrection is the true and constant reminder that discouragement in the spiritual life is groundless. If Christ is truly raised from the dead, there is no power in heaven or hell that can take the love of Christ away from us. Perhaps the Resurrection is the reason that my priest friend's preaching always seems to have an underlying joy and confidence about it. Everything hangs on the Resurrection. ■

CHNETWORK STAFF'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

April 5, 2014

Marcus Grodi speaking at EWTN's Family Celebration
Chandos Pattison Auditorium, Surrey, BC Canada
205-271-2989
viewer@ewtn.com

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.

Worship and Witness

By Marcus Grodi

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people,
that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him
who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
Once you were no people but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:9,10

In this brief but important passage, plucked from the first letter of Saint Peter, we hear the unique mission that each one of us has received as a result of Baptism.

Peter was writing to first generation Christians who had become dispersed from Jerusalem, “aliens and exiles” (2:11) in the seedbed of expanding Christianity in the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Most of his audience, hearing what is presumed by many scholars to be a baptismal homily, were adult converts who had received Baptism later in life upon entrance into the Church. Consequently, Peter reminds them that, before their faith in Christ and consequent Baptism, they “were no people” in need of salvation, or extrication, from their pagan, lost culture and lifestyles.

St. Paul made a similar declaration in what many consider his baptismal homily, Ephesians:

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might

show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works, lest any man should boast. *Ephesians 2:1-9*

The Ephesian Christians, as well as those to whom St. Peter wrote, were not extracted and saved out of their dead, pagan lives because of any improved behavior or good deeds they might have started doing while still living as pagans, but rather, while they were still “dead through [their] trespasses”—“while...yet sinners” (Rom 5:9)—Jesus Christ, through His grace, touched their hearts, minds, and consciences, and brought them home to the Church. Through Baptism they were “born anew to a living hope” (1 Pet 1:3), “not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet 1:23; cf. Jn 3:3-5).

Through faith and Baptism they were saved (cf. Mk 16:16) and became children of God, “a holy nation, God’s own people” (cf. Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1), empowered to *worship*, as “a royal priesthood,” God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and to *witness*—to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

To worship and to witness. Both are important, and both are essential.

It is my assumption that anyone reading this article has received the same undeserved graces and blessings as those first century Christians addressed above by Saints Peter and Paul. We, too, were once “no people” but are now “God’s people” by grace through faith, and born anew through Baptism, received even as ignorant infants

Member's Section

Member's Section

FEATURED RESOURCES



The East Looks Toward Rome: How the Eastern Churches Reconstructed Sacred Tradition and Authority

Fr. Ray Ryland examines certain ways in which the separated Eastern brethren have departed from the Catholic Faith, which was once shared. Fr. Ryland focuses on the issues of authority, discontinuity, and why ecumenical councils are not sufficient authority.



Orthodoxy and Catholicism: A Comparison — Dave Armstrong

Orthodox Christianity possesses the seven sacraments, valid ordination, the Real Presence, a reverential understanding of Sacred Tradition, apostolic succession, a profound piety, a great history of contemplative and monastic spirituality, a robust veneration of Mary and the saints, and many other truly Christian attributes. In this book, Catholic apologist Dave Armstrong respectfully compares Orthodoxy and Catholicism from a Catholic perspective. He covers such topics as oneness and ecclesiology, the papacy, ecumenical councils, doctrinal developments, modernity, contraception, and divorce.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive the *The East Looks Toward Rome* CD.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *Orthodoxy and Catholicism*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive the *The East Looks Toward Rome* CD and *Orthodoxy and Catholicism*.

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For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to chnetwork.org/donate/ or complete the form below and mail to:

CHNetwork

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PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

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SHARE YOUR STORY

The CHNetwork always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to <http://chnetwork.org/converts> to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

Prayer List



Clergy

- For John, an Evangelical minister in Kentucky, that the Holy Spirit would show him the way to get beyond the scandal that bad Catholics have caused for him.
- For a former Church of Christ seminarian in Idaho, that our Lord Jesus would guide him to use his talents wisely in the Catholic Church.
- For Patrick, a United Methodist minister in Texas, that God would guide his path as he seeks out the Catholic Faith and also open his wife's heart to new possibilities.
- For a missionary in the Caribbean whose wife is against his return to the Catholic Faith, that our Lord Jesus would soften her heart.
- For David, a Lutheran minister in Ohio, that the Lord would grant him the gift of patience as he works through the many issues with which he needs to deal as he journeys home.
- For Gary, a Non-denominational Evangelical pastor in New York, that he may find good faithful Catholics with whom he may find fellowship.
- For Jason, a Pentecostal minister in Canada, that he may be able to overcome his difficulties with Marian devotion and that the Holy Spirit would change his wife's heart.
- For a community of Anglican Franciscans in the Caribbean, that the Lord would clear

all obstacles to their reception to the Catholic Church.

Laity

- For Simon, his family, and their needs and intentions.
- For Barbara who has done extensive reading and study about the Catholic Church but doesn't know if she should become Catholic.
- For Dave who is attending Mass but has some questions and concerns about Catholics living out their faith.
- For Deanna, who recently received a decree of nullity and is hoping to be received into the Catholic Church at Easter.
- For Alaina, that she be able to find local Catholic support on her faith journey.
- For Irene to find a supportive friend who understands the particular challenges she faces in conversion.
- For Joe, who is having a very difficult time with his wife accepting his Catholic Faith.
- For Ken who continues to be drawn towards Catholicism, despite the challenges he encounters in his family.
- For Lisa who is looking forward to continuing her faith journey and learning more about the Catholic Church.
- For David who is studying about Catholicism while not having the support of his spouse.

- For Andrea who is having some struggles with Marian devotion.
- For Bill who is having doubts and questions about his faith.
- For Phyllis who is reading the Scriptures and the *Catechism* and is on an unexpected journey towards the Catholic Church.
- For Abigail, a young woman who recently returned to the Church, that Jesus brings her into an ever-deepening love of the Eucharist.
- For the wife of a minister who, after a long and difficult journey, is looking to become Catholic at Easter.
- For Anna that she will come to a deeper relationship with Christ in her life as a Catholic Christian.
- For Joan who is going through RCIA and is encouraged by receiving answers to her questions about Catholicism.
- For Karen who is planning to come into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter, that she will know how best to navigate the difficulties with her husband not converting.

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)

Resident Theologian, Dr. Kenneth Howell (former Presbyterian pastor)

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Communications Coordinator, JonMarc Grodi

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...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

After some investigating, I joined an evangelical church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, not knowing that this was opening the door to the roots of Christian Tradition and the historical Church. I dove into studying the Bible and quickly moved into positions of responsibility as a preacher, teacher, and board member at both the local and district level. I was approved to pursue ordination, and my path seemed clear. I daydreamed about which church I might be called to pastor.

But then God, as He is wont to do, used my own momentum to lovingly throw me to the ground in order to get my attention. I believed I needed to go on some evangelizing adventures, and signed up for a summer campaign in New York City in support of a Jewish-Christian ministry and, following that, I joined a church-planting team in New Hampshire. Summer in N.Y.C. was a powerful experience, but one that burned me out. I was excited to try to plant a church, but the excitement was ground to pieces by reality and the exposure of my weaknesses. I expected God to do much of the work and for me to have an easy path to success and status. Instead, I floundered in a strange environment with people I did not know well and did not like. One good thing came out of it all: in trying to be a good disciple of John Wesley, I discovered his appreciation for the ancient Church and I delved ever-deeper into history.

The entrancing beauty of tradition

Eventually, after leaving New Hampshire for an ill-fated drive to Kansas — to meet members of a church trying to combine charismatic elements with evangelicalism and tradition, and then returning to rural New York — I concluded that I needed to unite myself with the Church of the New Testament. I was left with two options: Catholicism and Orthodoxy. I retained some anti-Catholic prejudices imbibed from Evangelical sources. At the gas station where I was working, one customer (a faithful Catholic with a large family) gave me a *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to read, but there were still elements of Catholic doctrine — especially involving Mary — that I could neither comprehend, nor embrace. While I was in transition, I briefly attended an evangelical Episcopal church and got acquainted with the Eucharist, liturgy, and confession.

Eventually, entranced by incense, chant, history, vestments, and a deep mystical theology, I was received into the Orthodox Church. It was there I engaged in yet another wrestling match with God, with predictable results. I was received into Orthodoxy on December 24, 1999, by a Palestinian Arab priest (the seventh generation of priests in his family). I drove two to three hours to get to the Divine Liturgy on Sundays. I got a feel for the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and Basil and the liturgical year.

Two years later, I moved to the West Coast and joined an Orthodox parish with roots in the Slavic lands, including many of those who followed St. Alexis Toth from Rome to Moscow. I originally went west to meet a lady named Mary who was a friend of a friend. She was on her own journey: born into Ca-

tholicism, she joined the Church of Christ as a teenager, and then grew disillusioned with the over-emphasis on preaching and repudiation with any form of “ritual.” She was interested in Orthodoxy, and we were married a few months after we met. Later our marriage was blessed in the Orthodox Church.

My Orthodox life on the West Coast included theology studies and tonsure as a Reader after my wife was received into Orthodoxy in 2006. I especially loved quiet divine liturgies on weekdays; however, our absolute favorite was the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, a vesperal liturgy served only during Lent and Holy Week. The combination of candlelight, prostrations, chanting, and profound reverence won a place in my heart. That liturgy is attributed to St. Gregory Dialogos (Pope Gregory I), the Italian disciple of St. Benedict who resided in Constantinople as the pope’s representative before returning to the West and assisting in the birth of the Middle Ages and Western Civilization, along with the chant forever connected to him.

In twelve years as an Orthodox Christian I experienced both joy and grief. The joys included living with and learning from the Virgin Mary the *Theotokos* (Greek for Mother of God, or God-bearer), icons, beautiful liturgies, and a sense of belonging to a defined group. Orthodox theology offered a more mystical counterpart to more rational Western teaching. My previous difficulties with understanding Mary were mostly removed by singing beautiful songs such as the ancient *Akathist Hymn* of St. Romanos the Melodist and the 20th Century *Rejoice Unwedded Bride* by Saint Nektarios of Aegina; several major feast days are dedicated to Mary and her icons are always prominent in any Orthodox church building; finally, she is mentioned often in Eastern prayers and liturgies. The grief included a frequent sense of falling short in personal disciplines such as fasting, being hampered by the de-centralized governance of Orthodoxy, feeling like an outsider because of an American instead of an ethnic identity, an over-emphasis on mysticism and devaluation of reason, and the personal heartbreak of my wife’s multiple miscarriages, in spite of seeking a blessing from our bishop and praying before a miraculous icon.

Paving the way to Catholicism

Looking back, I can see there were stages along the way that brought me to Catholicism. At first, I adopted the attitude of many Orthodox believers who define themselves primarily as “not Catholic.” We would mention with disdain the presumptuousness of papal claims to govern the entire body of Christ; there were also dogmas we denied, including the Immaculate Conception and the addition of the *filioque* (referring to the Spirit proceeding from *both* Father and Son) to the Creed. Then I tentatively began reading Catholic works. Next, I started examining my own family’s connection to Catholicism; this included attending Catholic services and investigating Western Rite Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is home to a very small Western-rite with liturgies based on either the Anglican or older Catholic Mass. Al-

...Journeys Home Continued...

though there were no Western-rite parishes near where I lived, I bought a number of service books. I also started reading Catholic apologists like Fr. Dwight Longenecker, who has made his own journey from Protestantism and Anglicanism into the Church. Probably the most important decision I made during this time, was to start praying the rosary. Very quickly, I was in the “School of Mary,” the first disciple of Christ. As Pope John Paul II noted, Mary’s discipleship precedes Peter’s. It was in the Church of Rome that I finally experienced the truth of Mary in its completeness.

Another feature that drew me into communion with Rome was culture — literature, music, and art. So many of the great works of Western Civilization came from a desire to glorify God. As a college undergraduate, I gained an appreciation for the Christian Humanism of the Middle Ages. I did not find a comparable body of work in the Christian East, though there certainly were things of beauty such as Hagia Sophia and the churches of Russia. As much as I loved reading Dostoevsky and Solzhenitsyn, I hungered for more variety in literature, and so I read Waugh, Undset, and Flannery O’Connor; I continued re-reading my favorite author: the devoutly-Catholic J.R.R. Tolkien. I became attracted to Gregorian chant and the Benedictine way. St. Benedict (one of the patrons of Europe, along with Ss. Cyril and Methodius) seemed like a good bridging figure since he pre-dated the East-West schism and is honored on the Orthodox liturgical calendar. I investigated becoming a Benedictine oblate and living out the motto of *ora et labora* (pray and work).

At the time of my 50th birthday in 2011, I was open to a change. A week before my birthday, I went on a private retreat to Mount Angel Benedictine Abbey in Oregon. The peaceful, yet disciplined rhythms of Benedictine life pulled strongly on me. Through the legacy of St. Benedict, I found my way back to the West. As much as I appreciated the culture of the East, I was always a visitor there. I was a product of Western, Latin-rite inculturation. Inculturation means bringing the transfiguring light of Christ to what is good and true in a society; not imposing one culture on another, but rather appreciating language, customs, and community ties. I did not grow up Catholic, but my native territory in rural New York was shaped by Western Catholicism. Looking back, I can see (imperfectly, to be sure) that the culture, holidays, celebrations, language, art, etc. helped form me, in spite of my ignorance and rebellion. At the time I could not see the light of Christ in my culture, so I sought it in the East.

Finally, I felt I had no choice but to leave the Orthodox Church and hope for reception into Catholicism. I knew I could embrace Orthodoxy from within the Catholic Church, but Orthodoxy would not allow me to embrace Catholicism. After consulting with my wife, I decided I wanted to pursue the Catholic Faith. I wrote my pastor a letter informing him that we would not be coming back. It was hard saying goodbye to friends.

I began attending Mass at different parishes, and one especially attracted me. When my wife joined me she too liked the building, music, and the humble young priest. That same priest

was at a loss for words when, one Sunday after Mass, we approached him to say we wanted to be received into the Church and that we were then Orthodox Christians. Subsequent to that, we needed to sort out canonical issues about marriage. Mary and I both worked with parish advocates and undertook the annulment process, which was both painful and healing. The process taught me that the Church is wise, serious, and compassionate. Those issues were resolved by the grace of God and we are now in the arms of our loving Mother the Holy Church. Illuminations along the way

Signposts point me home

While trying to make sense of this journey I have picked out some other signposts along the way. When I was on the way from the evangelical, Bible-centered domain into the church of the Apostolic Tradition, I attended the funeral Mass for my devout Catholic grandmother. One thing I noticed was that the priest obviously knew my grandmother and her character, because his remarks captured her no-nonsense spirit. The second point I noticed was how much Scripture there is in the Mass. In Protestant Evangelical churches the readings usually depend on the preacher: there are typically no readings built directly into the service. Catholics were supposed to be Scripture-deficient, but here I found they heard many things from the Bible at every Mass. Finally, I sensed a unity in the Mass, which I did not see in Evangelical churches with their American individualistic ethos.

The second signpost was while I was doing a week of residency for my Orthodox theological studies. Although most of the students in the program were Orthodox or in the process of becoming so, there were also a few Eastern-Rite Catholics, mostly Melkites. I remember eating breakfast with several other students, and when one of the Orthodox students found out our table-mate was a Melkite, he launched into a diatribe about the falsity of an Eastern Christian being in communion with Rome. The Melkite man made some defense, but mostly I thought he handled the unprovoked verbal attack with dignity and patience. I remember thinking, as I took my tray up for the dishwashers, that the attack was uncharitable in the extreme, and I admired the Eastern Catholic man for his calm response. I determined to learn more about Eastern churches in communion with Rome.

The third signpost was when I accompanied my wife to Washington, D.C. in 2007 where she was studying Shakespeare. I was a tonsured Reader by then and I was doing some research for my final field project in theological studies. I was looking at different burial customs among the largest Orthodox ethnic groups in order to help plan a pan-Orthodox cemetery for the Pacific Northwest. There is part of a cemetery in D.C. set aside for the Russian Orthodox, so I went there to take some pictures. There were no Orthodox churches near where we were staying on Capitol Hill, but there was a Catholic church across the street. One morning I put on my cassock and walked over to observe Mass. Used to lengthy services, I was amazed that the daily Mass was over in about twenty minutes; but I noticed that all the elements of the



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...Journeys Home Continued...

liturgy were there, though in somewhat different language and shape than I experienced in Orthodox services. That memorable trip also included an awe-filled tour of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception — it was one of the grandest churches I had ever visited. So, on one trip I had observed Catholicism in both its humble and magnificent settings.

The fourth signpost came in September, 2010, when I went home to visit my parents (my wife, a teacher, could not get the time off to accompany me). I was thinking quite a bit about my family history and native region and decided I would go to Mass as often as I could and I went almost every day. I gained even more appreciation for how the Mass could be celebrated with reverence. I noticed the saints being commemorated and the faces of the faithful and it made me feel closer to my ancestors who had been faithful Catholics. I continued to revere Orthodoxy, but more and more felt estranged from it.

Finally, I must mention one book about one of the most noteworthy men of our time: George Weigel's massive *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*. Again and again, I found myself in tears reading about that inspired, brilliant, holy, and humble man. One of Pope John Paul II's many signs of greatness was his reaching out to the Orthodox and his spirited defense of the rights of Eastern Catholics, especially the Ukrainians. Despite Pope Leo XIII's encyclical concerning the Eastern Churches (*Christi Nomen*), Latin misunderstanding of their fellow Christians continued in the Twentieth Century. However, the Second Vatican Council spoke with clarity in its Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, defending the ancient traditions, canons, and prerogatives of the Eastern believers and their hierarchs. Then in 1978 the conclave elected Cardinal Wojtyla pope, and one of the staunchest defenders ever of Eastern Christians assumed the See of Peter as Pope John Paul II.

The Orthodox argument against Rome is that the West strayed from a shared Tradition. Pope John Paul II echoed the Eastern appeal to Tradition: "It is Tradition that preserves the Church from the danger of gathering only changing traditions, and guarantees her certitude and continuity" (*Orientalis Lumen*, 23). On the other hand, he was also shaped by and a shaper of Vatican II, and he prophetically challenged a too-often-moribund Orthodoxy: "Tradition is never pure nostalgia for things or forms past, nor regret for lost privileges, but the living memory of the Bride, kept eternally youthful by the Love that dwells in

her" (*OL*, 23-24). Both churches feel they have lost something; both seek a way in a darkening, hostile world. The Orthodox never came to grips with the end of the Eastern Roman and Russian empires, while the churches in communion with Rome still cannot agree on how to properly interpret post-Vatican II changes. Orthodoxy has still not grappled with situations in which it is neither politically ascendant nor part of a persecuted minority. Orthodoxy and the Churches in communion with Rome have in common a pilgrim nature: Will we choose to consciously make the pilgrimage together? "[T]oday we can cooperate in proclaiming the Kingdom or we can become the upholders of new divisions," wrote Pope John Paul II (*OL*, 43).

Today I am striving to make amends for the many ways I fell in the past, and I am grateful to God for the way He gives second chances. I have a special devotion to Our Lady and say the rosary every day. I feel privileged to be part of the Church and hope to have a role in her apostolate of prayer and witness to the world. In our parish (Our Lady of the Holy Rosary) we are reviving older customs and recently successfully undertook a procession on the Feast of Corpus Christi with our archbishop's enthusiastic blessing.

I am thankful for the journey God has granted me, and grateful for what I learned in Orthodoxy. I thank God for the disciplines of prayer, repentance, marriage, and the Eucharist. I believe the split between East and West (and misunderstandings between Eastern and Latin Catholics) is the greatest tragedy of Christianity and an all-too-frequent cause of scandal. I offer up my own story as a tiny token of gratitude to Our Lord for the healing of that wound in His Body. ■



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