



The Coming Home Network International

Membership Newsletter

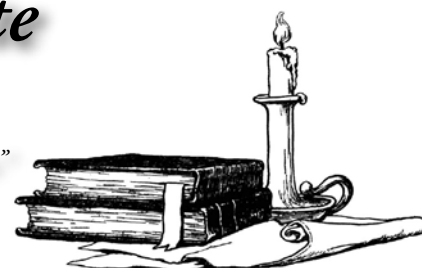
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August 2002

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I Wanted to Write

*"These are written that you may believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that believing you may have life in His name."
John 20:31*



In these words, St. John the Apostle explained how his written Gospel was in line with the great final commission Jesus had given His apostles. When Jesus commanded them to "go forth and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), He included instructions on baptizing and teaching, but as far as we know He never told them to write. Yet as the Church spread to the farthest reaches of the Mediterranean world, the missionary apostles recognized the supportive and evangelistic power of the written word. I am quite certain that all who read this newsletter gratefully recognize a great debt to the written Word, whether read or heard.

Newman claimed in the introduction to his Essay on the Development of Doctrine that "to become deep in history is to cease to be Protestant." I know that most of us can confirm this truth in relation to our own conversions. Yet for history to have such an impact in this twenty-first century, our Protestant friends and family must read as well as listen to apologetic arguments.

But what if our Protestant friends refuse to read books that present a balanced, non-revisionist version of history? I must admit that even though Marilyn and I have in no way hidden the reasons for our conversions, not one of our extended family has "ceased to be Protestant." Even those closest to us who watch my television program faithfully

do not seem to be getting one bit closer to the Church.

For years I have proposed that the three top reasons most Protestants are not Catholics (besides pride) are (1) ignorance—they don't have the right data about the Catholic faith; (2) prejudice—the data they have is wrong; and (3) "bad Catholics"—either the Catholics they know are poor models of the Catholic faith, or the faithful Catholics they know don't fit their definition of what it means to be a Christian.

Reinforcing these three reasons is the fact that few Protestants read Catholic books about the Catholic Church written by faithful Catholics. I'm sure most of you will concur with this observation. Until I began my journey toward the Church at age 38, the only Catholic book I had read about the Catholic faith was *On Being Christian* by Hans Küng. Not a great start!

Since Marilyn and I converted, we have given dozens of great Catholic non-fiction and biographies to family and friends, and with seemingly good intentions they promised to read them. But instead these books have all ended up gathering dust on shelves with only the first dozen or so pages touched—and usually our relationships with those who received the books have remained strained.

So how can we reach our friends and family? And how many of

you face this same, seemingly insurmountable, barrier?

I believe conversion begins when a breach occurs in the self-constructed walls of our psyches. Like the ancient citizens who built tall, thick city walls to protect their inhabitants from attack, each of us surrounds himself with defense mechanisms that insulate us from invasion. But when a breach occurs—either through a crisis, or a tragedy, or an awakening of some kind, all through the initiative of the Holy Spirit—we become vulnerable and open to conversion. So what can we use to help the Holy Spirit break through the thick walls of ignorance and prejudice?

Well, all my family and friends, Protestant or pagan, read novels. In fact, I never knew my father to be without a novel in his reading stack, whether it was by Clancy or King, Cussler or Grisham, Roberts or Le Carre. He was always off somewhere in a story, and these stories influenced his thinking. Historical novels by Kenneth Roberts, for example, shaped his views about the American Revolution, and novels by John Le Carre taught him about the world of espionage. Novels have likewise had a powerful influence on my own thinking—books such as *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Robe*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *The Stand*.

So why not utilize this genre to reach our loved ones for the Faith? This

is not, of course, a novel idea. Christian novels fill many racks at any large bookstore or library, but few of these are by contemporary Catholic authors. And if they *are* written by Catholics, they rarely have the goal of accomplishing what the Apostle John had in mind. There used to be novels with this goal, written by the likes of Newman and Benson, but today few publishers—Catholic, Protestant, or secular—are interested in taking the financial risk of publishing them (which is why *CHResources* had to publish my novel).

So I decided to write a novel myself. I must admit, though, that I really *didn't* want to write it. I've had many dreams throughout my life of what I want to accomplish (some pretty wild—just ask my wife!), but up until several years ago, writing a novel wasn't one of them. Negative experiences in high school and college English classes, reinforced by more than ten years of science and engineering education and experience, built in me a nearly insurmountable writer's block. But finally,

recognizing how integral novels have been in my own spiritual conversion and journey—and that a novel was probably the only way I could reach someone such as my father—I eventually mustered enough foolhardy determination to scale that wall.

It has taken over three years of writing, rewriting, critiquing, dialogue, rewriting, researching, and then rewriting, but with great excitement and relief I can report that the first edition of *How Firm a Foundation* (originally entitled *Be Thou My Vision*) is complete. Our hope is that lifelong Catholics and converts alike will enjoy the story enough to want to give the book away to Protestant friends and family.

As I'm sure you are well aware, one of the reasons few Protestants read Catholic books is that the books appear too Catholic. Therefore, *CHResources* has taken every precaution to use prudence as well as intrigue in our cover design and advertising. We have even initiated a bold marketing effort by promoting *How Firm a Foundation*

directly into the Protestant world with ads in publications such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Christianity Today*, along with a Protestant-friendly web site: www.hfaf.com. If the final product is in any way enjoyable and effective for its intended purpose, we have hundreds of you readers to thank.

Please let us know your thoughts about the novel and its design. We are moving quickly toward our second printing, in which we will incorporate a raft of textual corrections reported by the novel's first readers. We want *How Firm a Foundation* to serve as one more effective arrow in our quiver of outreach to our friends and family for Jesus Christ and His Church.

Sincerely in Christ,

Marcus C. Grodi
President, Coming Home Network
International

"How Firm A Foundation" - what some have said...

"One of my favorite things to do is to get engrossed in a good book. It's been a long time since I've found one that I could not put down. I read HFAF from cover to cover, immediately. I was hooked from the first page. I even took off from work today so I could finish it—it seemed more important.

The book came at the perfect time—which doesn't surprise either one of us, but I love it when that happens.

My wife and I joined the Episcopal Church a couple of years ago, but now I see that as the compromise that it is. We called it "Catholic lite." After reading Your book, I know that I need to just be obedient and yield to the authority of the Real Church."

T.H.
Missouri

"I just finished "How Firm a Foundation" last night. Although not a clergy convert, I am a convert from evangelicalism. Many thanks for this engaging novel which mirrored in so

many ways my own journey into the Church. The emotional response to a foreign culture, the philosophical questions, the difficulties in relationships and of course the key issue - authority. were all so accurately portrayed. Thank you, and congratulations on this fine book."

S.M.
Michigan

"I have just finished reading "How Firm a Foundation". As I told the story to my wife, she said, "Why are you reading that? You're already living it!" I know that it is only a matter of time until I have to resign my pulpit as well. Gotta work on getting my wife on board first! Thanks."

Rev. S.S.
Texas

"I just finished "How Firm a Foundation" by Marcus Grodi yesterday. I do a lot of reading but seldom have I had so much trouble putting down a book! Like Bud McFarlane's

"Pierced By a Sword" this book is a real page-turner and impossible to put down. Even more importantly, although classified as fiction, it gives rare insight into the struggles, both internal and external, moving from Protestantism to Catholicism. I'm not sure whether Marcus Grodi is planning other books, but it is going to be very difficult to top this one!"

P.M.
Maryland

"Thanks for the wonderful book...I think it will be very effective and irrefutable argument to our non-catholic brethren....Beautiful style and easy reading"

Fr. F.G.
Illinois

"The impression I got while reading the book, seriously was 'here we have the Dostoyevsky of Catholic Apologetics'!...But then, the ending!..."

A.A.
West Virginia



Congratulations and best wishes go out to Chris LaRose as he continues his life's journey with a new job as the Spiritual \ Bereavement Coordinator for a hospice near his home, a position that will utilize his gifts and talents well.

Chris was in charge of the email discussion group and helpers network for the Coming Home Network the last couple years. I know that many of you had contact with Chris on the email discussion group and have sent him your best wishes, (he was very involved in that forum) now we would like to add ours with thanks.

May God bless you and Best of Luck, Chris !

The Helpers Network has recently undergone some changes and we are looking forward to a successful year. This is the core of our apostolate, comprised of CHN member volunteers who provide support, answer questions, offer encouragement and prayer, and when necessary, ongoing contact with inquirers to the Catholic faith. Our Helpers are matched with people based on faith, life, and if required, geographical location.

One of the major changes is the switch on the web site from the discussion email group to the great new **Discussion Forum**. This tool enables the Network of Helpers to select topics that would interest them. The Forum gives Helpers the ability to develop a "private chat room" to use when in contact with someone on their journey.

We have new ideas to be incorporated into the Helpers Network such as a Helpers newsletter or a full section in the current monthly newsletter. The **Helpers Newsletter** would include information like a "Helper of the Month", current success stories, and progress that the Helpers are making. We are open to suggestions and looking for comments. We look forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions.

If you need help on your journey home, or would like to be a Helper;

Contact CHN by phone at
(740) 450-1175
or by email,
rob@chnetwork.org.

Come visit us at www.chnetwork.org

During 2002, our web site has grown to average over 300,000 hits per month. You can find support in the ways of online discussion boards, chat rooms, an online prayer list, job postings; as well as conversion stories, CHN news and events, and "Journey Home" program information. **Now making donations to the network is fast and easy online!** Come join this rapidly expanding community.

You will be glad you did!



***Upcoming guests on the
Journey Home Program
on EWTN, Mondays live at
8 p.m. EST***

***August 5
Dr. Richard Cross***

***August 12
Fr. Christopher Phillips***

***August 19
Dr. Paul Vitz***

***August 26
Larry Dimock***

***Can't catch the show
when it's broadcast live?***

***Tune in for re-airs: (EST)
Tuesdays 10 a.m.
Tuesdays 1 a.m.
Saturdays 11 p.m.***

**Or listen on the Internet at
www.ewtn.com.**

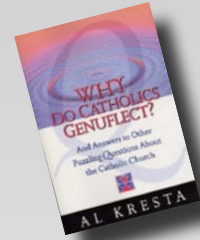
New CHN Resources !!

Why Do Catholics Genuflect?

by Al Kresta

soft cover - 208 pages

Why do Catholics Genuflect? answers in clear, concise terms many of the most common questions asked about the Catholic faith - queries such as: Why do Catholics make so much of Mary? Do Catholics really think the pope is infallible? Why do Catholics confess to a priest? Were Catholics ever forbidden to read the bible? Non-Catholics, new Catholics, and even "cradle Catholics" will find fresh insights to the Catholic faith.



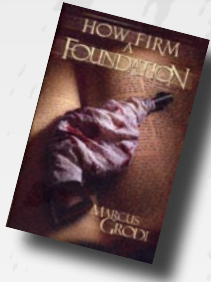
Item # 2599

Yours free with a donation of \$35 or more to The Coming Home Network

How Firm A Foundation

a novel by Marcus Grodi

soft cover- 464 pages



Stephen LaPointe is a minister who loves Jesus, loves to preach, and considers the Bible as the one sufficient, firm foundation for his life. He left a career to attend seminary because he wanted to devote his life to helping others experience a true conversion of heart. He knows that one day he will stand before God accountable for what he preaches, and it is in this conviction that his crisis begins, for how can he know for certain that what he preaches is eternally true? This crisis threatens his calling as a minister, his marriage, and even his life.

Item # 2582

Yours free with a donation of \$35 or more to The Coming Home Network

Or receive both free with a donation of \$50 or more to The Coming Home Network!

A JOURNEY HOME

By Jim Anderson

The Spirit of God first entered my life on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955, when, at the age of three months, I was baptized at the Union Furnace Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Reared in Ohio, in a nominally Evangelical United Brethren (later United Methodist) family, I grew up in a family in which neither parent attended church. I was one of those kids who would be dropped off for Sunday school. After Sunday school, a neighbor usually would bring me home. The greatest influence on my early faith development was my grandmother Anderson, one of the few churchgoers in the immediate family.

Since I grew up Protestant, Catholicism was not a factor in my life. We did have one neighbor family that was Catholic. The husband would brag about going to Confession before a party to confess any sins he might later commit while having a good time. "You never know," he said, "what the traffic might be like on the way home."

Our neighbor might have been joking, but how were we to know? We certainly knew he was telling the truth about the parties! I was repulsed by the (mistaken) conclusion that "pre-sin Confession" was an accepted Catholic practice.

These warped notions of Catholic doctrine were reinforced when I attended catechism classes in preparation for confirmation in the E. U. B. Church. The pastor's wife, while teaching us about different Christian denominations, gave the following definition: "Catholics are Christianized pagans who worship statues of Mary."

A basic exposure to the Holy Scriptures at Sunday school enabled my faith in Christ to begin to mature, but only to a point. I understood Jesus as my heavenly best Friend. What it really meant for Christ to be my Savior and Lord was obscure in my mind.

I wanted to be close to God, but I

didn't know how. Every time I would watch a Billy Graham crusade on TV, I would accept Jesus into my heart again. I knew that the journey began with accepting Jesus, but where was I to go from there?

In the fall of 1973 I enrolled as a freshman at Ohio University in Athens. While taking a course in Western Civilization that autumn, I found that an uneasy realization began to grow. I came to understand that the denomination of my childhood lacked any real historic roots.

Christian history, I learned, reached back almost two thousand years. My Methodist heritage was barely two hundred years old. In our Sunday school classes, all anyone ever talked about was what God had done in the first century. Sometime there was a comment about His actions in our own church in the last couple of centuries, but even that was rare.

Could it be that the Lord had taken a vacation for sixteen centuries? Of course, such a belief was never voiced by the people. It was just a living, working assumption that was never really questioned. But I was now questioning that assumption!

I didn't like the uneasy, precarious feelings these questions produced in me. I was uneasy because I could think of no answer that satisfactorily answered my inquiries. At this time, it was only a faint uncertainty, a crack in the wall of my Protestant world view. Yet little did I know that this uncomfortable feeling would be the beginning of eight years of growing questions and surprising answers that would finally lead me into the Catholic Church.

Sojourn Among the Lutherans

The next major step in my journey toward the Catholic Church was to be a sojourn among the Lutherans. My introduction to Lutheranism came through my best friend, Brian, who invited me to his church on Easter Sunday, 1974.

It was in that congregation that I first experienced the majesty of the Lord in liturgical worship.

Since up to that time I had only attended Methodist Sunday school, the beauty of liturgical worship came to me as a very pleasant and unexpected surprise. Sitting in the back pew, I began to wonder whether the pastor had failed to show up. The music had begun, the people were standing and singing, but there was no one up front in the sanctuary. *Where could he be?* I thought.

Then I began to hear singing coming from behind me. In process the crucifer, the junior choir, and the senior choir, followed by the pastor. *So that's where he was!* The Easter liturgy that followed awed me.

Sunday school had taught me that Jesus is my Savior and best Friend. This Lutheran liturgy was teaching me the beauty and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not only Savior and Friend, but he is also the Lord and King of the universe! The Lutheran liturgy began my training in what it means to *worship*.

I took instruction with Pastor Lueck from Luther's *Small Catechism*. I remember telling him that I wanted to belong to a church with a heritage and roots deep in history. I told him that my only other option was Catholicism, but because of their idolatry they could not even be considered. So the Lutherans were my only choice. I became a member of St. Matthew Lutheran Church (A.L.C.), in Logan, Ohio, on the first Sunday of Advent, December 1, 1974, which was also Communion Sunday.

Still More in Store

As a Lutheran I was learning much about God, Jesus, and the Bible, but the Lord had still more in store for me. Upon returning to Ohio University, in the autumn of 1975, I saw a course on "Basic Christianity" advertised in OU's student

newspaper. This course turned out to be a watershed event in my life.

I discovered that there existed on campus a dynamic ecumenical student faith community called “River of Life Ministries,” which accepted me with open arms. “River of Life” had risen from the ashes of a closed chapter of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The student leaders were an interesting ecumenical combination, made up of Methodists, a Messianic Jew, an Episcopalian, a Lutheran, and a Baptist.

Even though “River of Life” was sponsored by Central Avenue United Methodist Church, the group met in the basement of Christ Lutheran Church every Friday night for prayer, teaching, and fellowship. I figured that if they met in the Lutheran church they must not be too far off base. It was at “Friday Night Fellowship” that I was able to deepen my understanding of prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other Christians.

Having been branded a geek in high school, I had never experienced unconditional acceptance and love from people my own age. I was taken aback at being immediately welcomed as a brother in the Lord by the people of this fellowship group. I basked in the love Jesus was giving me through my newfound friends. All my lasting relationships from college have been with people who attended this fellowship.

Getting to Know Catholics

I must confess that I did have a problem with a few of the students who attended “Friday Night Fellowship.” Several of them were Catholics. How could that be? My misconceptions of Catholics had not altered greatly over the years.

Some of these Catholic students invited me to a prayer group that met at Christ the King Catholic Student Center. There, I was amazed to find a large number of Catholic Christians, and the only statue of Mary was kept in the back corner of the church. *Maybe they don't worship her after all*, I thought. At least these Catholics didn't. I soon learned that theirs was a faith based squarely upon Jesus Christ and the apostolic teaching of His Church, enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

At the end of fall quarter, I was

invited to attend what would be my first Catholic Mass. I was aghast! The liturgy was very familiar to me, but there was a major problem. I couldn't shake the Elizabethan English of the Lutheran liturgy of that time. The Mass was in contemporary English. I had thought I was the one who belonged to the reformed and up-to-date church. Now the Catholic Church seemed, to me, more reformed than my own Lutheran church!

Thanks to a well-stocked book table at “Friday Night Fellowship,” I began to be exposed to many Christian authors. The one to have the most lasting effect on my spiritual life was C. S. Lewis. His books were influential in the maturing process of my theology, giving it a solid basis in logic as well as Scripture.

My very first book by Lewis was *The Screwtape Letters*. I couldn't put it down. In fact I sat up all night, finishing it in one sitting!

Next on my reading list came *Mere Christianity*. I discovered that a reasoned defense of the Faith could be made with lucidity. Christianity was true, and truth could be demonstrated through logic. Yes, we need to have faith, but our leap of faith need not be a leap into the dark.

Lewis answered for me the controversy of faith and works. His analogy of faith and works acting in a person's life as two blades of a pair of scissors made sense to me. *The Great Divorce*, another work by C. S. Lewis, was instrumental in clarifying another Catholic teaching, purgatory. In this wonderful little book I discovered that the concept of purgatory made perfect sense in light of the just mercy of God.

Of course, Lewis' representation of purgatory in the book does not correspond to what the Catholic Church teaches on the subject. He warns that it is only a story, not systematic theology. Yet it still opened me to the possibility of the truth of the doctrine.

Meeting the Church Fathers

In the winter of 1977 a course was offered at the university on the history of early Christianity. Thanks to this course, I was introduced to the early Church Fathers. The class sparked a deep desire

to learn everything I could about early Church history and patristic theology.

Going to a local Christian bookstore, I asked if they had any copies of the Fathers. The clerk there didn't know what I was talking about. After some searching in publishers' catalogs, I found I could order copies of texts by the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Thanks to the early Christian writers of the first and second centuries, such as St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin Martyr, and St. Irenaeus, I learned that many of the doctrines I had always discounted as Catholic, and thus rejected, were in fact taught by the Church of that age.

For example, I had always, without question, accepted the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), which claims that the Bible is the only source of authority and revelation in the Church. When I read the early Fathers, however, I discovered they taught that the Church was based not on the Bible alone but on Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the apostolic teaching authority of the bishops (the Magisterium). I discovered statements such as this one written around A.D. 185 by St. Irenaeus, a student of St. Polycarp, who in turn was a pupil of the Apostle John as well as a friend of St. Ignatius:

The Church, having, received this preaching and this faith, although she is disseminated throughout 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 (Against Heresies 1, 10, 2).

The true knowledge is the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of bishops, by which successions the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere; and the complete Tradition of the Scriptures, which have come down to us by being guarded against falsification (Against Heresies 4, 33, 8).

I also discovered that nowhere does the Bible teach that the Scriptures

are the sole rule of faith for the Christian. I deduced that if such a teaching wasn't in the Bible, and the Church Fathers taught otherwise, then *sola scriptura* must be a tradition of man and not a doctrine of God.

The Need for Apostolic Authority

As a Lutheran, I had been taught that the priesthood of all believers negated any need for a ministerial priesthood. But I found that, while not denying St. Peter's teaching that all Christians are members of a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), the Fathers also insisted on the necessity of apostolic authority in the Church.

For example, St. Clement, the third bishop of Rome, wrote to the Corinthian church about A.D. 80: "Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (1 Clement 44:1-2). Clement was teaching the doctrine of apostolic succession!

St. Ignatius also writes on this subject:

You must follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery [that is, the council of priests] as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (Smyrmeans 8:1-2).

Again, St. Irenaeus writes:

It is possible, then, for every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our own times. ... But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the Churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through

self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its superior origin, all Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition (Against Heresies 3, 3, 1-2).

The Eucharist

Concerning the Eucharist, St. Ignatius' letter to the church in Smyrna records: "They [the heretics] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, Flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, raised up again" (Smyrmeans 7:1). This letter, written in the summer of A.D. 107, was penned by a man who had been ordained by St. Peter and was an acquaintance and student of St. John. And it teaches that the Eucharist *is* the Body and Blood of Christ—not that it merely symbolizes Him (as the Methodists teach) or contains Him (as the Lutherans teach).

St. Justin Martyr, writing about A.D. 150, confirms this reality: "For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these, but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist, by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnate Jesus" (First Apology 66).

How could these early Fathers have written such things? These writings were so very Catholic! After all, the Protestant faith was supposed to be a restoration of the pure, uncorrupted Christianity of the first centuries.

But I could not ignore the fact that Jesus had promised to send the Holy

Spirit to His Church and to protect it: "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (John 14:26). "When He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth" (John 16:13). "I will build My Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

I figured, then, that I was forced to one of two conclusions: On the one hand, I could conclude that Jesus didn't or couldn't live up to His promises and that the Church was corrupted almost immediately after the last Apostle died. On the other hand, I could conclude that the Catholic teaching I was discovering, in the writings of the Fathers, was a valid development of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit exactly as Jesus had promised. If these teachings were true, they demanded my acceptance in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

I was discovering, then, that if the Protestant position is true, Jesus must have failed to fulfill His promises. An impossibility!

Loss of Faith Among Protestant Leaders

During the time I was coming to terms with the Church Fathers, I was also becoming increasingly alarmed at an accelerated abandonment of Christian truth by Protestant leaders I knew. The local Episcopal priest denied both Christ's deity and resurrection. I heard a sermon by a philosophy professor in my Lutheran parish who declared that belief in the resurrection is only pious fire insurance. He stated that the concept of the resurrection was an accretion from the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, adopted by the Jews during the Babylonian captivity. It is not, he insisted, an essential element of the Christian faith. During the sermon the pastor sat beaming his approval.

My friend John, who was attending a Methodist seminary at that time, had encountered a similar lack of faith in church leaders he knew. He complained to me that of his theology professors, only a third accepted the deity of Christ, only a quarter believed in His bodily resurrection, and only one, a Catholic priest, subscribed

to Jesus' virgin birth.

I felt extremely anxious being under the authority of a Protestant bishop who didn't believe. Although I knew there were many faithful Protestants in the pews, I found that their leaders were rapidly abandoning Christianity.

In the Catholic Church, however, I saw the hierarchy holding firm to the truth of the faith of Christ and the Apostles. I was painfully aware, of course, that there are many flaky Catholics who hold to a lot of off-the-wall ideas. But I knew that if I became a Catholic, I would be submitting to the authority of the Pope and bishops, whom I saw as powerfully faithful—not to the trendy priests, nuns, and laity.

While reading *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, the official documents of the Catholic-Lutheran ecumenical dialogues, I became even more disenchanted with Lutheranism. I kept finding myself on the Catholic side in the conversations. Often the Lutherans would say that they agreed with the Catholic teaching but were uncomfortable with the terminology because they believed it had been misused five hundred years ago. All in all, I was having increasing discomfort in remaining a Lutheran.

New Convictions Developing

By December 8, 1978, my convictions had developed to the point that I could write in my journal:

In the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist Christ, true God and true man, is present wholly and entirely, in His Body and Blood, under the signs of bread and wine. The presence of Christ does not come about through the faith of the believers, nor through human power, but the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word. ... The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. In it the Church makes its sacrifice of praise to the Father. At the Eucharist Christ is re-presented to His Church and the act of the Cross is brought to the present. ...

Since the Roman Catholic Church has the longest history, with its roots in the Apostles, and all other Christian denominations have their final origin in it, total unity will not come until all are in full communion with it. Those who do not work for unity, or work against it, have not lost their salvation, but are contrary

to the Father's will and are rebellious and undisciplined sons, whom He will chastise.

Clearly, the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist had by this time become my own.

My last doctrinal difficulty to be overcome was Mary. I had no problem accepting her perpetual virginity; I could see how that truth could be deduced from the Gospels. Nor did I have any problem with asking her to pray for us. My problem was centered on the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. I just couldn't understand the need for these doctrines.

Then it dawned on me: I was being inconsistent. Long before, I had come to believe that the Holy Spirit had given the Church the gift of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. I accepted the infallibility of the teaching authority of the Pope. If I accepted the Church's authority, I also must trust God's guidance in all that she teaches. St. Augustine said, "First comes faith and then understanding." So I submitted my prideful intellect and, in time, God did grant me the gift of understanding.

In July of 1979 I was privileged to spend a month in Europe. I was overjoyed at the possibility of visiting St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the church of the newly elected Pope John Paul II, the white knight of orthodoxy. When I knelt to pray in the Blessed Sacrament chapel I felt that this was home. I was in the presence of my Lord in the Church of His vicar on earth! I belonged here.

But why did I remain outside my Father's house? I considered myself Catholic, but I had not yet built up the courage actually to convert because I knew my family would be scandalized. I also was hesitant to approach a priest to tell him I wanted to become a Catholic. The priests I had met had an extremely distant aura about them. They seemed unapproachable to me. So I put off what I knew I had to do if I was to be faithful to the will of God for my life.

Home at Last

I entered Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio, in the fall of 1980. My reason for picking Ashland

Seminary was that, though it was run by an evangelical Anabaptist denomination, the Brethren Church, it was actually the most ecumenical seminary in Ohio. Over fifty-five denominations were represented in the student body, every group from Quakers to Greek Orthodox. I was interested in being involved in ecumenical dialogue to further Church unity. The Christian cross-section at Ashland would be good preparation for me.

At seminary I at last came to the conclusion that I had no choice but to join the Catholic Church. Looking at my many and varied fellow students, I realized that Protestantism was like so many boats adrift on the sea without oars or rudders, each claiming theirs to be the only vessel on the proper course.

When I returned to Athens for the summer, I finally told my Catholic friends Andy and Karen that I had to talk to the priest about joining the Church. I met with the pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church during June and July. The big day finally came on July 25, 1981, the Feast of St. James. I made my profession of faith in Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church, and then I received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Immediately after my Confirmation, I received the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of my Lord Jesus Christ for the very first time as a full member of His Mystical Body, the Catholic Church.

I had arrived home in the Church, but the journey of grace continued. The Lord Jesus had more surprises in store. I continued my studies in Church history at Ashland Seminary. During my senior year I met Lynn, a Baptist girl from West Virginia, who would soon be my lovely wife. Within a year she would become the second Protestant student to become Catholic while attending Ashland Theological Seminary ... but that's another story.

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TIME TO AWAKEN AND PRAY- AND LEARN!

The Reverend Ray Ryland, Ph.D., J.D.

For months the media has bombarded us with news of criminal sexual assaults by some of our clergy, both priests and bishops. Not only that, we have learned that many of our bishops, tragically mistaken in their motives, have ignored or even tried to conceal these crimes.

This scandal of sexual molestation is not limited to the Catholic Church. It runs throughout our culture: in Christian denominations, in synagogues, in public schools, in families, in the populace in general. But our primary concern here is the problem within the Catholic Church.

Some, perhaps many, of the allegations about certain clergy may be false. After all, the word is out: The Catholic Church has already paid countless millions of dollars to alleged victims of these crimes. Yes, and she is expected to continue to pay out vast sums. The temptation for some persons to lie for the sake of great financial gain must be very strong. The ambulance-chasers are out in full force, greedy lawyers looking for people who will claim they have been victimized by a Catholic priest and will sue for huge payments in damages.

Nevertheless, even if only *one* allegation is true, it is a moral tragedy for the Church.

The Many Dimensions of the Crisis

This is the most serious crisis the Church has ever faced in this country. Keep in mind the chief dimensions of the crisis. First, there are the victims of sexual abuse who have suffered incalculable harm. The media falsify the reports of these crimes by always referring to them as crimes of “pedophilia,” crimes against children. That’s because the media always favor the militant homosexual movement. They refuse to state the important fact that almost all these alleged crimes are homosexual assaults on teenaged males.

Next, we have the clergy, priests, and bishops who by their crimes have betrayed their vows to God and the trust reposed in them by their people. We have the grievously mistaken efforts of many of our bishops to deal with molesting clergy by shifting them from post to post, or relying on dubious therapies for molesters.

Then, we have the doctrinal and moral corruption in many of our seminaries. Michael Rose’s book *Goodbye, Good Men* (Regnery, 2002) has painfully documented this fact. Every Catholic should read the book.

Finally—and this is my basic concern now—we have rebellion against the Church’s teaching, especially against her teaching about sexual morality. The rebellion has been and is being carried on even now by unfaithful theologians, teachers, yes, and even some bishops. This rebellion goes by the dignified name of “dissent.” It is cafeteria-type Catholicism: Take what you like of the Church’s teaching, ignore all the rest. It is *not* Catholic in any proper sense of the word.

This rebellion is the root cause of the loss of faith underlying these grievous acts that have brought shame to the Church.

Chief Tactics of the Rebellion

Take a look at the chief tactics of this rebellion, so you can be on guard against being caught up in it.

First, “raising questions.” Dissenters ordinarily try to avoid explicitly denying the Church’s teaching. Instead, in a deceitful manner they insist they are only “raising questions” about the Church’s doctrines. If a teaching is true, why raise questions about it? Accept it! Their purpose is to insinuate into people’s minds the thought that a given doctrine *might not* be true.

Second, calls for “dialogue.” The rebels repeatedly call for “dialogue” about some of the Church’s teaching (mostly with regard to sexual morality). They

know what the doctrines are. When the teaching is clear, what is there to “dialogue” about? These calls are simply another effort to sow seeds of doubt in Catholics’ minds about the truth the Church proclaims. Some dissenters even seem to cherish the illusion that by “dialogue” they can pressure the Magisterium into *changing* certain doctrines.

Third, demands for “pluralism.” Catholic theology has always been pluralistic in that it embraces many different approaches to the one faith, all approaches being complementary. When dissenters appeal to “pluralism” to justify their rebellion against the Church’s teaching, however, they redefine the term “pluralism.” What they demand is tolerating many diverse, even contradictory, opinions about Catholic faith as being equally valid. This is pure relativism.

Fourth, appeals to “conscience.” Dissenters almost unanimously urge people to “follow their own consciences” if those people disagree with what the Church teaches. These advocates of rebellion totally falsify the very nature of conscience. They pretend that conscience is a faculty for determining what is true about the Faith. Not so!

Instead, conscience is a faculty for making moral decisions *in the light of truth already received*. Consciences must be formed—that is to say, given bases from which they can function—in the light of the truth that the Church teaches. There can *never* be true conflict between a person’s conscience and the Church’s teaching. They operate on totally different levels of the mind.

Fifth, the “spectrum virus.” This is my term, not theirs. For the rebels it is the key tactic for infecting Catholic thinking with error. (Even if a dissenter were consciously sincere, that would not lessen the seriousness of his error.)

From time to time in our e-mail-box come warnings that some sociopath has unleashed a new virus on the Inter-

net. These software viruses can do great harm if allowed into our computers. The “spectrum virus” is far more dangerous, however, because it can distort our understanding of the Faith and obligations under the Faith.

Take the word “spectrum” itself. In politics and economics, to take two clear examples, there exist a wide range of opinions regarding solutions to our society’s problems. We speak of that range as going from “conservative” to “liberal.” In our democracy, everyone has a right to express his opinion and be included somewhere on the political or economic spectrum. And why a spectrum of opinions? Because in these areas there are *no final answers*.

Now look at the “spectrum virus.”

To justify their rejection of some or much Catholic doctrine, dissenters try to impose on Catholic theology the spectrum model we have just described. Ignoring the Magisterium (or at best paying it lip service), the rebellious ones insist there must be a wide spectrum of opinions about Catholicism. Within their spectrum there will be many disagreements and even contradictions. But—and this is essential to the dissenters’ strategy—they insist that anyone who *claims* to be “Catholic” has a right to have his opinions included on that spectrum. They seldom if ever exclude even the most outrageous opinions about what Catholicism is.

The symptom of the “spectrum virus” is the use of labels. Dissenters insist, and the secular media follow their lead blindly, on referring to “conservative” or “ultra-conservative” or “mainstream” or (on occasions) “liberal” Catholics. Even otherwise faithful Catholics often fall into the habit of using labels such as these. Each time they do, they unwittingly play the dissenters’ game.

The “spectrum” theory of the rebels is false. Unlike the realms of politics or economics, the Catholic Church has final answers to questions regarding what God has revealed in Jesus Christ. There is in fact *no such thing* as a “liberal” Catholic or a “conservative” Catholic. If one holds faithfully to what the Church teaches, he is simply “Catholic.” Period! If one rejects *even one* of the Church’s teachings, he is not an authentic Catholic.

Ad Tuendam Fidem

Strong language? Yes. And it is not simply my opinion. It is the teaching of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, approved by the Holy Father. In 1998, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic letter entitled *Ad Tuendam Fidem*. In a commentary on the letter (section 6), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, speaking for the Congregation, declared: “Whoever denies ... a truth of Catholic doctrine ... would therefore *no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church*” (emphasis in the original English translation).

Cardinal Ratzinger did not explain the reason for his statement, but the reason is not hard to discern. Anyone who rejects even one of the Church’s doctrines simultaneously makes four other grave mistakes.

One, he rejects the Church’s claim that her doctrinal authority is divinely appointed. Obviously, if she is wrong in one instance, that claim cannot be maintained.

Two, he makes his own judgment the final authority in matters of the Faith.

Three, he takes up a Protestant stance toward everything else the Church teaches. Any doctrines he does accept he accepts purely on the basis of his own authority.

Four, he starts down a very slippery slope. Once he denies one doctrine, he will eventually deny another and then another. This process can be illustrated from the careers of many well-known rebels against the Church’s authority.

That person, says Cardinal Ratzinger, is no longer in full communion with the Catholic Church.

The Consequences of Dissent

So much for the tactics of dissent. Now see what dissent has done.

Though its roots go farther back, dissent shifted into high gear in 1968. That was the year Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae vitae*, reaffirmed the Church’s condemnation of any use of artificial contraception. On the day the encyclical was released, several dozen prominent theologians openly rebelled against the Church. Led by Fr. Charles Curran, then

of Catholic University, they held a press conference in Washington, D.C. Not surprisingly, every major television network gave them full coverage.

Through their spokesman, the theologians announced to the world that Catholics need not pay attention to the Church’s condemnation of artificial contraception. Catholics, they declared, are free to make up their own minds in this matter. Though the rebels did not so state, they clearly implied that Catholics are also free to make up their own minds on *other* matters of sexual morality and of doctrine.

The ranks of the rebellion swelled rapidly. I regret to state that our bishops stood by and watched all this, silently. So far as we know, only one bishop in this country disciplined some of his priests who publicly dissented from *Humanae vitae*. And never since 1968 have our bishops faced head on the forces of dissent to stop its ravages.

We all know, and many have suffered from, the ravages of the dissent that has distorted the Catholic faith. The divorce rate and the abortion rate are almost as high among Catholics as among the rest of the population. Our “Catholic” colleges and universities, our secondary schools, even our elementary schools, are riddled with dissent.

Many of our chanceries are controlled by priests and religious who do *not* faithfully uphold the Church’s teaching. Our Catholic people have been confused and misled by unfaithful teachers. Many people are uncertain as to what they should believe and what they should do. Many religious orders have been devastated by dissent and are rapidly disappearing.

None can deny there has been a moral breakdown among our Catholic people, including the clergy. As George Sim Johnson has written recently, “In the wake of the dissent, many of the clergy began to issue permission slips to the laity for all sorts of sexual behavior. So why not give one to themselves?” (*Crisis*, June 2002, 17). And they did.

Read about it in the papers. Read about the widespread scandals caused by the loss of faith. That loss of faith was largely brought on by the heretical opinions disseminated by dissenters.

Hope for Renewal

But there is a positive side, a far greater side, to all this.

News of these crimes and their covers-up had to be exposed. So long as they remained hidden, they were a raging cancer eating at the human side of the Church. Now our bishops have been startled into action by mountains of adverse publicity. Some of our bishops are beginning to see the true dimensions of this crisis and its root causes. More and more bishops' eyes will be opened and bishops' wills will be galvanized into action.

Out of all this suffering God will bring deep renewal to his Church. But you and I must pray as never before. We must pray for the healing of all who have suffered at the hands of molesting clergy. We must pray for our bishops, that they will guard the purity of the faith. We must pray for our priests, that they will be diligent in prayer and grow in holiness and devotion to our blessed Lord and to proclaiming His truth.

We must pray for our seminaries, that they may be cleansed and made fit centers for training holy priests. We must pray for those who have betrayed their vows to God and inflicted untold harm on others, that they will repent so they can be forgiven. We must pray for the dissenters, that they will cast aside their errors and return to full communion in the Church.

We must also pray for ourselves, to grow in holiness. Who of us has been perfectly faithful in living and witnessing to the Gospel?

Catholics must continually work at deepening their knowledge of the Faith. This is how we can learn to detect error and correct it, or failing that, to reject it. How many of us have a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in our homes? How many of us regularly study that catechism? Nearly every home has newspapers and magazines. Do we subscribe to journals, magazines, and newspapers that faithfully present the Church's teaching?

With regard to the Faith, don't be overawed by theologians. Remember that a theologian has no more access to revealed truth than does every other Catholic. When it comes to knowing what the Church teaches, the most learned

theologian has no real advantage over any well-informed layman.

Never forget: No human weakness can change the Church's identity. Till the end of time she will remain the Bride of Christ.

In her two thousand years the Church of Jesus Christ has undergone untold suffering, as did her divine Founder. She continues to suffer, as He did, because of persecution from without and treachery and betrayal from within. Yet since her beginning, in a world of moral and spiritual darkness, the Church has always been and always will be an unfailing beacon, an inextinguishable beacon, of heavenly light.

This world could go on for ten million more years; who knows? But when the end does come, when the Son of Man appears like lightning flashing across the sky from East to West so that no one may miss His coming, the light of the Roman Catholic Church will still be burning brightly.

She'll still be governed by the same divinely appointed hierarchy.

She'll still be proclaiming the same faith.

She'll still be offering the same means of grace.

How do we know? Because Jesus Christ Himself said so!

Thanks be to God!

Fr. Ray Ryland



Fr. Ray Ryland
Chaplain

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Thank You

Attention Members!

If you have joined the Church please notify us. We would like to have this information to keep up our records. Call us at (740) 450-1175. or e-mail jim@chnetwork.org. Thank you.

Do you have a Job Opening?

Please remember our members when you have a job opening. Often times clergy converts are looking for positions within the church as well as the private sector. Please email job openings to rob@chnetwork.org so we can post them on our website.

Or you can post them yourself on our CHN forum, just visit www.chnetwork.org for more information.

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