



August 2013 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



From Calvin to Catholicism

By Brian Besong

My father was raised a Roman Catholic but attended Houston Baptist University on a scholarship; my mother was raised in a Protestant household and baptized as a Protestant in her youth. She also attended Houston Baptist, where she met my father. Prior to the wedding, my mother “converted” to Catholicism, but her conversion was superficial at best. The priest who conducted her initiation classes swept her serious reservations about points of the Catholic Faith aside and hastened her toward Confirmation. She was confirmed, though she was never told to make a first Confession. Her weak adoption of Catholicism was short-lived and by the time I was born, both of my parents had abandoned Catholicism and had begun attending a Disciples of Christ church. This was where my mother’s family went to church and it bore a liturgical style similar enough to the Catholic Mass for my father not to feel too strong a discomfort in making the switch. The main thing I remember about this church concerned my desire to be baptized. Although I believed what was told to me about Jesus and knew that people who believed those things were supposed to be baptized, the church refused to allow me to be baptized because they thought I was not yet old enough to make a more serious act of faith.

Not long after, my parents switched to a Baptist mega-church in Houston. Despite my desire to be baptized at the Disciples of Christ church,

I did not immediately respond to the altar calls at the Baptist church. I was eight when I did respond, spontaneously leaving the pew and my parents. I prayed the “sinner’s prayer” and was baptized. It was a long drive to this Baptist church, so my parents ended up joining a Baptist church closer to home. As I got a little older, I began to attend a youth group at an Evangelical Presbyterian church that some friends attended. I became very active, going on two mission trips to Mexico. When I was old enough, I also began attending the Baptist church’s youth services (switching sporadically between the two). Both groups were similarly structured. They had rock bands that played “praise and worship” music, in addition to sermons. The main distinction was that the Baptist church’s youth services were incredibly popular, being attended by a very large part of the “in” crowd from the local high schools. The band was very good, and the youth pastor was adept at putting on quite a show, including disco-balls, fog-machines, etc. Wednesday night services were often accompanied by altar calls and I remember seeing large crowds of people responding — sometimes more than once.

Theological depth

It seemed to me that the depth of faith being generated by these youth services was, at the very least, intellectually shallow. *“Journeys Home” is continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

The Baptist church was particularly devoid of much concrete theological content except for preaching the necessity of faith and the general fittingness to be a good person in gratitude for salvation. The Presbyterian church provided more theological depth; it was in a debate with my youth pastor during a mission trip that I was first introduced to Calvinism, of which I became a zealous convert.

Later, the youth minister at the Baptist church decided his calling was to be an adult pastor and the youth group, which had been drawing crowds upwards of three to four thousand people during the week, completely collapsed upon his departure. I found this experience particularly informative and began to resent the forms of Protestantism that smacked to me of religious “entertainment.” I turned more completely to the intellectual side of Protestantism and began reading many theology books. I particularly enjoyed Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, A.W. Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God*, and the works of Calvinist apologist Cornelius Van Til.

When I was old enough to drive, I stopped attending Sunday services at the Baptist church to which my parents still belonged and began attending a Presbyterian church (Presbyterian Church of America). As a high school graduation gift, I was given the complete works of Cornelius Van Til and John Calvin. I was so deeply immersed in Calvinism, that it came as no surprise that when choosing a college, I wanted something very religious and very Calvinist. My choice in 2001 was a well-known, conservative, and strongly Calvinistic college.

Sin

When one is convinced, as I was at this time, that one’s salvation is an assured thing as long as one “has faith,” then it is easy to rationalize one’s own particular sins as a necessary

and uninteresting consequence of the human condition that should be generally avoided, but not with any urgency. It was not as though, I had thought, my salvation depended upon avoiding sin. It rested instead upon the genuineness of my faith and the sincerity with which I adhered to my Protestant faith. Though the false and dangerous part of this theology did not sink in while I was under my parents’ supervision, I became much more rebellious in college. I began to go to parties often. This seems like a benign part of college life to many, but this was a very bad and dangerous phase of my life that, as sin often does, made me very miserable and blinded me to the specific cause or nature of my suffering.

My grades suffered. Though I had an intellectual bent in high school, I was never really disciplined in my studying. Consequently, I was not a particularly good student at college. I chose philosophy as my major, because when I arrived I was told that the philosophy department was excellent. I had initially planned to study philosophy and theology, but in my first semester I took a theology class with the chair of the theology department, who was uninterested in taking seriously the tenets of the Reformation that I had gone there to study, and also did not seem particularly keen to defend much of anything that I took to comprise Christian orthodoxy.

While in college, I began occasionally to attend an Associate Reformed Presbyterian church, toward which I had strong intellectual affinities. Here my Calvinism became even more virulent, adopting also the liturgical austerity of the early post-Reformation period. Thus, I was persuaded on the importance of not making or using any religious images, not singing any hymn not found in the Bible (i.e. using only the Psalms), and not accompanying these songs with any musical instruments. To do otherwise, I thought, was to offer a “strange fire”

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

August 5

Orestes Brownson (as performed by Kevin O’Brien)*
19th century convert

August 12

Richard Thompson*
Former Protestant

August 19

The Journey Home International

August 26

Cheryl Dickow*
Revert

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

to God since He never commanded them, and therefore they were deeply wrong (see Leviticus 10:1-3). At a certain point, I had expressed interest to an elder in joining the Associate Reformed Presbyterian church, but nothing came of it.

My public acts of piety, such as going to church, soon after dwindled to almost non-existence. The friends with whom I had originally began attending the Presbyterian church became far more interested in “high church” liturgical styles and had stopped attending the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. During my first year, I did not have a vehicle on campus, so I stopped attending church entirely, rather than attend where my friends wanted to go.

If I were to characterize the religiosity of this period of my life, it could be easily summarized as “bifurcated,” or going in different directions. Intellectually, I had a strong “faith” in the tenets of Protestantism, particularly as they were expressed in the Calvinist tradition. Yet Calvinism excused my sin as something God Himself did not see, since, so I believed, the righteousness of Christ had been imputed to me because of my genuine faith, covering over my sins so that He was blind to them, at least insofar as my salvation was concerned. My conscience naturally reproved the guilt of my actions, and yet I found in Reformation theology a rationalization of the guilt that prevented any serious and genuine reformation of my life. Protestants often hold this theological explanation of the unimportance of sin, so I think some degree of bifurcation is common. However, perhaps because I was more firmly convinced of the truth of this theological system than many other Protestants, I took God’s purported blindness to my sin seriously and became an increasingly worse person. The low point during this period was my being arrested for drunk driving as a sophomore. This event helped me take things quite a bit more seriously. In addition, in my junior year, I was quite fortunate to meet Amy, the woman that I would marry; she gave me far more stability.

An introduction to “a dying relic of European culture”

I graduated from college in 2005 and had been admitted into a philosophy Ph.D. program, which I began right after graduation. My wife, Amy, was a Catholic and I married her in the Catholic Church as a concession to her and her family. It didn’t matter much to me where we were married, though I thought of Catholicism with as much religious deference as I had toward lederhosen. To me, it did not seem to be a religion at all, but a dying relic of European culture.

Amy was raised as a cultural Catholic, which more firmly cemented this impression about Catholicism in my mind. Her mother was a convert to the Faith who, like my mother, was not given much by way of introduction and training. My wife’s father affectionately called himself a “C & E-er” (a

Christmas and Easter Mass attendee only). During our first year of marriage, we both tried out each other’s church preference; neither of us liked the other’s church, so our resolution was to sleep in on Sundays.

A year or so passed, and we both felt discomfort in never going to church. During this time, Amy also wanted to discover more about her Faith, so we bought the book *Catholicism for Dummies*. She never really looked at it, but I was a reader, so I had most of the book read soon after we bought it. I came across something I had never really seen before: a distinction in sins, between those serious sins because of which one could be damned (i.e. “mortal” sins) and less serious sins (i.e. “venial” sins). I was floored to find that using artificial contraception and skipping Mass on Sunday without a serious reason were mortal sins. I showed Amy this after I read about it. She said she might have vague memories, if anything, of something called “mortal sin” — but she didn’t know what that meant or which sins were considered mortal.

After learning more about what the Catholic Church considers grounds for mortal sins and though I was definitely no Catholic, I did not want her to get into any sort of spiritual trouble, so we resolved to stop using contraception and start going to Mass on Sundays. We learned about Natural Family Planning and opted for that, which was a Godsend in more ways than one, since my wife had been having some health problems that completely went away after discontinuing hormonal contraceptives. I also began accompanying her to Mass, but I had serious reservations about the Catholic Faith — particularly about Marian doctrine — and so was resolved not to convert.

We began to talk a little about the Catholic Faith at this point, insofar as I would explain to Amy my objections to claims, such as the perpetual virginity of Mary or Mary’s sinlessness. Amy knew little about Catholicism and expressed a wish that I could find someone else to talk to about why Catholics believe what they do and who could better answer my objections. We did not find anyone. However, I had a book about the early Church that I had always intended to read, and thought that it might shed some light on why the Catholic Faith developed to hold the things that it did. I was again floored by what I read.

Challenging Reformation theology

In particular, as a Protestant, I had always had vague notions that the earliest Christians were essentially the same as Protestants today in theology and style of worship. The Re-“formation” was, I thought, all about re-“forming” Christianity so that it got back to the original Christianity bequeathed to us by Christ, removing from it all the superstitious and silly doctrines and practice imposed upon it in the Middle Ages by the Catholic Church

“Journeys Home” is continued on page 4 ➤

...Journeys Home Continued...

I soon found that these vague notions I held about the early Church could not have been more erroneous.

As I read these detailed summaries of the beliefs of the Fathers of the Church, I was startled in particular to find in them all the essential elements of contemporary Catholicism in embryonic form. Moreover, this mustard seed of the Catholic Church did not become visible a couple hundred years after Christ, but was present in the earliest recorded Christian writings, some predating or contemporaneous with what we have good reason to believe was the time that the books of the Bible were still being written! In brief, the earliest Church was the *Catholic* Church.

The area of doctrine that struck me most forcefully was the insistence of the early Fathers (particularly St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp, and even into the period of the apologists Tertullian and St. Irenaeus) on obedience in matters of faith and doctrine to the bishops and the centrality of Tradition (faithfully transmitted to us by the bishops) in the codification of Christian doctrine. Tertullian and Irenaeus were particularly forceful to me in showing that *sola Scriptura* (as it is understood and firmly believed by central figures in the Protestant Reformation) was a notion foreign to early Christians. Once I saw this in the Fathers, I was shocked to find strong support of it in Scripture.

I was even surprised to find early insistence by some Fathers upon Peter's primacy as the Prince of the Apostles and the necessary submission to his successor as the chief steward of the authentic Faith. From this source, I thought, all other Catholic doctrines necessarily derive. For even if we saw no other Catholic doctrine present in the early period, save the necessity of believing the faith transmitted by the Pope, that would be sufficient. It is obvious that the popes have preached the Catholic Faith, and thus the Faith the early Christians would have today is authentically found only in the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, we find evidence for a broad range of uniquely Catholic beliefs and practices in the early Church, not just the doctrines involving Tradition and submission to the hierarchy, but my area of interest in philosophy was (and is) epistemology — that is, a study of what we know and how we know it — and seeing this point strongly pushed me toward Catholicism.

Prior to the actual decision to convert, I wanted to make sure I was not being hasty. I began reviewing many of my old theological sources to see if I had forgotten about central objections to Catholicism that I had not been particularly interested in during my youth. For instance, I read a lot of Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trying to find some argument against the Catholic Church he was leaving. I also reviewed the works of Van Til, whose apologetic method was supposed to prove the Calvinist form of Christianity distinctly.

Both left me very unimpressed. I turned to two Protestant apologetics websites that I had found useful in my youth and, looking over their arguments against Catholicism, I found the websites' arguments to be easily responded to in light of the research I had done into Catholicism.

Beyond the intellect

I was left without any mental objection to the Catholic Faith, but I was still a little wary. One of my old philosophy friends recommended I read *Rome Sweet Home* (or other books by Scott Hahn and similar convert authors) and, though not Catholic, he told me that praying the rosary was a powerful experience. As, perhaps, an intellectual exercise (at least at first), I did begin to pray the rosary — sometimes several times in a row, finding it deeply compelling. I also found myself more and more absorbed by the Mass. It was something strange and foreign to me, but there was also something to it that seemed solemnly important. I had been put off when attending Protestant churches sporting “high” liturgies while I was at college. Yet, there was something unique in the Mass that I could not describe, but that I believed I could sense. I am not a sentimentalist by any fashion, but I did feel a sort of magnetic attraction to the rosary and Mass.

It should be no surprise to say that I began RCIA soon after. I was confirmed in the Catholic Church in 2008. During this process, Amy also experienced a more authentic conversion to the Catholic Faith and was confirmed during the process (not having been confirmed as a youth).

The fruits of conversion

Several interesting things have happened since I converted. The first was that I found out from my Aunt Mary (my father's sister) that she and her family had been praying for a long time that I would convert to Catholicism. (I knew nothing of this.) They had reasoned that the only way that my dad would return to the Faith of his youth would be through *my* conversion and the subsequent arguments that I would inevitably have with him about Catholic truths.

During my journey, these arguments did indeed occur. As I had been reading and being drawn to the Church, I had concurrently described my discoveries to my parents, who were politely “interested” in what I had to say, though disagreed with it. My father was more easily persuaded, recalling debates that he had with Baptists in college while he was still Catholic. My mother, however, was firmly opposed. A year or so went by, during which it was common (and increasingly so) for us to talk about Catholicism and the arguments for or against it. At a certain point, both my parents were intellectually convinced (my mother being particularly helped in this by the book *Rome Sweet Home*),

“Journeys Home” is continued on page 5 ►

Journeys in Germany

By Jim Anderson



Living in Fulda, Germany, last year, afforded me many wonderful opportunities. The greatest of these was meeting and making friends with brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus, both Catholic and Protestant. When I first arrived in Fulda, I wanted to become involved with the local Catholic community. Through a mutual acquaintance I soon met two wonderful people, Fr. Winfried Abel and Sr. Maria Veronika, his housekeeper, cook, and parish catechist. Fr. Abel is the pastor of St. Andrew's Church (St. Andreaskirche), which was built in 1023, in Neuenberg, a suburb of Fulda. Fr. Abel has a recording studio in his parish for his teaching ministry and has appeared many times on EWTN (German language). I soon became a regular Wednesday and Sunday lunch guest, enjoying their hospitality and Sr. Maria Veronika's exquisite German cooking.

In April, Fr. Abel introduced me to another of his guests, Ingo Heinrich, the pastor of the Baptist congregation in Fulda. Ingo had been meeting with Fr. Abel



Ingo, Jim, Fr. Abel, & Sister Maria Veronika

regularly for three years and attending a weekly Bible study hosted by him for about a year. Before coming to Fulda he had been a Pentecostal pastor for about twenty years and had been searching for the fullness of God's truth for many years. Ingo and I quickly became very good friends. Fortunately for me, his English is much better than my German. This enabled us to have many, many long discussions about our common love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Ingo had many questions about the teaching of the Catholic Church. Some of his special concerns were the Eucharist and the teaching of the first Christians, especially the Apostolic Fathers and early Church Fathers. After meeting on a regular basis for a couple of months, Ingo asked if I knew of any native



Fr. Wolf & Bonifatiuskloster

German speakers who were knowledgeable in the Catholic Faith and would be willing to assist him in his steadily growing interest in the Catholic Faith. Ingo was still meeting with Fr. Abel, but he wished to also speak with someone else.

It just so happened that I knew Fr. Martin Wolf, the superior of the Cloister of St. Boniface (Bonifatiuskloster) in Hünfeld, a town about nine miles north of Fulda, run by the Oblates of the Immaculate Virgin Mary (Oblaten der Makellosen Jungfrau Maria). Fr. Wolf has been a member of CHNetwork for many years, and is a great supporter of Christian unity. The order to which he belongs was founded by St. Eugene de Mazenod (1782 – 1861), who said, "God has sent me to proclaim the Gospel to the poor." A missionary order, they now work in 70 countries proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are about forty priests and brothers in Hünfeld. Many of the young men are studying for the African mission field. Fr. Wolf is deeply committed to sharing the fullness of the Good News of Jesus to all who will listen. His zeal for our Lord and His Church is truly wonderful.

Ingo and Fr. Wolf hit it off immediately. They were soon meeting regularly delving ever more deeply into the truths of the Catholic Church. In addition to this, Ingo, other members of his family, and I began to attend the Cloister's monthly Youth Masses (Jugendmessen), which draws large numbers of young people and adults to an evening of special teachings, Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, fellowship as well as supper. It was at one of the Youth Masses that Ingo's wife, Annette, heard God's call for her to become a Catholic Christian. Our



Lord touched her in a way that He gave her the knowledge that all would be well. This made her willing to follow Ingo into the Catholic Church.

With great joy, Ingo and Annette were received into full communion with the Catholic Church, on the Saturday before Christmas 2012, at the Cloister in Hünfeld. Father Abel and I were

honed to be co-sponsors for Ingo. Since February, Ingo Heinrich has been working for the office of youth ministry for the Oblates of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and taking classes at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Fulda. The bishop has accepted him as a priest candidate and he is now a member of the Seminary of Fulda. He is discerning a calling to the priesthood. Our Lord Jesus is truly good!

Even though I've returned to America, I was able to leave some items behind by which to be remembered. Marcus had mailed a couple of boxes of books to me to distribute to people who wish them. Ingo wanted and received many of them. The others, I gave to the priests and brothers at the Cloister of St. Boniface in Hünfeld. May our Lord bless their studies. ■



Ingo's Reception in Hunfeld

One of Our Primary Members is Ordained

Jonathan Gibson, one of CHNetwork's primary members, was ordained to the holy priesthood on May 25, 2013 at the Ordinariate Parish of St. John the Evangelist in Calgary, Alberta (calgaryordinariate.com).

An ordained Anglican clergyman for twenty-five years, Fr. Jonathan and his wife, Peggy, (a medical doctor) contacted the Coming Home Network in the spring of 2012. Over the course of several months they were in regular communication with two of our staff members, Mary Clare Pieczynski and Kenneth Howell, as they discerned God's call to become Catholic. As they wrestled with the question of the role of Peter and the Petrine ministry, both Fr. Jonathan and Peggy became convinced of the need to unite with the Pope as the successor of St. Peter.

In July of 2012, Fr. Jonathan and Peggy were confirmed and received into the Church. He assumed a position as

a lay teacher at St. John's in Calgary while submitting his two dossiers to Monsignor Steenson and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to be considered for ordination. Along with other candidates in the Ordinariate, Fr. Jonathan began supplementary studies in January of 2013. In early May, Monsignor Steenson, the Ordinary of the Ordinariate, informed Fr. Jonathan that his dossiers had been approved by the Congregation in Rome and his rescript signed by Pope Francis. The stage was then set for him to be ordained a priest within the Ordinariate. Over two joyful Saturdays in Calgary, just East of the beautiful mountains of Alberta, Jonathan Gibson

was first ordained a deacon (May 18th) and then became Fr. Gibson on May 25th. Congratulations! Please keep the Gibsons and all the members of the CHNetwork in your prayers as they seek to follow God's will for their lives. ■



Fr. Johnathan Gibson

MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

August 10-17, 2013

Alaskan Cruise

Sponsored by Franciscan University of Steubenville
www.franciscancruise.com

August 17-18, 2013

EWTN Family Celebration

Birmingham, AL

www.ewtn.com/familycelebration 1-205-271-2989

NEWSLETTER DONATION

Our monthly CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication. We request a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter and remain a supporting member of the CHNetwork. These donations support all aspects of our small non-profit apostolate, making it possible for our staff to be available to help others on the journey, manage our studio and internet outreach, as well as the production and distribution of the CHNewsletter. Thank you for your support!

FEATURED RESOURCES

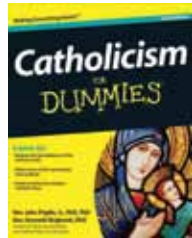
Calvin and the Radicals CD



Dr. Kenneth Howell's talk from the 2005 *Deep in History* conferences gives an understanding of John Calvin and the part he played in the Reformation. Calvin, who may have been more influential than Martin Luther, believed that it was not he who was leaving the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, but that the "Romanists" (Catholics) already had. Dr. Howell delves into the history and theology of Calvin and Calvinist spirit.

Catholicism for Dummies

By Rev. John Trigilio Jr. and Rev. Kenneth Brighenti



What does it mean to be a Catholic? What are the fundamental beliefs and history behind the Catholic Faith? *Catholicism For Dummies* is an intelligent and faithful look at Catholicism that is helpful for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. This book presents a rich tapestry and history of the Catholic Faith—from devotions to doctrines.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive the *Calvin and the Radicals* CD.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *Catholicism for Dummies*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive the *Calvin and the Radicals* CD and *Catholicism for Dummies*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

SUPPORT CHNETWORK

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

Attention: Ann Moore
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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UNSOLICITED MAIL

The CHNetwork would like to remind our members that we are unable to send unsolicited mail. Since our ministry exclusively responds to non-Catholic clergy and laity who initiate contact with us, we cannot add anyone to our mailing list or send materials unless they themselves first make a request. However, if you would like to have CHNetwork send materials with a gift card in your name, or if you have any questions about this policy, please contact our office at 740-450-1175.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Please go to www.chnetwork.org/ resources to see current job listings. Or, if you know of an employment opportunity that you would like posted for the CHNetwork membership, please e-mail the job description to maryp@chnetwork.org.

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.

RECENT CONVERT?

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

Prayer List



Clergy

- For Greg, a Presbyterian minister in California, that as he examines the claims of the Catholic Church he may fall in love with the ever ancient and ever new Church of our Lord Jesus.
- For an Old Catholic priest in Texas, that he may find a way for God to use him in lay ministry to his people as a Catholic.
- For Steve, a Mennonite minister, that the Holy Spirit would guide him as he seeks to understand the teachings of the Catholic faith and God's will for him.
- For Jeff, a Church of Christ minister, that his love for our Lord Jesus may grow ever more rich as he learns what the Catholic Church actually teaches.
- For Mike, an Episcopal priest in California, that our Lord may grant him the grace to return to the holy, catholic and apostolic Church of his youth.

■ For Pete in Florida, that he might have patience and wisdom in moving toward the Church.

Laity

- For Barbara, that the Lord Jesus give her courage and strength as she battles numerous health ailments.
- For Terrie and her family's needs, especially for her children to come back to the fullness.
- For Jovina, that Jesus guide her search as she learns more about the Catholic Faith and seeks God's will.
- For Pete, that he continues to persevere and move forward with his faith journey.
- For Marina, that she find good local support and friendship as she looks towards becoming Catholic.
- For Lee who was discouraged from pursuing her interest in the Catholic Church on account of her need to get an annulment.

■ For Linda, who feels led towards the Catholic Church but still has questions and difficulties on account of her previous faith background.

- For Reba, that she continues moving towards full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For Pam, who recently returned to the Church, that she find the welcoming embrace of Jesus truly present in the Eucharist.
- For Lorna who is going through RCIA but not sure if she wants to become Catholic.
- For Alex, who is considering beginning RCIA in the fall.

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

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

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

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

President/Founder, Marcus Grodi (*former Presbyterian pastor*)

Chaplain, Fr. Ray Ryland (*former Anglican priest*)

Chief Operating Officer, Kevin Lowry (*former Presbyterian*)

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

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

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

Financial Coordinator, Ann Moore

IT/Facilities Coordinator, Bill Bateson (*former Mormon*)

Publications and Laity Coordinator, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Communications Coordinator, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart (*former United Methodist*)

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

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 4

but still wary of making a first Confession and actually returning to the Church.

An event helped change that. One afternoon, my mom and I were discussing Catholicism. At a certain point in the conversation, she interrupted me and said something along the lines of “Oh my goodness...” with a long pause, and then “Oh my gosh...” Of course, I asked her what was going on. She began to get choked up and told me that she had just remembered a dream she had the night before. She had dreamt that she was with my dad’s mom at a Catholic Mass. At the end of the Mass, my mom and my grandmother left and saw that the priest who had celebrated the Mass who was (as she described him repeatedly) “beautiful” and “glowing.” The memory of him was the reason she had been choked up and when she began actually describing him, she started to cry outright and quickly got off the phone with me. This was very out of character.

That happened on a Friday night and I thought about the dream all weekend. I didn’t think that an ordinary dream could have had such a powerful effect on my mom. On the following Sunday, I told my dad that I thought the dream wasn’t an ordinary dream and that the beautiful priest whom she saw glowing was not just some imagination, but a real Catholic saint who had interceded on her behalf and whom God had granted to show up in her dream. Thus, I told him that my expectation would be that at some point she would see a picture of the saint who was in her dream and recognize who it was. He asked me who I thought the priest might have been and I told him that the first one that sprang to mind was the English Cardinal John Henry Newman, a convert from Anglicanism. He hadn’t heard of him and afterward I talked to my mom for a few minutes and then got off the phone.

About ten minutes later, I got a frantic phone call from my mom. She had told me that “a very weird goose bump thing just happened.” The reason she was frantic was that, after getting off the phone with me, my dad had pulled up a picture of Blessed Cardinal Newman online. He didn’t say anything to her about it, but had simply pulled up the picture and asked her if she recognized the person. She instantly recognized him as the “saint” that was in her dream, but my dad refused to explain who he was and told her to call me to find out. I quickly explained to her who Cardinal Newman was and his significance; she was flabbergasted. Needless to say, she had never heard of Cardinal Newman, nor had she seen his picture. She talked to me for a few minutes more and got off the phone (she was, after all, still officially a Protestant at this point, though on the fence about converting).

Though I had been praying for their conversions, I hadn’t expected this. My mom held off telling my sister, Kristen, about the dream for a few days, because my sister had been

pretty antagonistic toward my parents regarding Catholicism. When my mom finally worked up the nerve to tell Kristen about it, she was surprised at her reaction. Kristen had been talking to me about Catholicism too and on the same night that my mom had her dream, my sister had prayed to God to send her a sign that Catholicism was true and Protestantism was not. She explained to my mom that she had prayed God would specifically “send a dream,” because she thought she would be terrified if an angel came or something else very extraordinary happened. Kristen saw in this the exact sign she had prayed for and that day made the decision to convert to Catholicism, as did my mom and dad.

The last more immediate spiritual consequence of my conversion was the revitalization of the faith of my wife and her parents. My mother-in-law had always been a Mass-attending Catholic, but had never fully learned the totality of the Faith, particularly the necessity of going to Confession or the importance of avoiding certain sins. She remedied these defects very quickly. My father-in-law was a harder sell. He had grown up Catholic and had attended Catholic grade school; his attitude was that all those daily Masses and Stations of the Cross they had to do as kids more than made up for the missed Masses as an adult. It all evened out, he thought, and, after all, it seemed to him extreme to say that missing Sunday Mass without a good reason is any big deal. We prayed many rosaries for his conversion and it has now been several years since he returned to faithful Catholicism (going to Confession for the first time in 35 years).

My conversion has also deeply influenced my philosophy. My dissertation is a defense of a view in moral epistemology that is inspired, positively, by the works of Bl. Cardinal Newman and St. Thomas Aquinas, and negatively, by the desire to show why views of moral knowledge like those defended by heretical Catholic moral theologians since the 1960s (a view in contemporary philosophy often dubbed “moral intuitionism”) lead to moral skepticism. ■



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BLOG

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Persevering in Faith

By Kenneth J. Howell



In the July 2013 newsletter, the Coming Home Network reprinted an article on Final Perseverance that appeared originally in the 1911 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. While the article was accurate in its faithfulness to the magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church, in this article we attempt to show the relevance of this topic to our times and reflect on how this teaching on Final Perseverance is grounded in the witness of Scripture.

Final Perseverance is the enduring of a Christian believer in faith to the end of his natural life. The doctrine is based on Jesus's words in Matthew 10:22, "He who endures to the end will be saved" and underlies the many exhortations to perseverance in the New Testament. Our Lord teaches that it is not enough to profess Him at one or even many points in one's life. What is crucial is that at the moment of one's death, a Christian is in a state of grace, trusting in the mercy of God for his eternal salvation. This is confirmed in the very last book of the New Testament, the Revelation (Apocalypse) of John. In the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor, the author stresses how it is "the conqueror" who will be rewarded (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). Particularly striking is the Seer's exhortation to the Christians at Thyatira, "The one who conquers and keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations." A Christian overcomes precisely by being faithful to the end of life.

Final perseverance makes no sense apart from a Catholic view of salvation. The significance of final perseverance may become clearer if we contrast it with a view popular among American Christians, the idea of "once saved, always saved." This belief, which has become so widespread in American Evangelicalism, says that a profession of faith in Christ is sufficient to insure a place in heaven for the believer. God saves a person, according to this teaching, at the moment when he/she accepts Jesus as a personal Lord and Savior. God declares a person righteous or justified and that person is thought of (or accounted as) righteous in God's sight even though he/she is still a sinner. Out of a sense of thanksgiving, a justified person lives a holy life but what saves him is the original declaration by God. While there are elements of truth in this view, it fails to capture the whole truth of salvation.

The biblical doctrine of salvation is not simply that God *declares* us righteous (or just) but that God makes us righteous through the infusion of His grace into our souls. There are, to be sure, acts or declarations of justification in our Christian lives such as Baptism and the absolution received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The act of baptism, properly ad-

ministered, cleanses us from the guilt of original and actual sin. And when we are absolved by a priestly declaration in the Sacrament of Confession, we may be sure that all our sins are forgiven. However, the reality remains that we commit sins after Baptism — that's why we need Confession — and we need forgiveness repeatedly throughout our life. So one declaration is not enough; we need continual grace and forgiveness to end life in the friendship of God.

A second truth though is that salvation is not simply being forgiven but a process by which our human nature is transformed into the likeness of God. Paul teaches this view when he says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "We all who with unveiled

face are beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to greater glory." Here Paul envisions a process of transformation in which the believer is becoming more and more like God. Many Church Fathers teach that in the Fall of Adam and Eve the human race lost the likeness of God though it retained and could never lose the image of God (Gen 1:26). Thus, salvation is a lifelong process whereby our wills are conformed to God's will and so become more and more like God. This process the theologians call

divinization, or deification, or theosis. This process of becoming more righteous over time must continue until our death which explains why Jesus said that it was he who endures to the end that will be saved.

Our Effort or God's Grace?

Persevering to the end so as to be saved can seem quite laborious. At times, it can seem as if it is all up to us. This is probably why members of the Church so often seem to fall back into autosoterism or self-salvation. The exemplar of this tendency was Pelagius who, in the fifth century, taught that salvation was picking ourselves up by the bootstraps and imitating Jesus to the best of our ability. Although the Church long ago officially condemned Pelagianism, age after age has seen the revival of this tendency.

The Church's great theologians remind us, however, that perseverance to the end is primarily a grace that God gives us, not a work we generate. Two of those greats were St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas. They both stressed that our work is always a response to God's grace. This truth was officially embodied in the infallible declaration of the Council of Trent, "If anyone says that a justified man can persevere without some special help from God, or that he cannot persevere with it, let him be anathema." (Session VI, canon 22). This anathema condemns two extremes. One is that the completion of our spiritual journey is done

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without any special intervention from God. The other is that God's grace is not sufficient to help us achieve the end of our salvation. So God's grace is both absolutely essential and completely sufficient to persevere to the end.

The Church has always wanted to emphasize that just as the beginning of our salvation in Baptism was not due to our merits, so the continuance of our salvation to the end is not due to our merits either. Of course, we must cooperate with God's grace but in the end it is His grace that enables us to endure, not our human strength. This accords with Jesus's teaching in John chapter fifteen, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (Jn 15:4). Jesus is the source and strength of our endurance in faith. Perhaps that is why St. Augustine pointed to Jesus as the model of final perseverance in his treatise *On the Gift of Perseverance* (*De dono perseverantiae*).

Jesus: the Model of Final Perseverance

Jesus's life is a visible demonstration of final perseverance. His coming into the world was to do the will of His Father who sent Him. In speaking about what drove His earthly life, Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to complete His work." (Jn 4:34). The Gospels record, however, that it was not always easy for Jesus to do the will of His Father. The orthodox Christian may think it strange to say that it was not easy for Jesus to do the will of God. After all, isn't Jesus divine as well as human? Didn't His divine nature, always at one with the Father, allow Him to accomplish His Father's will with relative ease? And if His human nature was without sin, as Hebrews 4:15 says, why would it have been difficult for Him to do God's will?

We are not the first Christians to have struggled with this apparent incongruity. In the sixth and seventh centuries, there arose the heresy of Monothelism, the belief that Christ did not have a human will because it was absorbed into the divine will. Through many struggles, the Church eventually came to see that it is essential to our faith that Jesus had two wills, one human and one divine. Just as He had two natures (human and divine), so He must have had two wills because having a will is essential to being human. If Jesus was truly human, as the Church had already taught, then He must have had a human will. Still, if His human will was not tainted by sin, as ours is, why would it have been a struggle for Him to do the will of God?

Yet the four Gospels attest that Jesus did struggle to accomplish the will of His Father, the most prominent instance being in the Garden of Gethsemane. Reflection on this passage recorded by all three synoptic Gospels is worthy of extended meditation (Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46). Each Gospel writer adds various literary touches which bring out the many sides of His agony. The depth of Jesus's agony is evident in His words to His disciples, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to the point of death." (Mk 14:34). Matthew and Mark underscore His pain with their noting that "He fell

to the ground" (Mark) and "on his face" (Matthew). What caused such depth of pain? The prospect of suffering death on the cross, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36). The physical pain of the crucifixion, however, was nothing compared to the spiritual agony of bearing the sins of the whole world. Jesus knew what He had to do but that knowledge did not alleviate His temptation in the face of indescribable suffering. Yet it is in Jesus's words of resignation to the Father that we find His greatness, "not what I will but what You will." (Mk 14:36).

The Gospel writers have clearly gone beyond description of a historical event. The exhortation to "not enter the moment of trial" (Lk 22:40) and Jesus rebuking the disciples about sleeping (Lk 22:46) three times shows that they intend for us to take Jesus as the model for the vigilant and persevering Christian.

Our Perseverance Modeled on Jesus

Reflecting on these truths leads naturally to the recognition of the importance of final perseverance. In the end, it is not how many times we "succeed" or "fail" in our spiritual journey. What is important is that we persevere and remain faithful to God to the end of our life. At one point in my Catholic life, I succumbed to the wiles of the Devil as he influenced me to weave a story in my mind which confused good and evil. The temptation was so subtle that I could not detect it for months. Even my spiritual director failed to help me see it for what it was. Once I came to the humbling recognition of my failure, I shared the story with a priest friend who said to me, "Wow, Ken, the Devil really tackled you. The question now is whether you will get back up and run the race." When I told him I lost hope of trusting my interior life any more, he wisely said, "If you neglect your interior life, your outward life will deteriorate." Instinctively I knew he was right. The Devil wanted to destroy my perseverance and so I determined that I would get back up and run the race to the end. That decision was prompted by grace. No doubt about it.

Persevering to the end is not a matter of simply remaining in the same spiritual state until death because life is too precarious to let us remain in a static state. Life presents numerous challenges which threaten to injure our faith and to cause us to abandon God. The silent law of the spiritual life is that unless we are growing in grace, we will atrophy and recede farther and farther from God. The answer to final perseverance lies in the wisdom of St. Teresa of Avila who loved a phrase from Psalm 119:32, "I will run the way of your commandments for you have expanded my heart." If our heart is not expanding in love throughout this life, it will not be ready to hold God in the next. It was perhaps St. Paul who best captured the balance between human effort and divine grace when he wrote, "Work toward your own salvation with fear and trembling for the One working in you is God both by His willing and His acting for His good pleasure," (Phil 2:12-13). ■

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