



August 2014 CHNewsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

"And The Truth Will Set You Free: How I Was Reconciled to the Catholic Church"	1
By Kathleen M. Gavlas	
Featured Resources	2
"St. Augustine and Sola Scriptura"	
By Kenneth J. Howell	3
"Verses I Never Saw" By Marcus Grodi ...	A

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



And The Truth Will Set You Free: How I Was Reconciled to the Catholic Church

By Kathleen M. Gavlas

I have to begin my conversion story by relating something of my family life. My father worked for the government as an air traffic controller. They transferred him wherever they wished even though he had a family. So, we moved from state to state when I was a little girl. My youngest brother and I were born in Minnesota, our home state. I was born in 1948 in Minnesota and baptized October 31 that same year in Selma, Alabama, which tells how often we moved. My other brother and sister were each born in a different Southern state. Because of our constant moving, establishing a stable spiritual home was quite difficult for us.

We were nominally Episcopalian, attending services sporadically. I remember going for Easter, and attending some Christmas services, but not much else until we moved back to Minnesota where my mother insisted we settle down. As she told my father, "The kids and I are staying here!" I was about ten years old.

We were renting a house on the east side of St. Paul close to where I was born. Though there was an Episcopal parish within walking distance, we weren't attending there at that time. I went to a nearby non-denominational church's vacation Bible school. I was enthralled by the services, learning Bible verses, and singing their children's songs. I remember the Sunday School teacher telling us

that Jesus would cover over our sins so we could go to heaven. I very much wanted to go to heaven — and very much didn't want to go to hell — so I eagerly followed her in reciting the sinner's prayer.

It's strange, but even at that young age I thought there was something wrong with the idea that our sins would simply be covered over. *Wouldn't that mean they are still there?* I asked myself. *And if they're still there, and only pure things can be in heaven, as our teacher had also said, why would God simply ignore my sins? Wouldn't it be better if He got rid of them and made us holy?* I never asked the teacher about it, though, thinking she must know better than I.

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

Eventually, my family returned to the Episcopal Church after a couple of members from the local non-denominational church came to visit my parents to convert them. This effort to convert my parents spurred our family to resume attending the local Episcopal Church. We moved once more, but this time we faithfully attended our new Episcopal church where I was confirmed at age twelve.

And then our world fell apart — my thirty-five-year-old father died of a coronary occlusion. My mom was left a widow with four children, no job, and a paltry ten thousand dollar life insurance policy to support us all. It was too much for her; she melted into grief. Our Episcopal priest helped my mom get a job as a nurse's aide at the local Catholic hospital, so we survived, but she was never the same.

Coping in an Assembly of God

In her grief, the Episcopal Church didn't seem to give my mother what she wanted anymore, which was certainty of salvation and emotional support. Then we got a new priest who, unfortunately, had a cold personality, which didn't suit my mom. Dissatisfied, she turned to her Evangelical friends, who were glad to whisk her away into one of their churches.

After experimenting with going to a local Baptist church and several home Bible and prayer meetings, we ended up leaving the Episcopal Church for the Assemblies of God (AG). I didn't like the AG services when we first started attending. Since my brothers and sister and I had not had been exposed to Pentecostalism, the Assemblies of God came as quite a shock to us after the sedate liturgy, hymns, and devotional practices of the Episcopal Church. The style of worship was alien to me; I thought it bizarre and irreverent. My first impulse was to run for the door.

But, I had no choice. This was the church my mom had chosen, so it was the church to which I had to adapt.

The lively music had some appeal to my teenage taste and the sermons were rousing — nothing like the quiet homilies on loving our neighbor and being a good citizen that I had heard in the Episcopal Church. We were taught straight out of the Bible and were encouraged to read it for ourselves and pray on our own — another thing I hadn't experienced before. I began to drink in Scripture like one dying from thirst in the desert. Soon I was speaking in tongues, prophesying, and singing with gusto just like everyone else.

By the time I entered high school I was a faithful member. More and more I embraced my new church's mission, making it my primary concern. I became a little evangelist, accosting people on the bus, in school, and anywhere else I could to try to get them saved. This did not endear me to the popular set at school and I found myself, apart from the kids at my church, isolated from everyone my age. I took this hardship as the price I had to pay for being true to God. I saw everyone else as "lost" and in need of saving.

Unsettled

After graduating from high school in 1966, I worked for a year and then applied to our local Assemblies of God Bible college. I thought I ought to serve God in this way even though I had no clear idea what I would do with a Bible college education. Teaching positions in the AG were few and far between, but I majored in religious education — really hoping I would get married to a guy training to be a pastor, and thus help him in his ministry. That was certainly the path others saw laid out for me, and, having no other ideas of what to do with my life, I fell in line with it.

Continued on page 5 ➤

FEATURED RESOURCES



Deep in Scripture CD

— Marcus Grodi & Robert Stackpole

In this classic *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi is joined by guest Robert Stackpole in discussing whether Catholic teaching about Mary is found in the Bible.



Celebrating Mary: A Collection of Praises and Prayers

— By The Word Among Us Press

Saints and spiritual writers, preachers and poets, prayers and hymns—since the early Church, Christians have celebrated the grace, the virtues, and the loving heart of Mary. This new collection of one hundred timeless prayers and readings expands our understanding and appreciation of Mary and ushers us, by her intercession, to the feet of her Son. Includes the writings of Francis de Sales, Julian of Norwich, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bridget of Sweden, Alphonsus Liguori, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and many others.

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *Celebrating Mary* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive both a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *Celebrating Mary* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain premiums by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/premiums

St. Augustine and *Sola Scriptura*

By Kenneth J. Howell

St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) ranks not only among the greatest Fathers and Doctors of the Church but also as the preeminent Father whose influence on western history has been unparalleled. It can be said without fear of contradiction that Augustine was and is the most important Church Father in the history of western Christianity. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, all the major theologies in Christendom appealed to his authority: Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed. John Calvin, for example, appealed to Augustine as a secondary support for his doctrines and interpretations of Scripture as did his greatest Catholic critic, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the theological issues of the Protestant Reformation were as much about the writings of St. Augustine as they were about the Bible. In light of his importance, it is worth asking what St. Augustine thought about the authority of Scripture.



Augustine's preeminence in the western Church is only matched by his prolific output. While maintaining a busy life as bishop, preacher, reconciler, and disciple, he left us more than any other writer of antiquity, over five million words. Yet in all these words the issue of *sola Scriptura* never arose. As far as I am aware, Augustine never addressed the issue as it was formulated in the Protestant Reformation. He did, however, reflect on the authority of Scripture, especially the authority of various interpretations of Scripture so that his reflections can be relevant to the issue of *sola Scriptura* in the modern world.

Did St. Augustine believe in *sola Scriptura*?

Because Augustine held the Scriptures in high esteem and venerated them as an inerrant authority for the Church, many Protestant theologians and apologists have quoted him as a support for the notion of *sola Scriptura*. In his famous *Letter to Jerome* (no. 82 ca. 405) Augustine says:

I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.

Augustine goes on to contrast this infallible authority of the canonical Scriptures with other writings about the same subjects:

As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and learning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth either by means

of these canonical writings themselves, or by arguments addressed to my reason.

Advocates of *sola Scriptura* like to point out that Augustine even uses the Protestant phrase in the first sentence (*solis eis Scripturarum libris* "to the books of Scripture alone") which supports their contention that the great Bishop of Hippo embraced *sola Scriptura*.

This is a case where careful reading of documents is of paramount importance. The contexts of Augustine's comments and those of Reformers in the sixteenth century are quite different, not only in time, but in substance. Protestants contrasted the absolute authority of Scripture and what they considered the unjust authority of tradition or the magisterium of the Church. For them, the Scriptures alone were the proper source from which Christian doctrine and morals should be extracted. To add the authority of the Church was to undermine God's authority by adding human authority to it. But in Augustine's arguments with Jerome ten centuries earlier, the issue was not about the authority of the canonical Scriptures taken as a whole — Jerome himself affirmed that — but whether one should allow historical mistakes within Scripture. When Paul writes of Peter in Galatians 2:14 he did not act in accord with "the truth of the gospel," Jerome had supposed that Paul had made a mistake in his writing. Augustine, in the quotations above, is affirming that the Scriptures are inerrant, not that they are the sole authority. Other writings may err but not the Scriptures.

Still, a Protestant may say that even this lesser affirmation by Augustine means that he believed that Church tradition, writings of the Fathers, and Church councils could err while the Scriptures alone could not. They therefore could be the only source of absolute truth for the Church. So the Protestant Reformers saw themselves as justified in appealing to Augustine. And if one limits himself to a few select quotations from Augustine's writings, that may seem to be true, a fact which would explain how generations of Protestants could see themselves as faithful to the Bishop of Hippo.

Sola Scriptura as a Problem of Interpretation

Many contemporary apologists, both Catholic and Protestant, have limited their debate about the sole authority of Scripture to affirmations or denials about the Scriptures taken as a whole, prior to any interpretation by an individual or the Church. In this framing of the question, Catholic apologists often cite Church Fathers who affirm the necessity of both Scripture and Tradition. And there is an abundance of such texts to be had. Augustine, however, did not face the problem in that form. Rather, his life and work had more to do with *how to interpret the Scriptures in the light of schisms and heresies all around him*. Three examples in his lifetime were Manicheanism, Donatism, and what may be called simplistic literalism.

In his disputes with Faustus the Manichean bishop, Augustine insisted on the absolute authority of the canonical Scriptures against Faustus's claim that there were later writings of equal authority.

The excellence of the canonical authority of the Old and New Testaments is distinct from the books of later writers. This authority was confirmed in the times of the Apostles through the succession of bishops and the propagation of churches, as if it was settled in a heavenly manner in a kind of seat to which every believing and pious mind lives in obedience. (*Against Faustus*, 11.5)

Attending carefully to the wording of this statement reveals three important truths in Augustine's thinking. Manichean writings ("books of later writers") cannot be held as of equal authority with the Bible because they lack the confirmation of the historic Church ("through the succession of bishops and the propagation of churches"). Here Augustine says that the Church is the protector of Scripture's integrity. When he invokes the imagery of a seat, Augustine means the Church as an authority. It is to this seat that every believing Christian must live in obedience. While the Scriptures rightly command the assent and obedience of every Christian, the same Scriptures can only be known by their derivation from and connection with the historic Church.

The Donatist controversy was very different. On the surface, the Donatist controversy does not seem to have anything to do with the authority of Scripture. Here the issue was schism from the Catholic Church. By the time Augustine arrived on the scene of history, the Donatist schism in North Africa was over a century old. What is striking is that most of what the Donatists taught was in accord with Catholic teaching; their great sin was separation or schism. Yet, on at least one crucial doctrinal point, they differed from the Catholics. They wanted to remain separated from the Church because they considered its sacraments invalid. Why invalid? The ministers of the Catholic Church were tainted with sin and apostasy. The Donatist insisted that a priest who conferred Baptism but was himself not a good man could not confer the forgiveness of sins. His immoral life invalidated his sacramental ministry. Augustine's answer was multifaceted but on one point he was crystal clear. The Scriptures teach that Baptism confers forgiveness even if the man baptizing is himself an immoral man.

But I think that we have sufficiently shown, both from the canon of Scripture, and from the letters of Cyprian himself, that bad men, while by not converted to a better mind, were able to, and in fact do confer and receive baptism, of these it is most clear that they do not belong to the holy Church of God, though they seem to be within it. (*On Baptism Against the Donatists*, 6.3)

This quotation is significant not only because of what it reveals about the meaning of Baptism but also about scriptural authority. The objective validity of Baptism cannot be nullified by a sinful man. As Augustine says, this truth he demonstrated from the Scriptures. Further, while the Donatists were appealing to the teaching of St. Cyprian, Augustine showed that the earlier bishop's teaching was not really being upheld by the schismatics. In other words, Augustine sought to read the scriptural meaning of Baptism through the prism of the Church prior to his time. Schism from the Church was associated with schism from the Church's understanding of Scripture.

The third problem St. Augustine faced was not really heresy or schism but the difficulties which "the little ones" had in understanding the Scriptures. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine's most theoretical discussion of interpretation, he suggests that interpretation of scriptural passages should attempt to discern the intention of the biblical author had in mind. This meant paying careful attention to the contexts of the text, both immediate and remote, comparing text with text, but it also meant adhering to the rule of faith:

Let the reader consult the rule of faith which he has gathered from the plainer passages of Scripture, and from the authority of the Church, and of which I treated at sufficient length when I was speaking in the first book about things. But if both readings, or all of them (if there are more than two), give a meaning in harmony with the faith, it remains to consult the context, both what goes before and what comes after, to see which interpretation, out of many that offer themselves, it pronounces for and permits to be dovetailed into itself. (*On Christian Doctrine*, 3.2)

Here Augustine emphasizes that in cases of doubt about the meaning of a scriptural text, one should seek to discern "the rule of faith" from the Scriptures and from "the authority of the Church." The importance in adhering to the faith handed down (tradition) is emphasized by Augustine elsewhere. In his *On Marriage and Concupiscence* he discusses original sin and contrasts "the most ancient and firm rule of the catholic faith" with "those who assert new and perverse doctrines." His appeal is ultimately to the ancient faith transmitted through the Church, "Because all the hearts of the Catholic Church agree in faith which was established and handed down from ancient times and with a clear voice it [the faith] compels us."

Augustine walked a fine line between too little and too much latitude. In his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, he insisted that a Christian should allow differing

Continued on page 5 ➤

Verses I Never Saw

By Marcus Grodi

What follows is part of a project I have been working on for several years, reflections on fifty Scriptures and quotes from early Church Fathers that helped me come home to Jesus Christ and His Church.

But for the grace of God go I

This is how I must begin as I consider sharing the Scriptures that God has used to open my very hard heart and stubborn mind, by grace through faith, to the merciful love of Jesus Christ. Whenever I see someone lost in sin, in ignorance, in bitter anger, in abhorrent poverty, in addiction to false gods, I know that my on-going salvation has little to do with me, my intellect, or my will, but mostly God's love. Even the little that has to do with my efforts, and continues to be my responsibility, is still only an active response to His grace. It's all a gift. All of it. Thanks be to God.

The phrase "Verses I Never Saw" best describes my whole spiritual journey: how from an early age God not only brought into my life the gift of the Scriptures, but how, more often than not, I just didn't see them. I was in places where they were preached and taught; I read them, over and over daily; I heard them expounded on television and radio; I experienced them as seminary classmates debated and fought over them; I even preached and taught on them myself, but, in far too many ways, I failed to hear what God was trying to tell me.

Like a stopped military clock, there were times when I thought I understood what Scripture was teaching, but then later I discovered, sometimes with great embarrassment, how wrong I had been. Then other times, I discovered Scriptures I just had never seen before—that I somehow had read past and over, and even wondered whether someone had surreptitiously inserted them between the lines of my Bible! It was only over time, however, like the drip, drip of a life-saving antibiotic, that the Spirit helped me *see* these Scriptures and *hear* His message more clearly, when, I suppose, He perceived in His timing that I was ready.

Others have told me of the same experiences with Scripture, as if God purposely holds back the fullness until the time is right for each of us, maybe because we have matured enough to receive a particular Scripture, or because we need a particular Scripture to help us mature. Regardless, I'm confident than any avid reader of Scripture could compile his or her own completely unique selection of key "life altering" Scriptures, and frankly, my own list could easily be twice as long. For the sake of a manageable text, however, I've limited my list to the following collection.

I'm sharing this, not because I believe my personal journey is of any significance, or because I have been particularly successful in living out anything of what I have learned from Him through His Word. Nor because I'm a particularly skilled theologian or exegete, for these I am not! Nor are the following short reflections intended to pose as thorough exegetical studies. Rather, I merely want to serve Him who by His grace I have come to know and love.

If what I have discovered can help you, then praise be to God. If not, then maybe let me know, for my only desire is to help others experience the same hope and joy that I have received from Him.

My deaf, dumb, and blind years

1) Mark 16:16a

He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

It wasn't until I was a cognitive seven years old that the soul-altering waters of Baptism were sprinkled on my brown-haired head. My earliest years had little connection with formal religion and faith, until we moved to a community where the family next door were active Lutherans. It wasn't that my parents were irreligious, but rather, due to the turbulence of the union of their dissimilar pasts, church going never gained a footing in their marriage. One of my earliest, most cherished memories, however, is the white illuminated face-of-Jesus nightlight above my bed that would add a glow to my mother's face as she prayed me to sleep.

Eventually those avid Lutheran neighbors coaxed us to attend, and after several years of growing involvement, my parents had me baptized. As a commemoration of this important spiritual event, they gave me my first King James Version Bible. That Bible rested faithfully on my bedroom bookshelf for years. I vividly remember perusing it, from time to time, because it contained colored pictures of biblical stories and great maps, but, frankly, I don't remember if I ever took the time to read any deeper into it than Genesis chapter one. It basically gathered dust.

This verse from the Gospel of Mark was quoted by the Lutheran pastor when he baptized me. I certainly don't remember it being read nor do I propose that it had any impact whatsoever on my "deaf, dumb, and blind" self-centered mind. Nor do I remember having any signs of an active faith in God, or particularly that I in any way un-

derstood my baptism to be anything more than some kind of “rite of passage” into a more formal membership in the local Lutheran church. It never crossed my mind that that private ceremony of being sprinkled with water had any immediate or lasting effect on my soul.

But this is what was hidden in that first “verse I never saw” when I was seven and for many years to come.

If a person lives their entire life within a Christian environment that views Baptism and other sacraments as merely symbolic, it is easy to read Scripture through these lenses, without noticing the pervasive centrality and assumed necessity of Baptism. It was not until many years later that I saw the importance of stepping outside of our modern assumptions to consider what was in fact the underlying belief and practice of the early Church, those who learned their faith directly from the apostles. Once one at least recognizes the possibility of an alternate religious view, and applies this to the overall reading of Scripture, than all direct references and indirect allusions to Baptism rise to the top and together can begin to make life-altering sense.

When our resurrected Lord summarized His Great Commission to His followers in the command to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...,” this included the command to “baptize” and “teach” (Mt 28:19,20). When the very first folk “were cut to the heart” and came forward in response to the first Christian evangelistic sermon demanding, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), Simon Peter did not say, “Go down to the rectory and sign up for the year-long membership class,” or more simply “accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.” Rather he said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized ... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

When one reads the New Testament with an open mind, it’s easy to see how Baptism was considered the means by which all new believers and their families became “in Christ,” became members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and how through Baptism, believers are recreated.

This Paul communicated to all the churches under his care. To the Galatians, he wrote, “in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:26,27).

To the Ephesians, he reminded them that, after they had “heard the word of truth, the gospel of [their] salvation” and consequently “believed in him,” they were then “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,” which implies Baptism, which “enlightened” the “eyes of [their] hearts” (Eph 1:13,14,18). By this, they became “in Christ,” and as Paul told the Christians at Corinth, “if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).

In his first Epistle, the apostle Peter wrote, “Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...” (1 Ptr 3:21-22).

This fundamental belief in the importance of Baptism was carried onward in all the early church communities. In the *Didache*, a first century document that most scholars believe was written concurrently with the New Testament, the anonymous author writes, “Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. When you have said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ...” (ch. 7).

This is particularly described by Justin Martyr (105-165) in his *First Apology*, in which he presented an entire chapter on the importance of Baptism:

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. (*First Apology*, LXI)

My point for this short summary of New Testament and early church sources is not to give an apologetic defense of the importance of Baptism, but rather to simply demonstrate how from the beginning, Baptism was assumed to be the start of the Christian life—how through Baptism believers are washed clean and become new creations in Christ, members of His Body.

This is true for all baptized Christians, whether they realize it or believe in it, or not. And it wasn’t for many years later that I came to appreciate this gift of grace, because, as I said, when I was baptized a Lutheran at age 7, I had no idea that this embarrassing, inconvenient act was anything more than a rite-of-passage into local church membership. ■

SHARE YOUR STORY

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

EWTVN'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 4

Dr. David Gregson*
 Former Presbyterian and Anglo-Catholic

August 11

John Lillis*
 Revert

August 18

Seth Cherney*
 Convert from Judaism

August 25

Sean Chapman*
 Revert

*Schedule is subject to change.

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 this form 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.

Your information

Name _____

Signature _____

Address line 1 _____

Address line 2 _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$_____ on auto-payment from my:

☐ Checking account or ☐ Savings account

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

☐ Credit card

Card number _____

Expiration date _____

CVV Code _____

☐ Visa

☐ MasterCard

☐ Discover

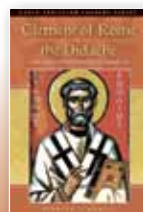
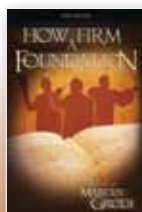
☐ AmericanExpress

NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to family and friend. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are Copyright © 2014 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

NEWSLETTER DONATION

The 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.



Visit www.chresources.com or call 740-450-1175 for these and other great resources to learn more about the Catholic Faith.

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE



Listen to Marcus Grodi and Dr. Kenneth Howell on the Deep in Scripture radio program on Saturdays at 11:00am ET and Sundays at 2:00pm ET on EWTN Radio Two. Please visit our website www.deepinscripture.com for live feed, archived programs, and further information.

Prayer List

Clergy

- For Jim, an Assemblies of God minister in Texas, that his extensive reading of the Church Fathers would enable him to embrace the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For a Lutheran minister in Pennsylvania, that his realization that reformation is no longer useful would guide him to full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For an Assemblies of God minister in Alabama, that he and his wife would find the path that leads them home to the Catholic Church.
- For Eduardo, an Anglican priest in Uruguay, that he may find his way back to the Catholic Church of his youth.
- For Michael, a United Methodist minister in North Carolina, that his study and prayer would lead him to the joy of receiving our Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- For an Anglican priest in Ireland, that he may realize that to be truly Catholic is to be in full communion with the Bishop of Rome.

■ For Jose, a Baptist minister in Texas, that the Holy Spirit would grant him the grace to return to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

■ For David, an Anglican youth minister in California, that God would show him how to minister to his extremely anti-Catholic relatives as he enters the Catholic Church.

■ For Bob, an Assemblies of God minister in Maryland, that through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary he and his wife may be able to overcome all obstacles to becoming Catholics.

■ For Jackie, a United Church of Canada minister, that the Holy Spirit would grant her the wisdom to respond to her confused family, friends and colleagues and she journeys to the Catholic Church.

Laity

■ For Kenny and her family, as they go to Mass and learn more about the Catholic Church.

■ For Brenda, who is praying and studying in preparation before beginning RCIA.

■ For Mike, who is listening to Catholic radio and attending Mass as he moves forward with his faith journey.

■ For Michael, that he be able to connect with local Catholics.

■ For Tony, who is having a difficult time with his faith journey and is encountering a number of obstacles.

■ For Rhonda, who is going to Mass but struggles with whether to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For Ralph, who is researching and learning about the Catholic Church.

■ For Barney who would love to become Catholic but isn't sure of whether he will be able to go through RCIA due to his personal situation.

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)

Chief Operating Officer, Kevin Lowry (former Presbyterian)

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

Manager of Outreach, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart (former United Methodist)

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

► “Saint Augustine...” continued from page 4

interpretations when the text seemed obscure. To be too narrow was to sin against charity (cf. *Confessions*, bk 12). On the other hand, too much latitude in interpretation risked putting oneself outside the faith. But how does one know what is too much or too little? Augustine’s answer lies in the rule of faith and the authority of the Church, both of which meant a humble listening to the past wisdom of the Church.

When Luther, Calvin, and other Protestants began to emphasize *sola Scriptura*, they believed that the Catholic Church had not only gone astray in the behavior of its members — something true in every generation — but also in its doctrines. The source of those doctrinal errors, according to the Reformers, was placing Church tradition above the authority of Scripture. This, they held, was the root cause of the Catholic Church’s departure from the Faith. Had the Protestant Reformers understood St. Augustine better, they would have had more charity toward the Church in their interpretations and more fidelity to the ancient Faith. ■

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

Here began my rather checkered college career. I could write a book about my Bible college experience, but in brief, it took me ten years to receive my B.A. in religious education, finally graduating 1978. During that time, I worked full time when not attending classes, got engaged to be married twice, and got involved in many and varied ministries ranging from Gospel singing groups to street preaching.

None of it satisfied me. As I studied and did ministries, I prayed, cried, and despaired of ever finding God’s real purpose for my life. By the time I finally graduated, I had no more of an idea of what to do with my Bible college degree than when I started classes ten years before!

Spiritual aridity was unheard of in the Assemblies of God (at least, it was never talked about). We were expected to maintain a perpetual attitude of cheerfulness and positivity. I remember college friends, worried about me, telling me that certain people thought I wasn’t “spiritual enough.” I was told they were praying for me — the buzzword for “you’re not acting like you should be.” And they were right — I wasn’t acting or feeling like everyone else.

I had become dissatisfied with the Assemblies of God, because there was no depth to the spirituality and no resources to grow in God, despite all their efforts to keep us “well fed on the word,” as they put it. In their well-used analogy, they said they wanted fat sheep that wouldn’t be tempted to wiggle under the fence into another church’s pasture. But, I hadn’t gotten “fat” on the Assemblies God’s diet of speaking in tongues and hearing the same Scripture passages preached again and again. I felt stuck. I had already invested so much of my life into it that I couldn’t see where else I could go.

The opening of my mind

A bright spot in my life were books by C. S. Lewis. I devoured *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Surprised by Joy*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I will always bless Lewis, because reading

him allowed me to return to the Episcopal Church of my childhood. The Episcopal Church had a charismatic prayer group, thus providing me (and my Assemblies of God friends) an excuse for my return.

Another author whose writing shook me to the core was J. R. R. Tolkien, especially his *The Lord of the Rings* series. I had read *The Hobbit* and saw some good spirituality in it, but then I went to see an animated version of *The Lord of the Rings* produced by Ralph Bakshi. Although the film was rather choppy, the story intrigued me, so I went straight from the theater to find a bookstore and bought a three-volume paperback set. I read the whole of Frodo’s story that weekend. After reading it, I recognized that my current religious view of life wasn’t good enough, but I couldn’t quite see why.

Through reading Lewis and Tolkien, I began to see Scripture with new eyes. Why, I wondered, did the AG gloss over or argue away passages that disagreed with its teachings? For instance, when I had read Jesus’ words in John 6 my heart would burn with fear and desire: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you....For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:53, 55).

I feared that I would not have eternal life, because, if our metaphorical interpretation was wrong, I would have to answer to God for not receiving Christ’s Body and Blood. It also made me desire a closer union with Christ — a union I did not have regardless of how hard I tried to follow the Assemblies of God’s teachings.

To Jesus...through Mary?

During this period I had a significant dream — one I’ll never forget. I don’t consider it a “revelation” from God, but rather a prompting in a direction I had not considered until then.

I dreamt I saw a man dressed in biblical-style clothing crawling on the ground, obviously hurt and unable to stand. I felt compelled to help him. I knelt down beside him and he looked at me. My world turned over. It was the Lord, as I had never pictured Him! I had heard the biblical descriptions of the Man of Sorrows and thought I had given Him the praise due Him for taking away my sins, but this image of Him told me I hadn’t understood or embraced Him as the Suffering Messiah who I was supposed to imitate in my own life.

He said, “Now you will live in the new millennium.” I felt a shift in the dream’s reality and began to doubt who I believed I was seeing and hearing — perhaps it came from my confusion over His statement. Or, it may be that He was so different from the resurrected, triumphant Lord who was the centerpiece of Assemblies of God spirituality that I just couldn’t accept it. In any case, I thought I would make sure I wasn’t talking to a demon in disguise, so, I challenged the man with a “shibboleth” (see: Jg 12:6). I said rather timidly, “May the Lord bless you.” He responded, “As Mary is our mother.”

I woke up with a start. For someone who had been anti-Catholic for nearly twenty years, His answer came like a bolt of lightning from a blue sky. The concept of Mary being “our” mother was totally foreign to me. Yes, I acknowledged that Mary had

...Journeys Home Continued...

given Him birth, but that was all I gave her credit for. Devotion to her just was not a part of my religious understanding.

Indeed, the Assemblies of God taught that “God is no respecter of persons” (see: Acts 10:34). So, in the view of the AG, Mary had only been a vessel that God had used like He had used Sarah or Ruth or any of the other Old Testament women. Besides this, AG didn’t see Mary having any purpose, besides as a follower, in Christ’s life. We even thought of her as something of an interfering mother whom Jesus had had to rebuke (see: Jn 2:4; Lk 11:27-28). Mary as *my* mother — let alone having devotion to her — was the last thing I could accept or wanted at the time.

Mustard seeds

As a little girl, I had had a few Catholic influences in my life, but they had made no significant difference to me until this time. I had seen the Academy Award-winning, 1943 movie *The Song of Bernadette* and loved it. However, my mother dampened my ardor by explaining that the lady couldn’t have been Mary, because the dead can’t talk to us — it must have been an angel, if anything at all. I ascribe no fault to my mom. She was not a Catholic and simply didn’t want her daughter believing in such “fairy tales.”

I also remember wanting to buy a depiction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus I saw at the Minnesota State Fair, but again, my parents put the kibosh on it, directing my attention to a picture of a guardian angel, instead. My dad told me, “You don’t want that picture [the Sacred Heart]. It’s a *Catholic* picture.” As if that explained why I shouldn’t want it. I chuckle when I think of that incident now; both pictures are hanging on walls in my home.

Post-graduation I had moved into a studio apartment near the college, and was working at a minimum wage job because my degree opened no career opportunities for me. Feeling lost and purposeless, I begged God to show me what I should do, and if I should remain in the Assemblies of God.

Until then I had been fluctuating between attending the Episcopal Church and the Assemblies of God. In desperation, I told God that I would go to any church He wanted, even — gulp — the Catholic Church in order to follow Him in spirit and in truth. It was tantamount to saying I would follow Jesus into hell if necessary. I believed that God told me to “go home.” I took this to mean I should return to the Episcopal Church, and more, that I should move back to my hometown on the other side of the Twin Cities. So, I moved and began attending the Episcopal church of my childhood.

The Episcopal Church too, was in flux, introducing a modern translation of the liturgy and toying with the idea of women priests. However, the liturgy and the hymns, the stained glass windows, and the smell of burning candles all reassured me that I was at last in the right place.

My childhood parish now had a new priest, who was doing his best with a dwindling congregation. He eagerly welcomed me back. I had hoped my spiritual restlessness would abate, and

for a time it felt as though I could relax and simply practice my faith in peace. But my heart was still unsettled.

Still unsettled

I hated working my office job — not because there is anything wrong with office work, but I felt I was wasting my time at this job and not fulfilling my true potential. I thought, *What career options are there for a single woman in the Episcopal Church who wants to serve God full time?* Only one thing seemed to fit — being a nun.

I had been attending meetings of an Episcopal Lay Franciscan group and had been greatly impressed by them and their spirituality. I asked them about formation as an Episcopal Franciscan nun. My priest started my formation with a prayer to Mary, asking for her aid for women religious. I balked at this, but he reminded me that Episcopalians believe in the Communion of Saints and in asking for the intercession of saints.

I realized it was going to take me a while to pull my head out of my Assemblies of God teachings and return to a fuller expression of the faith. I had every intention of becoming an Episcopal nun, but it was not to be. Along with the prayers of my Evangelical mother (who had left the Assemblies of God for a more modified form of Protestantism), I met a young man who gently wooed me. In the end, I got married to my sweet and ever-so-patient husband in 1983.

Due to my husband’s work, we moved to a northern suburb of the Twin Cities where we attended another Episcopal parish. This one was larger and a bit more progressive. After attending for a year or so they asked me to run their religious education program. I thought I had finally found my niche — someplace where I could put my education to good use. The program went well enough, but I ran into an unexpected snag. I was told that the parents, above all else, wanted their children to have fun. I couldn’t believe my ears. Not that I acceded to this idea, although I did try to make the classes interesting and engaging. I doubt all Episcopal parents have this attitude, but I found it discouraging and symptomatic of that parish’s modernist ideas.

Again, I found myself spiritually restless. I had been on a Curcillo weekend at a Lutheran church. I read *The Faith of Millions* by Fr. John A. O’Brien, as well as the book, *The Song of Bernadette*, both of which allowed me to see the Catholic Church in a new light. Still, I had many questions about Mary’s place in God’s plan of salvation; I didn’t feel I could accept her the way in which Catholics did, but I had a new appreciation for her.

I could not get past Mary!

I had been arguing with myself over Mary — my Assemblies of God scruples coming to the fore. But, as I walked to work one day, I sensed that Mary spoke to me, “Let me help you in your walk with Christ.” I answered respectfully, “Please don’t ask me that. I belong to Jesus alone.”

...Journeys Home Continued...

Her response? She laughed good-naturedly at my Protestant reservations and said, “We’ll talk another time.” I smile when I think back on that encounter. She was so kind and patient with me, leaving it up to me to decide if or when I wanted her in my life.

After that, I became interested in Marian teachings and devotions. I could readily accept many of the Church’s teachings — after all, my Episcopal Church held many of the same beliefs, including receiving communion — but I could not get past *praying* to Mary, or (seemingly) putting her in the place of Jesus as an intercessor.

It occurred to me that if the Church was right about Mary, it had to be right about everything else. I can’t remember how I got copies of the booklets *The Glories of Mary* by St. Alphonsus Liguori or *True Devotion to Mary* by St. Louis de Montfort, but I read them both, taking in every word and digesting them theologically and spiritually. Many Protestants who have read these works have been put off by them, but they did just the opposite to me. The more I read, the more I understood. They were like rich food after drinking nothing but milk. Only by the grace of God could I have accepted ideas so radically different from my Assemblies of God (and most Protestant) teaching.

Hesitantly, I bought a rosary. I had bought one many years before at an Assemblies of God rummage sale. I would pray with it in my hands, although I didn’t know the prayers. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and Mary’s gentle love. But I became fearful that I was being sucked into something bad, and gave the beads away to the Catholic hospital my mom worked at.

I sat with the new rosary in my hands, feeling like a traitor to all I had been taught by the Assemblies of God. I began to pray the Hail Mary, taking a leap of faith that she wasn’t going to pull me away from Jesus, but help me as she had promised. I pictured her in my mind assisting me, like a mother holding her toddler’s hands as she takes her first steps. From then on, I was hers. It was true: the more I honored Mary, the closer to Jesus I came. God’s love flowed over me in a way I had never experienced before and I knew I had to go to Mass.

Pursuing the Catholic Church

My husband and I began attending a local Catholic parish, so I could see what it was like. My husband, in fact, had been raised Catholic but had left the Church for several years. In the fall, I entered the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). While I was in RCIA, I was invited to a baby shower for my former Assemblies of God Bible college roommate. Being with those women gave me a deeper perspective on my journey up until that point. I no longer felt the pull to be part of the AG “movement” as we had called it. For me, being in the Assemblies of God had been like being married to the wrong person for the wrong reasons. I know they thought I had strayed from the “Gospel truth” by exploring Catholicism, but I realized that, in becoming a Catholic, I was going from a dinner of desserts to a banquet of rich nourishment.

I wrote a letter to my Episcopal priest explaining why I was resigning as the parish’s religious education director. I simply didn’t have the strength of mind or heart to talk to him about everything I had experienced and wanted. A few days later a car screeched up to our house. One of the prominent ladies from the Episcopal parish ran up our walkway to our front door. Without preamble she demanded to know why I was quitting the parish. How could I explain what had taken me years to come to? I did my best, but she didn’t understand. I don’t blame her — it was a mystery to me, as well.

The first night of RCIA, I literally shook with fear on my way to the meeting. I cannot remember what I expected or even what I feared, but when I got there, I heard the priest say, “There’s no need to leave behind all you’ve known and loved in your faith journey to this point. You will not be abandoning it, you will be fulfilling it.” Not only was he right, his words calmed all my fears. I learned more in those few months than I had in all my years in Bible college. My perspective changed from “Jesus and me” to “the community of Faith.” The Church loomed down through the ages as the great protector of doctrine and reason instead of the corrupter of human souls, as I had been taught.

Resting in Christ’s Church

I was received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in 1987. My husband, who had returned to the Church, was my sponsor. I would have never guessed I would end up a Catholic, but God worked with me through all my difficulties, helping me understand what His Church truly is and accept its authority to speak for Christ on matters of faith and morals.

I found a dear Mother in Mary and friends in the saints. In the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, I found more spiritual benefit from one Mass than I had from any number of revival meetings. The Scriptures came alive for me and finally made sense. My prayer life became stable as I began to pray Morning and Evening Prayer, which lifted my soul to God instead of me trying to get to God through my own efforts. I have found all I had ever desired and more in Christ’s Church. ■



KATHLEEN GAVLAS works at home as a homemaker, freelance writer, and a moderator for Catholic Answers Forum. She is a member of the Catholic Writers Guild and has authored books and articles. She and her husband celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary in October 2013. They are currently owned by four cats.

BLOG

Please visit www.chnetwork.org/blog to comment on and discuss this story!

The Coming Home Network International
PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Be sure to check out
www.chnetwork.org to discover
archived Journey Home programs,
conversion stories, and lots of great
information about the **Catholic Church**.

