

The Coming Home Network International

DECEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

Journeys Home

Two Journeys, One Destination

By
Richard and Ruth Ballard



Ruth: That Good Friday, I carefully took out white construction paper and the big, thick crayons that normally were reserved for my coloring books. Slowly, and very deliberately, I drew three crosses, the middle one in red. I don't know how long I sat there, but I remember talking to Jesus in my own child-like way. That is my first memory of prayer or any understanding, however rudimentary, of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. I was a preschooler, not yet attending kindergarten, but this memory is still so vivid and detailed that it doesn't seem that almost fifty years have passed.

The whole scenario could be easily explained away by a child's interpretation of Bible stories; however, this was not the case. Neither of my parents were religious; there was no mention of God much less Scripture reading in our household. In spite of this, I always had an awareness of God within my life. Even at this young age I possessed an awareness of a spiritual realm, although I did not have the means to verbally express it.

It wasn't until junior high school that I encountered "church." My father, a career Naval officer, and our family were living in Taipei, Taiwan, at the time. At the invitation of my best friend, I attended a Protestant Thanksgiving service on the military base. The Protestant ecumenical quasi-liturgy gave me the framework upon which to hang my "heart knowledge." I began attending services on my own at age 13. Eagerly, I read and studied the Bible seriously for

the first time in my life. And although I was not yet baptized, I attended confirmation training. I was hungry for the Word of God and the fellowship of Christians actively committed to church and worship.

When my family returned to the States, I was baptized at my Grandmother's Baptist church. From that point on, depending upon where my father was stationed, I attended either a military chapel or a Baptist church. Eventually I made the decision to attend Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. My goal was to serve God as an ordained minister in order to share the

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Gospel with others.

Now, I should insert here that I was Baptist by virtue of being Southern rather than any specific theological beliefs. At that time, the late 70's, the Bible Belt wrapped tightly around the South, contributing significantly to individual identity and cultural milieu. To be Southern was to be Southern Baptist. I was a Southerner. I was Baptist. Enough said.

Richard: In a similar way, I grew up in Western North Carolina in a farming family of predominantly nominal Baptists. I say "nominal" because, even though my great-grandfather had been a Southern Baptist minister in our community, no one among my immediate relations, other than my devout paternal grandmother, ever seriously practiced this faith. And so, I was left fairly much to my own devices in matters religious and spiritual.

As a teenager I began attending services of holy communion at an Episcopal church not far from where I lived. What impressed me the most about this church was two fold. First of all, the architecture spoke of the transcendent. There was an altar positioned against the east wall and the priest read the liturgy facing the altar rather than the people. It seemed as if he was praying with and on behalf of the people rather than performing for them. This was so different from my grandmother's Baptist church where the minister faced the people from a central pulpit and became the focal point of attention during worship.

Secondly, the worship was liturgical and centered upon the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. I fell in love with the beauty of Anglican worship. I loved kneeling for prayer, the lighting of candles, and the angelic sound of Anglican chant. By this time, I had a sense that God was calling me to ordained ministry and I might very well have sought to fulfill that calling within the Episcopal church had it not been for the advice of a priest who suggested that Episcopalians had far more ministers than they had positions for, and recommended that I should consider the Lutheran church.

I followed his advice and discovered that Lutheranism also had liturgical worship, much of it borrowed from the Book of Common Prayer. They also had altars, knelt for prayer, lit candles, wore vestments, and celebrated the sacraments, while embracing chant, chorale, and plainsong in their services as well. I soon felt right at home worshipping in the local Lutheran congregation. In addition, the more I read about Lutheran doctrine, the more I came to believe that it was

clearer and more precise than that of the Episcopal church. The Lutheran Book of Concord had a compelling and carefully articulated theology that made the assertions contained in the Anglican 39 Articles of Religion seem limited and vague by comparison. And so, I embraced Lutheranism and began my journey towards ordained ministry in that tradition.

Ruth: In addition to providing a superb Biblical education, Southeastern Baptist Seminary allowed me to delve more deeply into church history, as well as the theological underpinnings of Baptist belief. And in doing so, I discovered that I disagreed with the basic teachings and polity of the Southern Baptists. The concept of ordinances did not make sense to me. I believed that Baptism was more than a symbol of one's personal decision "to come to Christ." Otherwise, why would Christ have issued a specific command to baptize in the name of the Triune God? This name was God's essence,

active and powerful in its own right. Applied to the waters of Baptism, how could something NOT happen to the individual? I came to grasp that Baptism was a means of grace that brought God's very presence to the individual and removed the stain of original sin.

And would not the Christ who bid the children come to Him, freely want to offer this gift to all? Not only did I embrace the sacramental nature of Holy Baptism, I also went a step further to accept the validity of infant baptism. Not a popular stance among the Baptists. After I came to these conclusions about baptism, it was only a matter of time before my thoughts on the nature of holy

communion changed. No longer could I accept that this was a just a "memorial meal of grape juice and bread squares." The Gospel of St. John, chapter 6 made it very clear that Christ's body and blood somehow mysteriously were connected to the earthly elements of bread and wine.

I saw clearly that I was Southern but I was certainly not Baptist. So where to go? Which was the right Church with the right teachings? How could I connect with the Church founded by Christ without crossing over that invisible line separating Protestants from the "Dark Side?"

I had been enough of a Southern Baptist to absorb a prejudicial message that the Catholic Church was full of abuses and not the place a good and faithful "Bible-believing" Christian wanted to be.

During my last year of seminary, I found my answer in the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). I was attracted to the

Continued on page 5

"How could I connect
with the Church
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A Familiar Story

By Marcus Grodi

On January 24, 1785, in England before the Catholic Relief Act of 1791 or the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, the Rev. Philip Wyndam, an English Catholic priest, wrote a personal letter to Bishop James Bishop, the Vicar-Apostolate of the London district. What he is describing as a current problem nearly 222 years ago is just as currently difficult today for many Protestant clergy on the journey home. What Rev. Wyndam was trying to do then is what the *Coming Home Network International* continues, with your prayers and support, to do today. Please read this prayerfully. We do not know what eventually happened to the man and his family, but we do pray that the Church was responsive, and that their hopes were fulfilled.

Most Hon Sir,

An important affair makes me trouble you with this, also having consulted your Brother on the same, and by whose advice I write at present. The copy of a letter I received about two months ago will describe the nature of it much better than I can by words. Copy:

“Although I have not the pleasure of being personally acquainted with you, yet I humbly presume that you will not be angry with me for troubling you on this occasion, which, without doubt is of the greatest importance to myself, and those whom God hath given me, & as I hope, may through the grace of God be the means of adding several souls to the Communion of that Holy Catholick and Apostolic Church in which you are a priest.

“I am (and have been for more than eleven years) a Minister in the Church of England the greater part of which time I have spent in the study of the holy Scriptures in their original languages in reading the works of the primitive fathers, and of such other authors as conduce to the better understanding of those divine oracles. I have at length found (through the Blessing of Almighty God from whom alone faith proceedeth) and am fully persuaded as I hope for Salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, that there is no other Church on earth which can properly be called Catholic, and Apostolic but only the Holy Roman Church. I do firmly believe and will ever maintain Ium hos regit spiritus artus all the articles of the Creed of that Apostolic Father Pius the IV being well assured that they may all be proved by most certain testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, and by unanimous consent of the Fathers.

“I do therefore Rev. Father most earnestly desire to be ad-

mitted into the Communion of the Roman Church quo vera est omnium ecclesiarum Mater. As I am married, that Holy Church will not permit me to enter into Holy Orders, and having nothing to maintain a wife and six small children but

what I get by my ministry and by teaching school, I can not enter therein until I can procure some employment whereby I may be able to support myself and family.

“I humbly request that you will please to take the trouble of making my case known to such gentlemen of your acquaintance as may have it in their power to employ me either as a private tutor for the learned languages and mathematics, or in any other employment for which I am or (in a short time) may be qualified either in this Kingdom or any other. For I am ready to leave brethren, sisters, and friends for the sake of the ever Blessed

Jesus and his Holy Faith. It would not be disagreeable to me to teach school publicly (if I can’t be properly recommended). My wife is very desirous to be admitted into that Holy Communion. I can procure letters, testimonials of my life and conversation from many respectable Persons

“I most ardently wish for that happy day in which I and my family may be admitted into the Household of God for so St. Paul called all the members of the true churchO proclaram diem! cum ad illud divinum catholicorum concilium cietumque proficicer, cumque ir kae turbo, ot hominum factiosorum collusionem discedom.

“I now beg leave to subscribe myself &c. &c.

So for this letter to me. Since this letter I have taken the following steps. I first consulted Mr Lyre of Hassop who advised an immediate interview with him which I had a few days after with this clergyman. I found him a very learned

“There is no other Church on earth which can properly be called Catholic, and Apostolic but only the Holy Roman Church.”

man, but a man seemingly to me not qualified for any other employment but teaching, and to converse with books. The Hebrew, and Greek languages are as he tells me (not being a judge of them myself) very familiar to him having compared the Scriptures in those languages to the Latin vulgate. As much as I can judge of him, [he is] very sincere and determined to take the step he mentions in his letter what ever may be the consequences of it. I have examined him in regard of our Doctrine, and he gave me as good an account as if he had been brought up to it from his childhood and yet before he conversed with me he had never read any Catholic books but the following: The Poor Man's Catechism ... the Catechism of the Council of Trent, and ... Pius IV Profession of Faith.

In my way to Longbirch from whence I only returned last Saturday I called on him. His wife is very desirous of doing the same, and is fully determined she having been instructed by him. The children he has are all but small the least eldest about ten a girl, the second about 8 a girl, the third and forth two boys one of near 3 the other near 2 years old. The fifth a girl of a year and half old, and the sixth a boy in the cradle.

With these encumbrances I do not know what to do. If something could be done for him till such a time as he could get some employment, perhaps in time he might get sufficient to maintain his family. At present he has no prospect of it. Having heard that Mr. Fisher at your school is dead, could he not be employed as a teacher till such a time as bread might be found for him?

I represented all these things to your brother who very generously offered the sum of a 100 pounds towards it; another gentleman promised me the sum of twenty. Mr Lyre promised to give something and that yearly perhaps about 50 pounds at least for four or five years. For the remainder I must seriously recommend this affair to your charity and that of those good people to whom you may apply on this occasion.

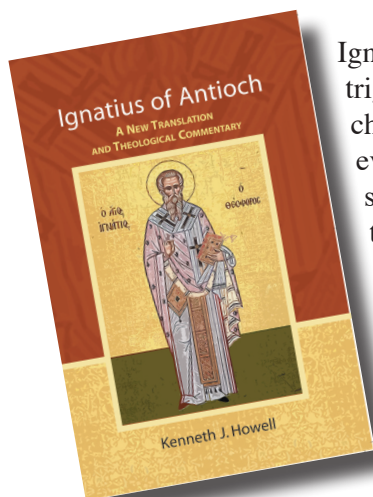
Your humble servant, T. Wyndam (Westminster Archives, # 60)

Featured Resources

Ignatius of Antioch

A New Translation and Theological Commentary

By Dr. Kenneth Howell



Just released!

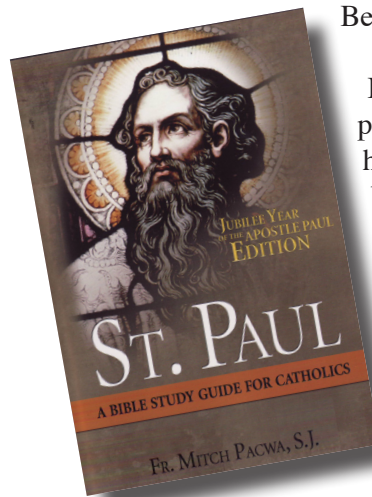
Ignatius of Antioch is an intriguing figure of the early church whose wisdom is relevant even today. Ignatius's seven letters are included in this powerful book along with Dr. Howell's insightful commentary. Pick up this book and discover the richness of Ignatius's teaching on subjects such as church unity, the Eucharist and the governmental structure of the church. Let Saint

Ignatius's words give you a glimpse of beauty of the early church.

St. Paul

A Bible Study Guide for Catholics

By Fr. Mitch Pacwa, S.J.



Begin the new year studying St. Paul!

Immerse yourself in the person of the Apostle Paul heroic in his martyr's death but so recognizably human in his conversion story and subsequent letters to the faithful. Gain fresh insights into your own personal growth potential through the Scripture of St. Paul: Whether you use this

guide for personal study, interactive journaling, or study with a group, you will find its format concise and easy to follow.

These books make great Christmas gifts!

**RECEIVE EITHER BOOK WITH ANY
DONATION OF \$35.00 OR MORE!**

**RECEIVE BOTH BOOKS WITH ANY
DONATION OF \$50.00 OR MORE!**

CHNI Bulletin Board



on EWTN television and radio
Mondays live at 8 PM EST Tues 1 & 10 AM, Wed 1 PM, Sat 11 PM

December 15

Kevin O'Brien
Former Atheist

December 22

Mike Allen
Former United Methodist minister

December 29

Pre-tape
Robert J. Baker
Bishop of Birmingham, AL

December 1

Open Line
Dr. Steven C. Smith
Former Willow Creek

December 8

Richard & Ruth Ballard
Former Lutheran ministers

THE COMING HOME NETWORK

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LIVE RADIO PROGRAM

WITH MARCUS GRODI & GUESTS

WEDNESDAYS LIVE AT 9:PM EST

Following our Holy Father's call to rediscover the inspiration of St. Paul and his writings, our *Deep in Scripture* live radio programs will be featuring guests discussing their favorite verses from St. Paul.

The live broadcast of the program has moved to **WEDNESDAY EVENINGS AT 9 PM EST.**

Marcus Grodi and his guest will be taking your calls and emails about the evening's text from St. Paul.

Go to www.deepinscripture.com for more information.

December 3

Jeff Schwehm

December 10

Matt Leonard

December 17

Scott Hahn

December 24

No program

December 31

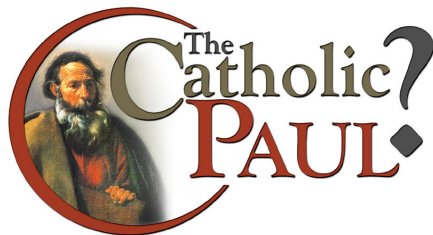
Pre-tape with
Rosalind Moss

Marcus Grodi & Dr. Scott Hahn

along with

The Coming Home Network International & The Saint Paul Center for Biblical Theology

present



Saturday - May 16th, 2009

Hilton Easton - Columbus, Ohio



For more information contact:

COMING HOME NETWORK INTL.

1.800.664.5110 - www.chnetwork.org

SCHEDULE

9:00 The Catholic Paul—

Dr. Scott Hahn

10:15 Paul through Jewish Eyes—

Dr. Jeff Marrow

11:45 Mass

1:00 Lunch

2:15 Saint Paul and the Mystical

Life—Dr. Mary Healy

3:15 The Mystery of Redemptive

Suffering—Jeff Cavins

4:30 Dinner

5:45 The Pauline Texts: Conversion

through The Verses I Never

Saw—Marcus Grodi

6:45 Romanism to Rome—

Father Mitch Pacwa

7:45 Closing—Marcus Grodi



www.thecatholicpaul.com



Spouses Network!

The *Coming Home Network International* is pleased to announce the introduction of a *Spouses Network* to our apostolate. The mission statement of the Spouses Network reads:

The *Spouses Network* exists to aid and provide fellowship for the spouses of clergy on the journey to the Catholic Church as well as those who are new Catholics. The mission of the *Spouses Network* is that through one-on-one assistance given by spouses of clergy who have embraced the Catholic faith, clergy spouses who are on the journey to Catholicism or have recently become Catholic will find a source of friendship, support, and increased love of Jesus Christ.

If the *Spouses Network* is something you feel called to, whether you be a spouse of a clergy who has made the journey home and would like to assist someone, or if you are a spouse of a minister and are either on the journey or a new Catholic, we would like to invite you to contact *CHNI* to assist us in the development of this network. If you would like more information or if you feel called to become a part of this apostolate please contact Mary Clare Piecynski by e-mail at maryp@chnetwork.org or by phone at 740-450-1175 ext 105. We do ask all the *Coming Home Network International's* members to please keep the *Spouses Network* in your prayers as we seek to answer the needs of those spouses of clergy on the journey home and those who are new converts.

"Come, follow me." Luke 18:22

Quo Vadis News

Are you a young person who is interested in the Catholic faith? Or perhaps are you a young person who would like to share your Catholic faith with others? If your answer to either question is "yes" you should discover the *Coming Home Network International's* youth network, *Quo Vadis*. *Quo Vadis* exists to help young people learn more about the Catholic Church and to come into a deeper relationship with our Lord and God Jesus Christ.

Quo Vadis has many ways that you can get involved! We, as always, ask primarily for your prayers that *Quo Vadis* will follow God's direction as we seek to share the good news of the Catholic Church with the young people of today. If, though,

you are a young person curious about the Catholic faith, if you need someone to talk to about what Catholics believe or if you are interested in fellowship with other young Catholics we invite you to join *Quo Vadis*. We have a website, www.quovadis youth.org with information about the network and ways to become involved. *Quo Vadis* would particularly like to invite you to come to our weekly chats, they are every Thursday night at 8pm EST in the *Coming Home Network* chatroom. We hope you can come! If you would like to learn more about *Quo Vadis*, or you have

a question about the Catholic faith you are welcome to contact Mary Clare Piecynski at maryp@chnetwork.org or call her at 740-450-1175 ext 105.





Please pray ...

✠CLERGY✠

✠ For Pete, a former Nazarene minister in Maryland, that the Lord would honor his step of faith in resigning his pastorate and provide him with employment so that his new found Catholic faith may be a witness to his wife leading her to the Church.

✠ For David, a Southern Baptist minister in Missouri, that the Lord would guide him step by step to full communion with the Church founded by Jesus.

✠ For a Reformed seminarian in Maryland, that, as he delves more deeply into the riches of the full truths of the Catholic faith, the Holy Spirit may guide his heart and mind.

✠ For David, a former United Methodist minister in Oklahoma, that his experience of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) may be one of growth and enlightenment as he draws ever closer to full communion with the Catholic Church.

✠ For Ron, a former Episcopal seminarian in Kansas, that his pilgrimage inspired by the writings of C. S. Lewis who reach their maturity in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

✠ For a Presbyterian in the state of Washington, that God would guide him to his true home in God's holy Church where his gifts and talents may be used for the strengthening of faith of the People of God.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. Each person mentioned has contacted us and is somewhere along their journey home. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs in general and specific of the *CHNetwork*, its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to :

*CHN Prayer List
P. O. Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702*

You may also email your prayer requests to:

prayers@chnetwork.org

We use only first names to preserve anonymity, and the following code:

(QV) Quo Vadis Requests



✠LAITY✠

✠ For all families who have loved ones who have walked away from the faith and for their re-version to the fullness of truth.

✠ For all those within the Helpers Network.

✠ For all those who feel called to the Catholic Church that the Holy Spirit guide them upon their journey of faith.

✠ For Debbie, Grant, Gary and Barbara in their personal struggles.

✠ For Lynn in her upcoming procedures may God grant her health and strength in the road ahead.

✠ All our priests and religious and those discerning their vocational calls.

✠ In thanksgiving for the success of the Deep in History conference.

✠ For the upcoming Catholic Paul conference on May 16th.

✠ For Becca and her current struggles that God will lovingly guide her along life's paths and show her the depths of his love.

✠ For baby Bek and his brain injuries, that God may grant him health and give strength to his family in his time of trial.

✠ For all who are struggling due to the current economic situation.

✠ For Melissa and her family in this time of hardship. That God may give them his healing and his peace. (QV)

✠ For all the members of Quo Vadis. (QV)

✠ For Spencer, Jessica, Elena, Sarah, Carolyn, Melanie, and Melissa in their search for truth. (QV)



New Newsletter Layout!

To usher in the new year, the *Coming Home Network International's* newsletter is receiving a new look. Beginning in January 2009, *CHNI's* newsletter will be revamped and redesigned. With the same great content, we hope you will enjoy our new layout. *CHNI* looks forward to hearing your comments and suggestions concerning the new design. Please contact Mary Clare Piecynski at maryp@chnetwork.org or at 740-450-1175 ext 105 to give your feedback.



Come and hear Marcus Grodi speak on conversion and the truth of the Catholic Faith:

December 6, 2008
St. Joseph's Catholic Church
36 Melmore Street
Tiffin, OH 44883
(419) 447-5848

February 27-28, 2009
Living the Catholic Faith Conference
Colorado Convention Center, Denver
For more information or to register,
call (303) 715-3260 or email
lcfc@archden.org.

The Pillar and Bulwark

Since the Deep in History Conferences began we have journeyed together from the time of the Early Fathers to the establishment of the Catholic Church here in North America. October 23, 2009, marks a new beginning in our journey to the past as the Deep in History Conference turns to the theme of the History of Catholic Doctrine.

Once again the focus of these weekends is to assist both Catholics and non-Catholics in their understanding of what it means to be Deep in History, Deep in Scripture, and Deep in Christ. In 2009, we will begin on the "rock" looking to understand the question of Authority: The Pillar and Bulwark.

Authority is at the root of Catholic discussion with our separated brethren, and in 2009, we will take an in-depth look at where authentic

authority lies. Marcus Grodi and the *Coming Home Network International* are bringing together another exciting list of speakers as we tackle the issue of authority - examining its scriptural and historical roots.

Returning to speak in 2009 are Dr. Scott Hahn, Dr. Paul Thigpen, Fr. Ray Ryland, Fr. Charles Connor, and Dr. Kenneth Howell. They will be joined with Steve Ray, Archbishop Michael Sheehan and Dr. Brant Pitre along with a host of others.

We look forward to seeing you again in October of 2009, as we ask "by what authority?"

For additional information or should you wish to assist in the advertising of this event please send an e-mail to rob@chnetwork.org, visit deepinhistory.com or call 1-740-450-1175.



stately liturgical practices, the emphasis upon sacramental theology, and, as I perceived it, the historical grounding of Lutheranism as the reformed, and thus, the purest remnant of the Church that Jesus Himself founded. As a Lutheran I could point to the writings of Martin Luther and his colleagues and say: "This is what Lutheranism is about. This is what we believe." To top things off, my father's ancestry was Norwegian Lutheran. So I felt confirmed in my decision on a personal level as well.

After graduation, I began an additional year of study at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (LTSS) in Columbia, SC. My days were filled with classes to round out my previous studies and to prepare me for ordination in the LCA.

Richard: In the meantime, after completing my undergraduate education, I was accepted at LTSS and became a candidate for ordination. My four years in the seminary were filled with challenging academic study and opportunities for spiritual growth. Each day was centered on the historic offices of prayer and there was a weekly celebration of the Eucharist that often made use of the rich ceremonial tradition of the church. I long had been drawn toward what could be simplistically termed a more "high church" understanding of faith and practice and this orientation grew and solidified during my seminary experience. It was there I discovered that this particular theological point of reference had a name, and within Lutheranism was called "evangelical catholicism." Evangelical catholics, by and large, regarded Lutheranism not as a separate and distinct Protestant denomination that permanently had divided itself from the Catholic Church, but rather as a movement of renewal and reform within and for the Catholic Church of the West. Evangelical catholics also held that the most critical ecumenical endeavor was to "heal the breach of the sixteenth century" and reestablish full-communion with the Bishop and Church of Rome. In discovering evangelical catholicism, I had located what I felt at that time was my true theological home and a vision that would guide my ministry within Lutheranism for the next 23 years.

Ruth: At the same time, I, too, came to an identical understanding. My old "Baptist-style" prejudices regarding the Catholic Church had faded. Richard and I met, fell in love, and were married in 1981.

The path to ordination in the LCA was almost a decade long struggle for me. Although the LCA approved the ordi-

nation of women as pastors in 1970, the day-to-day reality was somewhat different. Congregations were slow to accept female pastors, especially in the South. Such was the case in South Carolina where Richard had received his first call to parish ministry. This was an extremely painful time for me. As much as I loved Richard and supported his ministry, to watch Richard preside at the Eucharist and preach Sunday after Sunday while I sat in the pew as "pastor's wife" left me feeling depressed and conflicted. I, too, felt called by God to exercise the office of Word and Sacrament. Finally in 1988, Richard resigned his parish in South Carolina so I could become an associate pastor in North Carolina. After 2 ½ years there, we realized that we wanted to work together in a parish ministry. We moved to Millersburg, PA, and spent a very happy fifteen years together as pastors of a wonderful congregation. I thought I had it all: a fantastic husband, ordination, and a ministry that was flourishing; yet I felt something was missing.

"Without a magisterium that is the ultimate arbitrator in matters of faith and morals, orthodoxy becomes optional."

Richard: In 1988, the LCA and two other Lutheran church bodies merged to create a new church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). From its inception, there were ominous signs that this new church was inexorably moving in the direction of liberal mainline Protestantism and away from evangelical catholic commitments. This reality has been demonstrated in a variety of ways since the ELCA's formation, but most importantly in two crucial areas: faith and morals.

When considering the area of faith, one inevitably comes to the question of authority. During the course of our years in the ELCA both Ruth and I tried to always preach, teach, conduct worship and celebrate the sacraments in accordance with the Scriptures, Creeds, and Confessions of the Lutheran church. However, even as we were engaged in what we understood to be a faithful ministry, the ELCA pastor down the street could be teaching the exact opposite of what we were teaching and be considered just as authentic as were we, and perhaps more so. It all boiled down to an issue of authority. Who could say that point "a" was correct while point "b" was in error? In the ELCA, nobody, and that is the problem. Private interpretation of the Scriptures, Creeds, and Confessions is the norm. Without a magisterium that is the ultimate arbitrator in matters of faith and morals, orthodoxy becomes optional. This has happened in the ELCA as a whole on any number of issues ranging from the doctrine of the Trinity, to ecclesiology, to God language, to Eucharistic theology, to liturgy, and on and on.

Secondly, regarding morals, the ELCA has succumbed to the spirit of the age in which it was created. In matters concerning marriage (the ELCA permits sequential divorce and remarriage and tolerates artificial contraception), in matters of sexuality (the ELCA is considering whether or not active homosexuals can be ordained and their unions blessed) and in matters regarding life (the ELCA permits abortion and its health plan will even pay for an abortion by one of its covered members). In all of these matters and more the ELCA has rejected the normative nature of the historical teachings of Scripture and the Church and has adopted the tack of relativism based on principles of diversity and inclusiveness. In fact, the voting system of the ELCA is designed to empower quotas of those who, for the most part, are the least qualified to make theological decisions, and yet are elected and appointed to make such decisions at church conventions. During this time Ruth and I read an article published by a colleague titled “Real Churches Don’t Kill Babies.” This really got our attention and made us think very hard about the life issues in the ELCA and whether or not that pointed to the ELCA as a false church.

Ruth: The dramatic turn in the road that led me to Rome occurred on an afternoon when I happened into a Catholic bookstore and bought the book, *The Story of a Soul*. Despite an extensive seminary education, I had never heard of St. Therese of Liseux nor did I know that she was one of the most popular saints in the Catholic Church. I’m not even sure why I picked up the book other than to attribute it to the working of the Holy Spirit and to St. Therese herself.

St. Therese’s concept of “the little way” and her resolve to be “love in the heart of the Church” brought me back to the spirituality of my childhood. Therese had stripped away the façade of complex theological constructs to reveal a way of sanctity based on simple, unshakable faith in God’s love. I felt that I had discovered the Gospel anew. I returned to the bookstore and bought all the books I could find about or written by Carmelite saints. I poured over each volume, researched Discalced Carmelites on the Internet, and began incorporating Carmelite spirituality into my own prayer life. With the different witness of each Carmelite saint, I found a common thread of love for our Lady. My heart began to open up to this love of which they spoke. I found myself venerating the Blessed Virgin Mary in my personal devotions, praying to her, and asking for her intercession in my life and the lives of others. I loved her as a mother, and I believed she

loved me as her own daughter. And, while still a Lutheran pastor, I began to pray the rosary on a regular basis.

As a member of the Society of the Holy Trinity (STS), a Lutheran ministerium of which Richard and I were both members, I was encouraged to have a spiritual director. Msgr. John Esseff, whom I had met through a common friend, became mine. We discussed Carmelite topics, especially prayer and the spiritual life, for hours on end. Over a ten-year period, I came to the knowledge that my true self was Catholic and Carmelite. This understanding transformed me. I felt an intense yearning for the hidden, prayer filled life of a contemplative. Although Msgr. Esseff never pressured me to convert to Catholicism, I had a sense that I would not remain Lutheran. Without any doubt, I knew that God was leading me to the Catholic Church and to the Carmelite life-style.

During this same time period, I began taking lessons in iconography from Jody Cole, also a Catholic, at a Roman Catholic parish in Gettysburg, PA. Her classes stressed not only painting technique, but also the use of icons in prayer. This wonderful marriage of art and spirituality, and Jody’s witness to the Catholic faith, drew me even closer to Rome.

My final decision to convert did not originate from my trying to escape the problems of the ELCA as much as moving toward the conclusion of a very long spiritual journey toward Truth. As I reflected and prayed and studied, the beauty of the Catholic Church unfolded before me: the fullness of all seven sacraments; the sacrifice of the Mass;

the real, undeniable presence of Christ in the Eucharist; the respect for all life, from conception to natural death; the authority of the Magisterium and the Papacy; the emphasis upon the dignity and unique gifts of women; the saints and sacramentals... what richness the Catholic Church held! How could I remain apart from her any longer?

Richard: As Ruth was being drawn to the spirituality of the Carmelites, I was determined to go deeper to the roots of the faith, to the Scriptures and the teachings of the early Church Fathers about what the Scriptures meant. It was through an extensive reading of the Fathers of the Church over a period of years that I came to understand that the ELCA bore scant resemblance to the Church that was described in those writings. Furthermore, no other contemporary Lutheran church body did either! Where was the Bishop of Rome in our faith and practice? Where was the college of bishops and the

“I found myself venerating the Blessed Virgin Mary in my personal devotions, praying to her, and asking for her intercession in my life and the lives of others.”

magisterium? Where was the historic apostolic succession of bishops, priests, and deacons? Where was the sacrifice of the Mass? Where was Eucharistic adoration? Where were the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints in the life of the church? Where were sanctification, growth in holiness, and the role of good works in the schema of our redemption? Where was the morality demanded by the Church of those who called themselves followers of Christ? Where were the religious orders, ancient pious practices, and devotions? The list could go on. What became clear to me was the fact that the Church described by the Fathers was not the ELCA, not by any stretch of the imagination. If it was not the ELCA, then where was it?

As I looked around I found it in the place that I had for some time thought it would be: the Catholic Church with the Bishop of Rome at its head. It is in this Church that the teachings of the early canonical Fathers are accepted. It is this Church that has demonstrable continuity from the time of its founding by Jesus Christ. It is this Church alone that has never erred in teaching about faith and morals from the time of its inception, but has stood as a beacon of truth and grace. It is this Church in which all of my previous evangelical catholic commitments still exist, but in a rightly ordered and properly completed fashion. Everything that is good and true in classic Lutheranism, and there is much there that I value because it helped to form me in my faith, is to be found in the Catholic Church, but made whole and fulfilled.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit I became convinced, in the words of *Lumen Gentium*, 14: "Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in her could not be saved." I therefore determined that I must be a part of this Church that Jesus founded and decided that, no matter the cost, I would seek to enter it and finally realize the trajectory of my life that had begun within Lutheranism all those many years ago

Ruth: Richard and I decided to take a step of faith and ar-

ranged to be received into full communion on Easter Thursday, April 20, 2006, by the Most Rev'd. Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of the Diocese of Harrisburg. Originally this was to have taken place at the Diocesan Center, but on Easter Monday I was diagnosed with a serious illness. Hastily, everything was changed to the chapel at Holy Spirit Hospital, where I had been admitted as a patient. Msgr. Esseff and Richard's spiritual director, Sr. Cor Immaculatum, served as our sponsors. Two years later I was received as a secular Carmelite in the Flower of Carmel Community (OCDS), Asheville, NC, and am now in formation. At last, we are home and, in the words of another convert, the Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman, have moved "out of shadows and phantasms into the Truth."

Dr. Richard and Ruth Ballard are parishioners of St. Mary's Catholic Church, Greenville, SC. Ruth writes (paints) icons

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and contemporary artwork on religious themes, is a secular Carmelite, and a homemaker. She is in the preliminary stages of founding an apostolate, "Art from the Heart," through which she will be available to parishes as a lecturer on the topic of iconography, provide classes and lesson plans for parochial and parish schools on the topic of iconography and other liturgical art, as well as provide artwork for sale. She can be reached at: artfromtheheart@att.net. Richard is completing a certification in bereavement counseling and is in the developmental stages of an apostolate that will provide bereavement support

for parishes, individuals, and groups, through which he will serve also as a conference and retreat leader. He is in the process of writing a book on his conversion story titled, "How far is it from Wittenberg to Rome?" and hopes to begin preparation for the permanent diaconate in the near future. He can be reached at: richardgballard@att.net. In addition, Ruth, Richard, and Dr. Ronda Chervin, a well-known author and EWTN personality, are collaborating on a book about saints and heaven. The Ballards will be guests on the Journey Home program December 8.

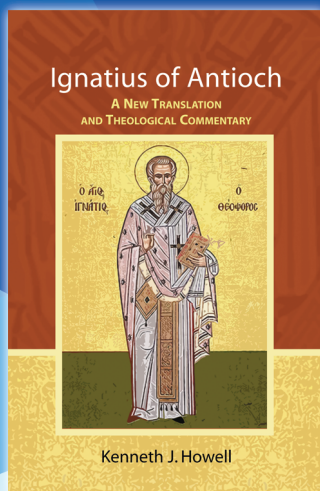
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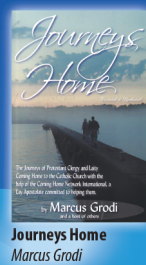
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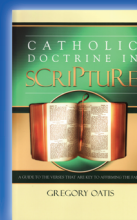
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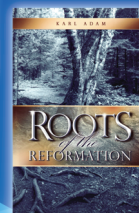
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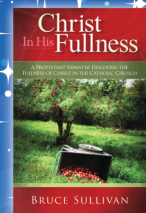
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