



February 2009 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Toward the Celestial City

— Dr. Frank Hermann

Browsing the religion section of the local used bookstore, I caught sight of a peculiar volume, the black and red ink on the spine contrasting sharply against the drab surroundings. “Now, there’s an oxymoron!” I thought to myself as I reflected on the book’s title, which read *Catholic and Christian*. Intrigued by the apparent paradox, I reluctantly grasped the book from the shelf and began reading, beginning with the ornate back cover. The author was a certain Dr. Alan Schreck, a professor of theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville. His objective was simple—to clarify Catholic doctrine for the many Catholic and non-Catholic Christians who misunderstand it. At \$4.50 the paperback seemed a bargain I couldn’t afford to ignore. Little did I know that this meager investment would pave the foundation for my journey home to the Catholic Church.

I grew up in a secular family with little concern for things spiritual. I can recall visiting church with my family on only two occasions, both times to a Unitarian congregation. We never prayed and rarely talked about God. At the age of 19, however, after reading the gospels for the first time in my life, I underwent a profound transformation and yielded my life

to Jesus Christ. Our neighbor at the time, who was the pastor of a Southern Baptist Church, quickly became my mentor, teaching me literally everything I knew about theology. Noticing my passion for studying the Scriptures, Brother Lee, as we affectionately called him, encouraged me to pursue my passion on a more formal level. Within a year, I found myself enrolled as a biblical studies major at Criswell College, a conservative Southern Baptist college in Dallas, TX.

Criswell College (founded by the late W. A. Criswell, long-time pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas) was known principally for two things: its staunch defense of biblical inerrancy and its unwavering proclamation of premillennial eschatology. Although I initially subscribed to both doctrines, I soon abandoned the dispensational approach to interpreting Scripture in favor of a more reformed view, eventually becoming a committed—and, it now pains me to say, militant—Calvinist. The attraction toward reformed theology soon led me into the Theonomy movement, where I remained content for several years.

Upon graduating from college I experienced something of an existential crisis. Although I had a passion for studying ...continued on page 2

Journeys Home

FEATURED RESOURCES

Beginning this month, *CHNI's* monthly newsletter will be featuring resources that we believe will specifically aid our members in evangelization. The resources we will be featuring are materials that *CHNI* uses to give away to those on the journey to the Catholic Church.

Made For More

By Curtis Martin



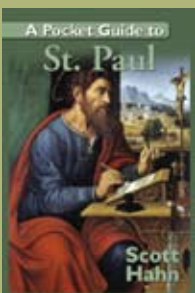
A fantastic book for young people!

In this book, renowned Catholic leader Curtis Martin presents the evidence that we have been "made for more" than just

the intoxications of this world. We have been made for greatness—and we will only reach such heights when we first come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A Pocket Guide to St. Paul

By Dr. Scott Hahn



A handy, yet thorough guide to St. Paul

St. Paul was a thinker, a pastor, a missionary, a revolutionary, and a martyr. By the end of his life - and largely thanks to his efforts

- Christianity enjoyed a worldwide presence. We cannot understand Christianity unless we understand his message. We cannot understand ourselves as Christians unless we see ourselves in the light of his words. Pick up this powerful guide to St. Paul and be inspired by this Apostles to the Gentiles.

Please visit
www.chresources.com

for closeout prices on selected books while supplies last.

...Journeys Home Continued...

the Bible and had even become licensed to preach in Southern Baptist churches, I had never felt called to be a pastor. I did, however, feel a romantic tug to be a missionary—more specifically, a Bible translator. I had enjoyed studying Greek in college and was enticed by the thought of living in an exotic culture, translating the New Testament into languages unknown to the Western world. So I began studying at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the training arm of the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

There I learned to read and write the phonetic alphabet and to parse languages into their underlying structures. But the most important thing I learned was that God was not calling me to be a missionary. Indeed, I concluded that God was not calling me into any full-time ministry. I nonetheless retained an evangelistic spirit and a desire to spread the gospel, even if only in a lay capacity. To make a long story short, I returned to graduate school, eventually earning a master's degree in applied English linguistics and a Ph.D. in rhetoric and

composition. To earn a living, I began teaching English at a local community college. Meanwhile, I remained active in my church, teaching Sunday school as well as a weekly home Bible study.

Some of my fellow parishioners had asked me to devote a class to the topic of how we got the Bible. It was a subject I had studied in college, but as I prepared for the lesson, I began to see the issue in a new light—one that was incongruent with my beliefs about Scripture and the Church.

Now, as a Protestant I never believed that the Bible had simply fallen out of the sky or that the Lord had dictated its contents to the apostles and given them explicit instructions about what to write. Like most Evangelicals, I realized that the New Testament emerged as part of an organic process in which the Holy Spirit inspired fallible men to record infallibly the spiritual and moral truths He willed mankind to know for their salvation. Yet, the full implications of this process escaped me until now, as I researched the topic in preparation for our Bible study.

Although Christians had unanimously accepted the four gospels and the Pauline epistles from a very early time, the Church Fathers remained divided for centuries over the inspiration of other texts. Even as late as the fourth century the issue of the canon still had not been resolved decisively. Among the disputed books of his day that Eusebius (ca. A.D. 264-340) lists in his *Ecclesiastical History* were James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and the Revelation of John, all books that I as a Protestant took to be divinely inspired. Moreover, other books that we do not consider canonical today, such as 1 Clement and The Shepherd of Hermas, were held in high esteem

by more than a few Church Fathers and were frequently cited in homilies. Only gradually, through tradition and a great deal of discernment, did the bishops become likeminded about the shape of the New Testament canon.

The more I pondered these historical truths, the more unsettled I felt about my own views of Scripture and the Church. By what authority, I asked, did Christians in the second and third centuries govern their lives, since they had recourse neither to the apostles nor to the Bible as we know it? Furthermore, what if the bishops erred when defining the canon of Scripture? This, I feared, was a distinct possibility, for as a Protestant I never believed in an infallible Church, only in an infallible Bible. But since a house is only as strong as the foundation upon which it is built (Mt 7:24-27), how could I place my faith—indeed, the state of my eternal soul—on a scriptural edifice that might be built on sand? In short, I realized that if the early Church was fallible, my Bible might very well be also.

It was at this time that I encountered Alan Schreck's book *Catholic and Christian*. Under any other circumstances, I would have ignored the book, treating it as propaganda unworthy of my attention. Yet, on this occasion I decided to give this Professor Schreck an impartial hearing, if for no other reason than to collect ammunition that I could use to evangelize Catholics.

Although I was never one who believed that all Catholics went to hell, I did harbor a deep-seated animosity toward the Catholic Church, believing that it had, as the Lord accused the Scribes and Pharisees of doing, neglected the commandments of God for the traditions of men (Mk 7:8). Idolatry, simony, works salvation, pomp—these were all things I associated with Catholicism. I can remember on one occasion even feeling strong revulsion as I watched a procession of bishops on television, their hands folded in pious reverence while they strutted around in their little red caps, chanting Latin and pretending to be ambassadors of God. "What a joke!" I thought to myself as I mocked them from the comfort of my living room.

My anti-Catholic sentiments stemmed from a number of sources, including many reformed authors whom I admired. One author in particular was Loraine Boettner, whose infamous work *Roman Catholicism* became the definitive sound bite for the emerging field of anti-Catholic apologetics. Another influence, of all things, was a comic book—namely, Jack Chick's *Alberto* series. Chronicling the life of Alberto Rivera, an alleged Jesuit priest turned Fundamentalist, these captivating comics portray a massive conspiracy in which the Vatican, in an effort to obtain global dominance, secretly orchestrates the events of history, including the advent of Islam, communism, and the Mafia. Now, I was only nineteen years old at the time and a brand new Christian. And although I never believed half of what I read in these comic books, they did, I am convinced, exert an influence on me, contributing in some small way to my indoctrination against Catholicism.

It was with this mindset that I approached *Catholic and Christian*. Naturally, I was skeptical and not a little defensive. The author's conciliatory tone, however, quickly disarmed me so that I began to read the book out of a genuine sense of curiosity. I had read books by Protestant authors about Catholicism, but this was actually the first book by a Catholic I had ever read. ...continued on page 4

CHNI NEWSLETTERS BY EMAIL

The *Coming Home Network International's* monthly newsletter is now available to be received by e-mail. Though CHNI members will always be able to continue receiving the newsletter through regular mail, members now have the option to have it delivered right to their inbox. Through e-mail the newsletter is more readily accessible to take with you, it is easier to forward onto friends who are not members and it is simpler to make multiple copies. As an added bonus, e-mail newsletters will be in full color. CHNI members have the option to receive the newsletter both by e-mail, and through regular mail. To sign up to receive the *Coming Home Network International's* monthly newsletter by e-mail, please contact Rob Rodgers.

Rob Rodgers

rob@chnetwork.org
740-450-1175 ext 109



EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

on television and radio, hosted by
Marcus Grodi, president of CHNI.

TELEVISION

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM EST
Encores: Tuesdays 1:00 & 10:00 AM EST
Wednesdays 1:00 PM EST
Saturdays 11:00 PM EST

RADIO

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM EST
Encores: Wednesdays 2:00 PM EST
Saturdays 6:00 PM EST

February 2

Open-line
TBA

February 9

Dr. Frank W. Hermann
Former Southern Baptist

February 16

(English Pre-Tape)

February 23

Dr. Allen Hunt
Former United Methodist minister



...Journeys Home Continued...

Although I found myself disagreeing with the author quite often, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Catholics and Protestants were not as far apart on certain issues as I had thought. One issue of importance to me was justification. As a reformed Evangelical, I was a staunch proponent of *sola fide*, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Catholicism, I believed, was a religion of works, one in which man tried to ascend into heaven through his own merits, by pulling himself up by his own bootstraps, so to speak. In true religion God seeks man; but in Catholicism I perceived just the opposite—a religion in which man seeks God. My mantra was Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast.” In my mind, Catholicism was hopelessly irreconcilable with this creed.

By referring to the Council of Trent’s “Decree on Justification,” however, Professor Schreck explained that although the Catholic Church insists on the necessity of good works as a fruit of justification, it indeed teaches that salvation occurs solely through God’s grace and that even our faith and good works are gifts of God that cannot be earned. This new understanding of the Catholic doctrine of justification sat well with me, for the Calvinist in me obstinately refused to consider any theology in which man makes the first move. Man, every Calvinist believes, is totally depraved as a result of original sin, and in an unregenerate state has no more desire to be saved than a plate of broccoli can have a desire to be eaten. Catholic theology, I realized, also recognizes this inability of man to reach out to God, thus stressing the need for Christ’s crucifixion and the grace of justification that flows freely from it.

Throughout its pages, *Catholic and Christian* addressed a number of other Catholic beliefs (for example, prayer to the dead, baptismal regeneration, and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist) that I found difficult to accept, believing them to be superstitions introduced relatively late in the life of the Church. The author, however, provided copious citations from the Church Fathers to show how these doctrines were celebrated among early Christians. Now, being a Reformed Baptist, I had an immense respect for the opinions of the early Fathers. Their proximity to the apostles and their zealous devotion to Christ, even to the point of martyrdom, gave them a certain credence and authority in my mind. After all, in my thinking, they lived in an age of pristine Christianity, an age when the words of the apostles were still ringing in their ears. I had been indoctrinated to believe that the Church had remained relatively untarnished until the fourth century, when Constantine corrupted it with the mass baptism of his pagan army. But the ante-Nicene Fathers lived before that time—my reasoning continued—so their beliefs could be viewed as a faithful reflection of the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

Knowing how easy it is to quote someone out of context (especially someone who has been dead for almost two thousand years), I suspected that Professor Schreck might be playing fast and loose with the words of the early Fathers. So I decided to do some fact checking: I purchased the 10-volume set *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and began to peruse it zealously, beginning with page one. For the next six months, I spent practically every spare moment reading or ruminating on the words of the early Fathers. By the time I finished,



The hair on my neck stood at attention as I heard him say, “They [the Gnostics] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ...”



my view of the early church had changed considerably.

As a Protestant, I had believed that the sacraments (“ordinances” as they are generally called in Baptist circles) are mere symbols with no objective efficacy. Baptism, I believed, was simply an outward sign of an inward reality: death to sin and a new life in Christ. The Lord’s Supper was likewise just a symbol to me, a memorial of Christ’s broken body—nothing more, nothing less. While reading the Fathers, however, I was confronted with a radically different perception of the so-called ordinances—a sacramental one, a very sacramental one.

I can remember the first time I read St. Ignatius of Antioch’s Letter to the Smyrnaeans. The hair on my neck stood at attention as I heard him say, “They [the Gnostics] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins” (7:1). Here, after all, was a man who was bishop of one of the largest and most prestigious sees in the primitive Church and who, according to early tradition, was a disciple of St. John the Apostle. And this man was in no uncertain terms professing faith in the corporeal presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Another text that caught me off guard is in the First Apology of Justin. Describing the baptismal liturgy at the Church of Rome, St. Justin Martyr (ca. 150 A.D.) remarks:

“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. They are then brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated” (LXI).

I had been taught that baptismal regeneration was heresy, “works salvation.” Yet, here in the writings of St. Justin was unmistakable evidence that the doctrine existed at least as far back as the mid second century, scarcely over fifty years after St. John the Apostle had died. Could heresy of this magnitude have crept into the Church undetected in such a short period of time? I had a hard time believing so. False doctrines have competed with the gospel from the very beginning. But from the very beginning the Church has combated them indefatigably, one after another. Gnosticism, Arianism, Sabellianism—these and other heresies were combated routinely by leaders of the primitive Church. Nowhere, however, is there any record of the Church denouncing the ideas of baptismal regeneration and the real presence. ...continued on page 6



DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Live Radio program with
Marcus Grodi & Guests

Wednesdays **LIVE** at 9:00 PM EST
Encores: Friday @ 9 PM EST
Sundays @ 6 AM 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.

DIS guests February 2009

February 4 TBA
February 11 Nate Roberts
February 18 Al Kresta
February 25 Fr. Eric Bergman

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTL'

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...Journeys Home Continued...

The most reasonable conclusion I could draw was that the Church did not attack these ideas because she believed them herself and propagated them in her life and liturgy.

Like Saul of Tarsus, however, I was still kicking against the goads, and was resolved not to go down without a fight. Even though by this time I was under enormous conviction from the Holy Spirit, there were still a number of doctrinal issues and liturgical practices in the Catholic Church that rubbed me the wrong way. Twelve years of Protestant indoctrination does not wane easily, and my stubbornness only compounded matters, making it all the more difficult for me to embrace the Catholic faith. The veneration of Mary, the use of images in worship, and the infallibility of the Pope were a few of the doctrines that proved to be major stumbling blocks to me.

I knew I could not in good conscience remain in my current denomination—my study of the early Fathers had convinced me of that—yet I did not want to become Catholic. So I began exploring alternatives. I started visiting Anglican and Eastern Orthodox churches in an effort to unite myself to a body of believers that was sacramental and that, most importantly, could trace its origins to the apostles.

After attending an Anglican mass one Sunday, I spoke to the priest and explained my dilemma to him, saying that I was thinking about becoming Anglican. His words were not very encouraging, for he confided in me that he himself was feeling disillusioned with the direction his church was moving regarding the ordination of women and gay bishops; and he told me bluntly how he admired the Catholics and the Orthodox for standing firm on these issues. That was the last time I visited an Anglican church.

My options had become narrower. Indeed, I really had only two options—Orthodoxy or Catholicism. Moreover, as I weighed these choices, I realized that the deciding factor would boil down to a single issue: papal authority. Both churches shared the same rich liturgical and sacramental life; both professed faith in the ancient creeds; both, I was convinced, possessed valid holy orders; but only one could possess the fullness of truth.



The Four Fathers of the Latin Church — Jacob Jordaens



I revisited the Fathers more closely to determine their take on the issue. Although the tragic rift of 1054 had not yet occurred, the early Church did experience more than a few controversies and schisms that required intervention, and more often than not it was the bishop of Rome to whom the universal Church looked to resolve such matters.

The first recorded instance in which the bishop of Rome was invoked to resolve a controversy occurred in approximately 90 A.D. (perhaps earlier), when St. Clement wrote to the Church of Corinth, warning a group of trouble-makers there with these stern words:

*"Owing, dear brethren, to the sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened **to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points respecting which you consulted us** [emphasis mine]; and especially to that shameful and detestable sedition, utterly abhorrent to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-confident persons have kindled to such a pitch of frenzy, that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be universally loved, has suffered grievous injury....Receive our counsel, and you shall be without repentance....If, however, any shall disobey the words spoken by Him through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and serious danger...."*

Clement is obviously exercising authority here, but why? Some authors, attempting to deny any papal jurisdiction outside of Rome, maintain that Clement was merely sticking his nose where it didn't belong. The text, however, makes clear that he had been consulted about the matter, that the Church at Corinth had sought his counsel. Others maintain that Clement's counsel was merely that of a fellow bishop doing his part to mediate a crisis in a neighboring see. Again, though, the tenor of the passage makes such an interpretation unlikely. Clement speaks with confident authority that he is declaring the will of God to the Corinthians. He does not speak with the voice of one merely trying to mediate a neighborly dispute.

The annals of history repeatedly show similar events: a heresy or a schism arises, and the Church looks to the bishop of Rome to resolve the matter, imploring him to convene an ecumenical council if necessary. It became apparent to me that even before the papacy evolved to its later form, the bishop of Rome possessed a unique charism as the successor of Peter. Furthermore, if all this were not enough, one could not ask for a clearer affirmation of papal authority than the one St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, provides in his oft-cited *Against Heresies*:

"But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been

...continued on page 8



MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

February 27-28, 2009

**2009 Living the Catholic Faith
Conference**

At the Colorado Convention Center — Denver. This year's conference theme is: Live with Conviction "For the love of Christ compels us." (2 Cor. 5:14)

For more information or to register:

(303) 715-3260 -or- email lcfc@archden.org

March 7, 2009

Men's Spirituality Conference

The theme is "Let Us...Strengthen One Another". In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia at the Cardinal O'Hara High School.

For more information or to register:

www.archphila.org/evangelization/famlife/famlife.htm

NEW LOOK

The *Coming Home Network International's* newsletter has received a new look. 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 Piccynski to give your feedback.



Mary Clare Piccynski

maryp@chnetwork.org

740-450-1175 ext. 105



SPOUSES NETWORK

The *Coming Home Network Intl'* 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 and His Church.

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 Piccynski 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.

...Journeys Home Continued...

announced to men by the apostles. **With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree** [emphasis mine], that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition" (3:3:2).

Needless to say, I knew by now what I needed to do. Yet, I continued to drag my feet, praying that God would provide me with light or a sign or something to help me make my decision. That "something," I believe, came one day as I was eating dinner.

There was in my neighborhood a fast-food restaurant I used to frequent named Popeyes, which served Cajun-style chicken and biscuits. I had eaten there many times, but on this one occasion as I ate my meal from the privacy of my dining room, my eyes caught glimpse of the bag from which I had taken the food, and there shouting clearly at me in capital, red letters was not one word—POPEYES—which I had seen countless times, but two: POPE•YES! Blinking hard and shaking my head in bewilderment, I looked at the bag a second time, which now read POPEYES again. I sat there in a state of paralysis for several minutes as I asked myself what had just happened. To this day, I don't know whether it was the Holy Spirit who was giving me a sign, or whether it was my own subconscious mind trying to impose order on randomness. What I do know is that the event shook me out of my complacency.

Within a month I was attending weekly catechetical meetings with a local parish priest to learn as much as I could about the Catholic faith. Although this was not the typical means by which a convert is initiated into the Church, the priest made an exception for me since I already had theological training and since the next RCIA class was not scheduled to begin for six months. Finally, on Pentecost Sunday, 1996, the moment arrived that I had been eagerly awaiting for the past several months: my first communion. I had eaten crackers and sipped grape juice from church pews many times before under the pretense that I was celebrating the Lord's Supper. This time, however, I wasn't just eating Saltines. I was receiving the body and blood, soul and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. I had joined together mystically not only to Christ, but to His body as well—to the see of Peter and to all the saints who have communed with God throughout the ages. It felt good.

As St. Augustine did over sixteen centuries ago, I have embarked on a journey toward the City of God, a celestial city where, in Augustine's words, God "shall be the end of our desires who shall be seen without end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness." (*City of God* book 22, chapter 30) And although I see many roads pointing to that celestial city, the only one I trust to lead me home is the one that takes me first to Rome. ■



Frank W. Hermann, Ph.D. is assistant professor of English at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, where he lives with his wife and four children. Dr. Hermann will be a guest on the Journey Home program on February 9.

Prayer List

Clergy

- For Sean, a Lutheran seminarian, that the Lord Jesus would guide him during the time of transition as he is received into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For Matt, a Lutheran minister in Delaware, that as he seeks new employment the Lord would be a light unto his feet and the Holy Spirit would give him God's peace.
- For Mark and his family in Indiana, that the Holy Spirit would heal their hearts and make it obvious where they are to take their next steps.
- For Tom, a Non-denominational minister in Michigan, that as he learns more of the truth of the historic Church of Jesus he will be drawn ever deeper into the arms of the Catholic faith.
- For George, an Episcopal priest in South Carolina, that the Holy Spirit would soften the heart of his wife toward the Catholic Church and that she would become open to hearing what the Church truly teaches.
- For Michael, an Episcopal priest in Illinois, that the Holy Spirit would give him the courage to return to the Church no matter what sacrifices he may be called to make.
- For John, a Baptist minister in Ohio, that God would give him a hunger for the Truth that can only be fulfilled by the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- For Carol, a Baptist minister in Tennessee, that God would effectively call her back to his holy Church.
- For Mark, a Southern Baptist minister in Virginia, that the Lord Jesus would clear all impediments that now block him from coming into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For Kira, the wife of a minister, that God would soften her husband's heart so that she may follow her conscience as the Lord has formed it in his grace and encourage her to become a Catholic Christian.
- For George, an Episcopal priest in Louisiana, that he would gain the strength to follow his convictions and conscience.
- For Trent, a United Church of Christ minister, that Jesus would grant him the grace to be able to receive of him in the Holy Eucharist in the fullness of his body, blood, soul and divinity.
- For Harold, a former Pentecostal minister in California, that the Lord would speak to the hearts of their family so that they may understand and rejoice at their loved ones becoming Catholics.
- For Vincent, an Assemblies of God minister, that he may come to rejoice in the fullness of the faith, which subsists in the Holy Catholic Church.

Laitie

- For Fr. Henry in all his work with our clergy.
- For Fr. Brady, Fr. Darling, and Fr. Emmett and their health.
- For a member's father and his healing after back surgery.
- For Michelle, her family, and their intentions.
- For Laura and Kathleen that God give them his grace and shower them with his love.
- For Stacy and her personal struggles.



- For Caroline and her cancer treatment.
- For the repose of the soul of Matthew and that his family finds solace in God's peace.
- For all 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 all the members of *Quo Vadis (QV)*.
- For the upcoming *Catholic Paul* conference on May 16.

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 & 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*

THE WINNOWING EFFECT OF THE EUCHARIST

I'm assuming there are at least three groups of readers perusing this *CHNewsletter* article: those who are presently on the journey considering the Catholic faith, those who've already "made it home," and those who are praying for both, life-long Catholics who are partners in this apostolate (we call Tertiary members). But since we encourage *CHNI* members to pass this newsletter along to non-Catholic friends and family members, it's possible some non-inquiring, non-Catholics might be reading this. What could possibly compel otherwise happy non-Catholic Christians to consider and then convert to the Catholic faith? Surprisingly, many, many things, but one of the most important is found in chapter six of the Gospel of John. In fact, all of chapter six, not just those controversial verses in the 50s, directly addresses why so many of us concluded we must become Catholic, for one of the primary themes of this powerful chapter is winnowing: thinning down the crowd to those who truly believe.

The chapter begins with the miraculous feeding of the five-thousand, and, as a result, *"When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!'"* (6:14) So we begin with a large crowd of people who, with the courage of "group think," exclaim their faith in Jesus. But Jesus wasn't convinced. The next day, when Jesus was preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59), he posed the subject that would serve to winnow down this crowd: *"Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal'"* (26-28).

In response, the crowd, or at least one or two of their spokesmen, asked the age-old question, *"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"* (28) As Jews, they should have had an age-old answer to this question, but people are always seeking an easier answer than the one they already have. So Jesus gave them an answer they didn't expect. He essentially drew a line in the sand, based on their very exclamation of faith, and dared them to cross: *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent"* (29).

The crowd responded with their own "line." Ok, admittedly they had responded from full stomachs. *"So they said to him, 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'"* (30-31)

Seems like an amazingly sophisticated response for your average uneducated rural Jewish audience, since they quoted Exodus 16:15 which reads, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." Could one of the pharisees, buried in the crowd, have been taunting Jesus, trying to trick him into blasphemy? Jesus knowing what is in the hearts of men, as John tells us earlier, responded, not flippantly, but with his most serious form of proclamation: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world"* (32-33).

It's possible that before the Pharisee could wrap his mind around this for another theological response, several commoners from the crowd, like the woman at the well, cried out in earnest, *"Lord, give us this bread always"* (34). This request may have offended the pharisees and scribes, who considered themselves the ones to whom the crowd was to come for spiritual food, but before they could answer, Jesus responded: *"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day"* (35-40).

Here was an answer none within hearing ever expected. Imagine, if you have a comedic imagination, a thousand people standing with their jaws to the ground. This is the last we hear of the crowd. This was more than they can handle.

The winnowing process has become, leaving only the Jews (i.e., the pharisees and scribes) and those who had declared themselves “the disciples of Jesus.”

The pharisees and scribes huddled up and “murmured at him, **because he said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’**” They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (41-42)

But you can’t keep anything from Jesus. Often it is reported that he knows what people are whispering. Here is his first opportunity to correct any misunderstanding they might have concerning his words, but he doesn’t: “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day... Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. **I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh**” (43-51).

Startled, the pharisees and scribes probably pulled their huddle in even tighter and “disputed among themselves, saying, **‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’**” (52) They expressed in whispers what the crowd had found revolting: Jesus was not speaking figuratively—his words seemed to mean exactly what he said.

Presuming that Jesus again heard their murmurings, he had a second opportunity to soften any misunderstandings, but instead he couldn’t have piled it on deeper: “**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; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever**” (53-59).

From this point on in chapter 6, we hear nothing more of the Jews (pharisees and scribes). They have huddled away to fine-tune their plot against Jesus, leaving only his disciples. Apparently some of them are not happy with the boldness of His words. “Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, **‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’**” (60) Once again, Jesus knew “in himself that his disciples murmured at it” (61) and with his friends now had an intimate third opportunity to straighten out any misunderstandings. In other circumstances, Jesus has admitted to his followers that to the crowd he often

spoke in parables while to them he was clear, sharing with them the secrets of the kingdom of God (cf., Luke 8:9f). So, as with the parable of the Sower, he could have given them the keys to his symbolism. But he wasn’t speaking in symbols. To them he said, possibly with growing frustration (“*O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?*” Matthew 17:17), “*Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe*” (61-64).

I used to argue that here Jesus was admitting that he was only speaking in images not literally, but no where else in Scripture does Jesus use “spirit” to mean symbol. When he said “*God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24), did he mean that God is only a symbol? When he said, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5), was he only speaking figuratively? Hardly, but regardless, even his closest friends did not understand him as speaking figuratively, for we read that “[a]fter this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (66).

The winnowing process, all focused on accepting Jesus at his word concerning eating his body and drinking his blood, had reduced the large crowd down to twelve, and “Jesus said to the twelve, **‘Do you also wish to go away?’**” (67), and the winnowing process had not ended, for only one of these spoke up: “*Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’*” (68-69).

Three quick things in closing: First, is there any wonder that Jesus chose Simon Peter upon whom to build his Church? Here Peter models for us “*the obedience of faith*” (Romans 1:5), even when we do not fully understand; even when our senses tell us something different than what Jesus is calling us to believe. Let’s face it, how hard was it for Simon Peter to believe that the plain human being standing before him was “the Holy One of God?”

Second, when we recognize, through the teaching of Saint Paul, that the Church, “*the pillar and bulwark of the truth*” (1 Tim 3:15) is the very “*body of Christ*” (1 Cor 12; Eph 4), then if we want truth, “*to whom shall we go?*”

Finally, with whom in Jesus’ audience do you affiliate: the crowd, the Jewish leaders, the wider circle of disciples who left because they found Jesus’ teachings too hard to stomach, the eleven who sat silent, unwilling to commit themselves, or Simon Peter who, at least in this instance, allowed faith to seek understanding? Where are you in the winnowing process?

Sincerely in Christ — Marcus Grodi ■

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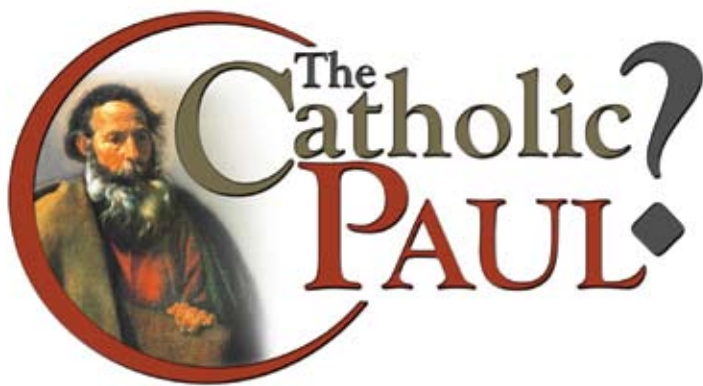
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Marcus Grodi & Dr. Scott Hahn

— along with —

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

— present —



Saturday - May 16th, 2009 - Hilton Easton - Columbus, OH

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*



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