



February 2014 Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

“A Bible-Believer Becomes Catholic by Believing the Bible”
By Wesley Vincent Ph.D. 1

EWTN’s *The Journey Home* Schedule 2

“A Cold Winter but a Warm Faith: The Life and Martyrdom of Polycarp”
By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell 4

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



A Bible-Believer Becomes Catholic by Believing the Bible

By Wesley Vincent Ph.D.

Our devout, fundamentalist-evangelical family of six children attended Sunday School, Sunday morning and evening worship services, Wednesday evening prayer meeting, and choir rehearsal after prayer meeting — even when traveling. My parents alternately took us to Nazarene and Baptist congregations. Nazarenes taught Arminian doctrine; that sinning resulted in loss of salvation. Baptists taught “once saved - always saved - safe and secure for eternity.” As early as grade school I became aware that different denominations taught contradictory doctrines, yet logic dictates that only one can be correct. Fundamentalist-evangelical pastors taught the precepts: (1) the Bible is the *only* authority; (2) salvation is by *faith alone*; and (3) the requirement to live according to biblical morality while simultaneously believing that our actions (works) had nothing to do with salvation. Fundamentalists erected legalistic barriers around immoral behavior in order to avoid any occasion for temptation.

I never remember not believing in Jesus Christ, though our family had faith, we were not happy. There was, however, one bright spot in my childhood: Bible Club.

The late Allan Emery, Jr. and his wife, Marian, held Bible Club in their living room for 50 to 90 teenagers every Thursday night. Allan was President and Chief Operating Officer of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. These loving Chris-

tians made everyone feel special and welcome at Bible Club — Protestant, Catholic, or un-churched. On alternate weekends, twelve teens were taken to *Whisperwood*, their New Hampshire farm, for weekend retreats. The strict rule was no more than two weekends, per teen, each year. One year, because the Emerys knew about each teen’s home life, every weekend they found a way to “need” one more boy. I was that fortunate boy. The Emery’s personal commitment led me to view them as being “Christ to me.” Bible Club was a godsend where my first happy memories were formed and where I met, courted, and (in 1975) married Paula (the perfect girlfriend) in the Emery’s flower garden.

Innate desires

Besides Bible Club, two other childhood factors influenced my faith journey. I had an intense yearning to participate in communion, but to receive communion in my childhood church required being twelve years of age, baptized, and a member. After communion one Sunday, at about age eight, I discovered that the communion trays of Matzo crackers and cups of grape juice were left unattended in the kitchen. On subsequent communion Sundays, after the ushers returned from disposing of the trays, I would ask to use the restroom and proceed to reverently serve myself communion. When our family moved to a new congregation, communion was infrequent. Later, as a busy student at

Journeys Home

“*Journeys Home*” is continued on page 2 ►

...Journeys Home Continued...

Wheaton College, the congregation I attended never seemed to have communion, yet my deep desire for communion never faded.

Besides a desire for communion, I was drawn to the story of Christ's birth and the *Ave Maria* (my mother's favorite music). Our beautiful (Catholic) Advent Calendar was a treasured Christmas tradition; however, because my mother was the choir director in all the congregations we attended, and my father was a deacon, we children were advised never to discuss these topics with other members. None of the congregations we attended were open to ecumenism with other Protestant denominations and utterly rejected the Catholic Church. The serene image of Mary brought a sense of peace to me, especially as a child in an unhappy family. Interestingly, the Emerys were the only Protestants I knew who openly recognized Catholics as Christians. Although Paula, who was Catholic, joined me in Protestant congregations, the Emerys never encouraged her to leave the Catholic Church.

A jigsaw of interpretation

Living with many mutually contradictory doctrines made understanding the faith similar to trying to complete a complex puzzle from a combination of different jigsaw puzzles stirred together. As a teen I viewed the contradictions with perplexity. For example, altar calls in the Nazarene congregations (when only members were present) made sense based on the Arminian doctrine of the possibility of losing one's salvation. However, in the "once

saved - always saved - safe and secure for eternity" Baptist congregations, altar calls to members seemed utterly absurd. In one congregation, this only impacted one mentally feeble woman who tearfully went forward each time and "finally accepted Jesus — again." As an adult, maintaining the theological tension between contradictory biblical interpretations eventually led to a minimalistic faith. That is, the acceptance of Jesus was the only necessary aspect of the faith; nothing else mattered. So after college, since both Paula and I were employed at different evangelical agencies with weekly chapel services led by pastors and missionaries, we readily substituted the chapel services for Sunday attendance. But there persisted a desire to find a church that taught all of what we knew Scripture taught.

In 1979, a move to a small New England town resulted in a limited choice of congregations. Two of the local congregations were so theologically liberal that the pastors were more likely to quote sentimental poems than Scripture. One fundamentalist congregation was pastored by a high school graduate whose exegesis was agonizingly embarrassing. Another congregation was so unreceptive to newcomers that not

a single member of the congregation, or the pastor, greeted us. Discounting the Catholic church in town, Paula and I hesitantly visited the remaining small Episcopal chapel. The beauty of the liturgy and the opportunity to receive communion at every service was such a blessing that that congregation became our spiritual home. Two years later, in 1981, we moved again for graduate school and attended a large, active, Episcopal congre-

“Living with many mutually contradictory doctrines made understanding the faith similar to trying to complete a complex puzzle from a combination of different jigsaw puzzles stirred together.”

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television and radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET

The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET

The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

February 3

Joseph Pearce*
Former Agnostic

February 10

Nikki & Jason Workmaster*
Former Evangelical/Baptist

February 20

Charlie McKinney*
Former Southern Baptist

February 24

Rick Fee*
Former Lutheran

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

gation with dynamic liturgy, powerful sermons, and some of the best music we have ever enjoyed. Yet, sadly, it was in that congregation where it became evident that, while the words were biblical, a double-speak was at play. The realization that something was amiss occurred after learning that the rector's "wife" was actually still married to an ex-parishioner. Gradually, it became evident the evangelical and biblical language was actually code for left-leaning political messages.

Without describing every issue, my Protestant experience confirmed that there was no congregation in which I could trust that all (or only) biblical truth was being taught. Certainly, much truth was taught at all the congregations we attended, but never was "all truth" (Jn 16:12) taught. In fact, it took only a few sermons to identify some false, unbiblical doctrine being proffered. It became increasingly evident that every pastor and member — not the Bible — was his or her own final authority. Utter discouragement with the contradictory theological doctrines led us to live our faith on our own for more than two decades. During that time many evangelical clients came to my practice specifically because I am listed with insurance companies as a Christian psychologist. Often, what these clients believed and practiced was foreign to what I previously knew to be evangelicalism. This made it apparent that evangelicalism had changed radically during those two decades. Many aspects of moral living were also conspicuously absent.

"Correcting" Scripture

These experiences made it obvious that the "once saved - always saved - safe and secure for eternity" doctrine was "a different gospel" (Gal 1:6-7). The carefully guarded and entrenched belief regarding their prerogative to a personal, private interpretation of Scripture insulated these individuals from recognizing the fallacy of their beliefs and practices. I came to recognize that the schismatic nature of Protestant denominations is likely due to this non-biblical and faulty assurance that individual believers are guaranteed to be led into "all truth" (Jn 16:12). Yet, as I later discovered, Scripture is clear that only the Apostles, individually (Jn 16:12), and "God's household, which [is] the Church of the Living God, the pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Tim 3:15) were given any assurance of acquiring "all truth."

This forced me to face up to the fact that *sola Scriptura* (the belief that the Bible is the only source of authority) is not found in Scripture and *sola fide* (the belief of salvation through faith alone) was soundly rejected by James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." Accepting these

doctrines would suggest that the Holy Spirit leads entire denominations of sincere, devout, Bible-believers to contradictory conclusions on such vital matters as salvation and morality with modern denominations contradicting basic orthodox doctrine and adopting pop-culture morality. As Marcus Grodi would say, I discovered Bible passages I had "never seen" before and those passages did not support Protestant doctrines.

One evangelical congregation near my practice hired a new pastor who did his first communion service "In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Allah, Buddha and all other deities." Evidently *sola Scriptura* gives one a license to interpret Scripture, free from all authority, in violation of 2 Peter 1:20, "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." These experiences made me recognize that something was terribly wrong in evangelicalism. I was forced to realize that I, like all Bible-believers, didn't accept what the Bible actually teaches.

From our wedding on, Paula and I had followed the advice of a number of devout Protestants and used contraception in order to get our careers and finances established. Years after having stopped using contraception, we concluded that we were infertile. Then, in 1991, Paula and I finally had a son, Sean. Paula's labor of forty-eight hours seemed to last longer than the concurrent Desert Storm invasion. Selfishly, we had waited too long so now he is an only child who will face the responsibility and demands of our last years alone.

By Sean's teen years, we realized home-based devotions were not enough. Because of the rejection of biblical truth in the liturgical Protestant denominations, we returned to a non-liturgical congregation for biblical, orthodox doctrine. Being away from evangelicalism for twenty years allowed us to recognize how many changes had occurred and how often Bible-believing pastors "corrected" Scripture. We heard statements like, "That passage doesn't mean what it says" or "The word 'is' doesn't mean 'is.'" The phrase "faith alone" was verbally inserted into biblical passages in which it was not written. After declaring there was no need for baptism, one pastor explained, "See those lines in the text separating the verses? You don't have to accept anything between those lines. Those verses are not in the manuscripts our scholars consider valid." What a shock to be told to ignore Scripture! Sean's teen Bible study interpreted Christ's comment, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me..." (Mt 25:32-46)

"Journeys Home" is continued on page 5 ▶

“As an adult, maintaining the theological tension between contradictory biblical interpretations eventually led to a minimalistic faith. That is, the acceptance of Jesus was the only necessary aspect of the faith; nothing else mattered.”

A Cold Winter but a Warm Faith: The Life and Martyrdom of Polycarp

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell



As we make our way through the winter cold of February, we are reminded that the climate we live in is more than a matter of reading the temperature gauge. Many Christians, not just Catholics, are feeling the coldness of American culture to the Christian Faith these days. Moral truths, once assumed by our culture, are now in jeopardy or completely rejected. Public expression of Christian faith is not only ignored but frequently suppressed in the name of tolerance. These are not easy times to be a Christian. But the reality is that it has never been easy. The New Testament is replete with references to persecution from religious and governmental forces. In the Jewish culture of the early Christian communities, opposition to “The Way” naturally came from Jewish authorities but, as the Church made inroads into the Greco-Roman world, non-Christian forces began to exert themselves as well (Acts 19:23-41). Later, around AD 60, St. Peter alluded to many estrangements (1 Pet 4:3-4), accusations (2:12), and insults (4:14) facing Christians in Asia Minor.

It may be valuable for us to reflect on the martyrdom of early Christians so as to warm our faith and strengthen our resolve in the face of threats in our own time and place, be they obvious or subtle. February affords us an opportunity for on the 23rd of this month the Catholic Church celebrates the life and martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna. Polycarp is a man for all seasons.

Polycarp, whose name in Greek means “much fruit,” was the bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor in the first half of the second century. We know of his life from three sources in the same century. The last but most explicit comes from Irenaeus, the late second century bishop of Lyons in Gaul (France), who relates to hearing Polycarp preach when he was a child in Smyrna:

For when I was a boy, I saw you [Florus] in lower Asia with Polycarp, moving in splendor in the royal court, and endeavoring to gain his approbation. I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. For what boys learn, growing with their mind, becomes joined with it; so that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eyewitnesses of the ‘Word of life,’ Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* bk 5, chap. 20, sec 5-6.

Our second set of texts derives from Ignatius of Antioch who passed through Asia Minor en route to Rome in the first (or so) decade of the second century. Among his seven letters is one to

Polycarp and another to his church at Smyrna. From these letters we can glean the high esteem which the bishop of Smyrna garnered from his fellow bishop of Antioch and from the lay faithful. The third witness to Polycarp’s life is his own letter to the church at Philippi. These letters portray a man who was viewed as a true witness (*martus*) to Jesus Christ both by his manner of life and by his faithfulness to the teachings of Christ.

Polycarp’s letter to the church at Philippi weaves references to the New Testament, especially 1 Peter, into a pastoral exhortation that focuses on moral perfection. Like St. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:10, Polycarp focuses on the love of money as root cause of immorality (PolyPhil 4:1). “The love of money” in both Paul and Polycarp may well be a synecdoche for a larger truth. Polycarp sees attachment to this world as militating against a fervent faith in Christ so that anything, be it money, fame, or desire, may block the way to the fullest love of and commitment to Christ. Even attachment to episcopal ministry could become an obstacle to Christ rather than service to the people of God. But the end of Polycarp’s life shows that he was willing to give up everything, even his episcopal ministry in Smyrna, in offering to God.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp is the earliest account of a martyr outside the New Testament that we possess and the death of the Bishop of Smyrna reverberated throughout Christendom for years to come. *The Martyrdom* is a remarkably balanced account since it does not portray the Roman officials in a uniformly negative light. Their concern was not for questions of religion but for civil order. Whether the officials agreed with the royal edict to swear by Caesar, we have no way of knowing, but their words reflect an attempt to compromise so as to save Polycarp from destruction. Yet, what was for them a matter of civil conformity to the law, was for Polycarp a matter of obedience to a Higher Authority. *The Martyrdom* shows an eighty-six year old bishop who was kind to the end. That same gentle man, however, also displayed an exceptional fortitude. To a secular mind, humility, and courage are opposites. But this apparent oxymoron, “humble courage” is exactly what attracted Christians to Polycarp in his own lifetime and moved others to venerate his remains (ch. 18).

For the early Christians, the martyrs were constant reminders of their need for vigilance and fortitude. In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the accusation of being a Christian is shorthand for all the civil disobedience that Roman pagans saw in Christians. There were no laws against being a Christian, but there were laws which required that Christians, like everyone else, bow the knee to the all-powerful State. For the Christians, that was tantamount to denial of Paul’s summary in 1 Corinthians 12:3, “Jesus is Lord.” Polycarp’s life and death are vivid reminders that in the coldest moments of history, when the Faith seems its weakest, that is the time to be most vigilant and courageous. May Polycarp’s witness, his *martus*, inspire us to follow him into eternal glory. St. Polycarp, pray for us! ■

Brother Rex Interview

1 Br. Rex, thanks for taking time to speak with us today! Tell us a bit about yourself and your early formation — are you a convert?

Thank you. It's good to chat with you. Yes, I am a convert. I was baptized in the United Presbyterian Church but left the practice of Christianity as a teenager. I had a spiritual awakening in my early twenties and returned to the practice of Christianity. By the grace of God and out of a deep love for Jesus Christ, I "came home" to the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil in 2000.

2 Tell us a bit about your conversion process — what was it that drew you to the Church?

My attraction to Catholicism began in the late 80's or early 90's when I began to long for I-knew-not-what. There was something missing in my experience as a disciple of Jesus Christ, so I began to search in earnest for what was missing. By the grace of God, through the study of Church history, reading the Scriptures, and daily prayer, I eventually discovered that the "something missing" was an encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ in His Eucharistic Presence within the community of the visible Church He established.

3 So what is a hermit, anyway? How did that all come about, and how did your family feel about it?

A hermit is an individual whom God calls to live a life of prayer and penance in the silence of solitude for God's glory, the good of His Church, and the salvation of souls. In my case, the Bishop of the Diocese of Portland, Maine has recognized my vocation as a part of consecrated life in accordance with Canon 603 of the *Code of Canon Law*.

Like every vocation, the call to eremitic life is a great mystery. God calls, we respond: to the single life, to marriage, to some form of consecrated life or to the priesthood. From my initial return to Christianity and my eventual entrance into the Catholic Church I have kept saying "yes" to Jesus as best I can one day at a time. I have kept putting one foot in front of the other, albeit falteringly at times, as the mystery that is my vocation has unfolded.

Members of my family of origin are a bit baffled, I think, by my vocation, even though it has been thirteen years since I began my life as a Solitary. From a Protestant perspective they have no category (except maybe "He's off his rocker!") in which to place me.



4 What does a hermit do all day? What's the purpose of an eremitic vocation, and how do you live it out?

The primary focus of life in the hermitage is conscious awareness of God, the needs of His Church and His world and to pray accordingly. In other words, the vocation to which I have been called is to love. To that end, in whatever I do — preparing my meals, washing the dishes, reading the sacred Scriptures, spending time in Eucharistic Adoration or praying the Divine Office — I endeavor to be open to God in Christ and to pray for people and situations as the Holy Spirit leads. It isn't easy, this vocation to live and love God and others through prayer in the silence of solitude. I must admit that I often fail miserably. Thankfully, our God is an awesome God full of mercy and grace. As often as I fall, He helps me to regain my footing and continue the journey.

5 Don't you live in Maine? How did you get connected with CHNetwork?

Yes, I do live in Maine but I am originally from Ohio. I became associated with CHNetwork years ago through the Defending the Faith Conferences at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. I attended several conferences, met a number of the staff members and learned that the headquarters for CHNetwork is located close to my parents' home. I began to drop into the CHNetwork office when I would travel to Ohio to see my family. A couple of years ago, Marcus phoned to ask me if I would be interested in partnering with the CHNetwork ministry team. I would provide ongoing intercessory prayer for the Network and

its members, and spiritual companionship/direction on an as needed basis for individuals coming home to the Catholic Church. I prayed about it, asked the permission of my Bishop to do it, and here we are!

"Brother Rex Interview" is continued on page B

6 How do you serve our members?

I have been blessed with the extraordinary gift of having permission from the Bishop to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the hermitage chapel. I make a Holy Hour daily to pray for the intentions of the people affiliated with CHNetwork — be they staff members, individuals who have come home to the Catholic Church, or people still on the journey home. I also provide spiritual direction, encouragement and support via email and phone conversations when asked to do so by the Network.

7 What gives you the greatest sense of satisfaction in working with clergy on the journey or who are new to the Church?

My greatest sense of satisfaction comes from helping individuals deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior in the context of full sacramental communion with Him in His Church.

8 You spend a ton of time praying for other people — how can we pray for you?

Thank you for offering to pray for me. Pray that I will be given the grace to live faithfully the vows I have made because of my desire to love God, His Church, and His world: evangelical poverty; life-giving celibate chastity; and whole-hearted obedience to Christ and His Church. ■

Please visit littleportionhermitage.org to learn more about Brother Rex's vocation and ministry.

TAX LETTERS

If you need a record of your 2013 contributions for tax purposes, please contact Wendy Hart. wendy@chnetwork.org or 740-450-1175 ext 100

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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

RECENT CONVERT?

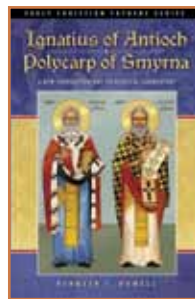
If you have been recently received into the Catholic Church please notify us so we can update our records. Please e-mail Jim at jim@chnetwork.org if you are a former Protestant minister or Mary Clare at maryp@chnetwork.org if you are a lay person who has become Catholic.

We look forward to hearing from you!

FEATURED RESOURCES

The Issue of Authority in Early Christianity — Dr. Kenneth Howell

In 2009 *Deep in History* conference CD, Dr. Kenneth Howell describes the way in which authority arose from the apostles, as commissioned by Christ. Dr. Howell discusses a series of questions and answers from the Bible and the early Church Fathers that helped him understand the authority of the Catholic Church.



Fathers of the Church hold in establishing the foundations of historic Christianity.

Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna: A New Translation and Theological Commentary

— Dr. Kenneth Howell

Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna's combined writings provide a unique window on the faith, life, and practice of the early Christians. Careful reading of these writings demonstrates the unique place that the early

\$35 For a donation of \$35, receive *The Issue of Authority in Early Christianity* CD.

\$50 For a donation of \$50, receive *Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna*.

\$75 For a donation of \$75, receive a *The Issue of Authority in Early Christianity* CD and *Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

SUPPORT CHNETWORK

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to chnetwork.org/donate/ or complete the form below and mail to:

CHNetwork
Attention: Ann Moore
PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

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

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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.

CHNETWORK MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Coming Home Network International (CHNetwork) is to help inquiring clergy as well as laity of other traditions to return home and then be at home in the Catholic Church. To learn more about our work, please go to www.chnetwork.org.

FORUM!

Check out CHNetwork's online forum. The forum is a wonderful place to connect with other CHNetwork members, ask questions about the Catholic Faith, and browse through archived discussions on a wide variety of topics related to the Catholic Church. Go to <http://forum.chnetwork.org>.

NEWSLETTER DONATION

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

NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to family, friends, and church groups. 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. Back issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at www.chnetwork.org/newsletter-archive.



Prayer List



Clergy

■ For an Old Catholic priest in California, that he may come to the realization that to be truly Catholic is to be in full-communication with the successor of St. Peter.

■ For Wesley, a United Methodist minister in the South, that his desire for doctrinal stability and hunger for Jesus in the holy Eucharist would draw him home to the Catholic Church.

■ For Antonio, an Evangelical minister in Italy, that the Lord Jesus would open his wife's heart to the Catholic Church.

■ For Peter, an Episcopal priest in the Southwest, that he and his wife would follow the path to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

■ For Andrey, a Southern Baptist minister, that all obstacles that he perceives before him would be replaced with a clear path to the Catholic Church.

■ For John, a recent convert and former Anglican deacon in England, that the Holy Spirit would guide him and his family as they move to a new house and grow in their new faith.

■ For an Anglican priest in Alabama, that God would grant him a hunger to come into the holy Church which is ever ancient and ever new.

■ For Don and Kathy, former Wycliffe translators, a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for their reception into the Church and new lay ministerial opportunities.

Laitiy

■ For Emily, that the Holy Spirit continue guiding her faith journey and that her husband be more open to her interest in the Catholic Faith.

■ For a woman in Illinois, who is interested in becoming Catholic but hasn't been able to connect well with her local parish.

■ For Ruth, who is reading about the Catholic Church and feels drawn to become Catholic.

■ For Lee, that she may have the courage and perseverance to move forward with her faith journey.

■ For a recent convert who wishes to deepen her understanding of the blessed Virgin Mary.

■ For an Episcopalian in Ohio as he prays and discerns whether God is calling him to become Catholic.

■ For Joseph, who is having struggles that are affecting his ability to return to practicing the Catholic Faith.

■ For Jamie, that she be able to go forward with her faith journey.

■ For Brian who is trying to lead a deeper spiritual life but has questions about moral issues.

■ For Tony who is looking for local Catholic fellowship and is concerned about his family's reaction to his interest in Catholicism.

■ For Becky who is discouraged by not being warmly received in her RCIA group and in her parish.

■ For Jennifer, a convert who has concerns about her parish community and her continuing journey as a Catholic.

■ For David in Bristol, England, that he may receive the grace to overcome whatever is stopping him from taking the final step of reception into the Catholic Church

■ For Jeff, who wishes to become Catholic but is waiting for his family to be more open to his conversion.

■ For Susan that she receive the guidance and direction she needs to pursue her faith journey.

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

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

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

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

President/Founder, Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor)

Chaplain, Fr. Ray Ryland (former Anglican priest)

Chief Operating Officer, Kevin Lowry (former Presbyterian)

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 Laitiy Coordinator, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Communications Coordinator, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart (former United Methodist)

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

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 3

by concluding: “Jesus is not saying you will be judged for what you do. He is just talking about having faith.”

Exegesis of this type resulted in our spending virtually all of our Sunday afternoons reviewing the morning’s biblical passages and correcting the faulty interpretations contained in the sermon. How? By merely reading the passages in context, reviewing topically related passages, and taking Scripture for what it actually said. Despite a bachelor’s degree in biblical studies from Wheaton College, a master’s degree in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a doctoral degree in clinical psychology from Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, I found myself, approaching sixty years of age, entangled in a theological belief system fraught with contradictions that required me either to ignore, reinterpret, or wildly over-emphasize biblical passages.

All generations will call me blessed...

About eight years ago, my dear friend Bob Frasco, a Catholic, asked, “Why do evangelical Christians ignore, demean, and even reject the role that Mary played in redemptive history?”

I responded, “Evangelical Christians, led by the Reformers, have learned the lessons of the Old Testament and faithfully guard against idolatry. Therefore, we utterly reject the worship of Mary.”

Shocked, Bob exclaimed, “Catholics *don’t worship* Mary. We only worship God. We honor Mary, as we are told to do in Scripture.” He finished with what I thought to be the demonstrably absurd comment, “Don’t you know the Hail Mary is biblical?”

As a theologically trained evangelical, with *no* knowledge of Catholic theology, I intuitively knew my friend must be wrong, because no authentic translation could possibly contain pagan material. To my chagrin, once I learned the Hail Mary and restudied chapter one of Luke, I was faced with the fact that all Protestant Bibles contain the text of the Hail Mary. More unsettling was Mary’s statement, “From now on all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48). Never in my entire life had I ever heard Mary blessed. Rather than hearing Mary be blessed, I had uncritically accepted the teaching of pastors who downplayed her importance. In fact, what was commonly taught about Mary is summed up in statements such as:

- “Mary wasn’t born sinless.”
- “Mary didn’t remain a virgin.”
- “Mary wasn’t assumed into heaven.”

- “Mary never became a Christian, because there is no evidence in Scripture that she ever accepted Christ as her personal Lord and Savior.”
- “Mary was *rejected* by Christ at Cana, because she was a social status-seeking mother, trying to show off her son as a miracle worker.” With a snarling voice, a pastor once quoted John 2:4 (KJV), “*Woman*, what have I to do with *thee*?” and almost spat out “woman” and “thee”, as if Jesus, righteous in all things, would have violated the Fourth Commandment and dishonored His mother.

One pastor said, “Mary was only a vessel and any teenage girl would have sufficed.” He named two teens in the congregation

“who just as easily could have been the mother of Jesus.” Even as a twelve-year-old, since I knew that the one girl had a lengthy history that precluded her from being a virgin and the other girl was quite rebellious, that suggestion seemed wrong.

In one Christmas sermon, a pastor only used the phrase, “the virgin.” As a child, I was afraid to ask my parents who the virgin was, since I knew the word had some questionable connotation. It was not until the car ride home, when my mother complained to my father about her discomfort that our pastor was referring to Mary “like that,” did I understand.

During my childhood, I heard sermons on most biblical characters, godly and ungodly, familiar and obscure — even a sermon on what

Christ’s coming meant to the ass on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem (Mt 21:2-7; Jn 12:14-15). But, in more than fifty years of sermons, I had never heard a single sermon on Mary. I became aware that in an effort to avoid being in submission to the only source of authority established by Christ, Protestants, including me, had defied Scripture and failed to bless Mary.

Breaking through misunderstanding

To understand my point of reference: my parents and childhood pastors had taught us that our varied denominations (despite theological contradictions) were members of the true church that had been persecuted by Catholics throughout history. Our denominations were on a quest to replicate the Church of Acts. We were taught: that Catholics had turned biblical characters and deceased Christians into demigods (called saints) whom they worshipped; Catholics, contrary to the Bible, believed we must earn our way into heaven; that the pope was the antichrist and the Catholic Church was the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation. Most pastors held that the majority of Catholics were apostate and pagan and thus, were consigned to hell.

“Journeys Home” is continued on page 6 ►

“Approaching sixty years of age, entangled in a theological belief system fraught with contradictions that required me either to ignore, reinterpret, or wildly over-emphasize biblical passages.”

...Journeys Home Continued...

My mother would draw attention to the Catholic neighbors who were kind, sober, caring, charitable people, and state, “They are such wonderful people, it is too bad they believe they can earn their way into heaven by going to church every day. It is sad to think such nice people will end up in hell, because they refuse to accept Christ.”

My friend Bob gave me a subscription to *National Catholic Register* and recommended EWTN’s *The Journey Home* show. The discovery that Mary was to be blessed by all generations caused me, for the first time, to begin studying the writings of the early Church Fathers. The seven letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 90 – 110) proved that the first century Church was undeniably Catholic. I consumed books by Catholic apologists and read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In my first reading through the *Catechism*, I intentionally included only those portions discussing doctrines shared with Protestant denominations. Unfamiliar material (e.g., penance, purgatory, indulgences) would have been far too easy to reject out-of-hand. What I discovered was comprehensive biblical support for all Catholic doctrines. Nowhere did I encounter the simplistic proof-texting, which is so prevalent in Protestant theology.

Having presumed that none of the denominations I attended taught “all truth” (Jn 16:12), I had developed a complacency when reading Christ’s words: “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” (Jn 6:53-56). In verses 60-69, Christ didn’t reassure those who hesitated, because they thought He was suggesting cannibalism, which made it explicitly clear that Christ intended

His words to be taken literally. It was with great distress that I became aware that the Apostles and the early Church did not view communion as symbolic. Of greatest concern was the reality that I had been excluded from receiving the Body and Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, which, according to Christ, is necessary for eternal life (Jn 6:51-53). Receiving Him in this way was only possible through His one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

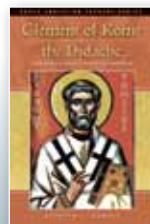
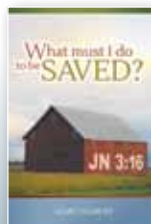
As a family, into the biblical Church

When taking Scripture at face value, the Catholic understanding of Mary and the Eucharist were correct and biblical. Sadly, what all the denominations we attended had taught about the Catholic Church was absolutely wrong and some of what these congregations taught as truth was actually anti-biblical. Since the first century, heretics viewed the Eucharist as merely symbolic, but not the heirs of the Apostles; not the Church. After discovering that Catholic doctrine on the familiar theological issues was based on a comprehensive view of Scripture and, thus, indisputably true, I realized the doctrines that are rejected by Protestants could then be recognized as true and necessary.

As a family, we explored Scripture and compared Catholic and Protestant doctrines, and together we discovered the historical longevity and biblical nature of Catholic teaching. We all agreed

there was only one reasonable response. During late summer of 2007, I visited a local Catholic church to request how to enter the Church and was helped by a wonderful priest who met with Sean and me for RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) and Paula for a review of catechetical material. For me, recognizing the roles of Mary and the Communion of the Saints in salvation history was the one puzzle piece that brought comprehension of the bigger picture.

“ Having presumed that none of the denominations I attended taught “all truth” (Jn 16:12), I had developed a complacency when reading Christ’s words: “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...” ”



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...Journeys Home Continued...

In order for Sean to avoid unnecessary pressure from his life-long evangelical peer group by a sudden departure, we attended Mass weekly, but also attended the Protestant congregation on alternate Sundays. The time to make a full departure occurred close to Christmas when the evangelical pastor found it necessary to launch into a debunking of all the “Catholic myths” about Mary, proclaiming virtually every anti-Mary comment I previously listed. I now find it horribly sad that, as a Protestant, I had ignored the teaching of Scripture regarding the Eucharist, baptism, and other sacraments, as well as demeaned Mary’s role in salvation history.

Sadly, the doctrinal errors of *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide* lead to a faulty interpretation of the Bible and allow some evangelicals to be trapped in sinful lifestyles, while believing themselves to be “saved” — safe and secure for eternity. It is not that Catholics are immune from sin, but the type of error is qualitatively different. Orthodox doctrine allows for correction, whereas false doctrine prevents correction. If a reasonably catechized Catholic chooses to sin, they know they are sinning. In contrast, the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* promotes the right to a personal, private interpretation of Scripture and, therefore, does not allow for the correction of a faulty interpretation that leads to an anti-biblical lifestyle.

Devoid of any and all authority, Protestants have divided the visible Church into thousands of competing denominations in violation of Christ’s prayer, “I do not pray for these only [the Apostles], but also for those who believe in me through their word [all subsequent believers], *that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*” (Jn 17:20-21). There is no more explicit condemnation of Protestant denominationalism than that last phrase.

In contrast, Catholic doctrine consistently teaches what the Apostles taught, making Bible reading sensible. The Catholic Mass is composed almost entirely of scriptural passages. Celebrating the Eucharist involves the glorious experience of sitting at the Lord’s Table receiving Christ, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

And then, there is Mary. While God could certainly have worked salvation history in some other way, Jesus would not be the Messiah if Mary refused to accept the angel Gabriel’s request (Lk 1:38). This biblical fact repudiates the hyper-omnipotent Calvinistic doctrine. Salvation history actually demonstrates that God subjected His omnipotence to the will of one young girl.

At Easter Vigil 2008, our family entered the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ. That Church was led by the Holy Spirit to establish all orthodox doctrines. I came to realize that the claims made by Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers (not to mention all those Protestant books about what the Catholic Church teaches) are false. Furthermore, we discovered that the faith, which all Christians in every place for

fifteen hundred years had understood to be true, was stood on its head by the Reformers.

Though I previously considered abortion as an unfortunate, but unavoidable reality, I had an instantaneous conversion of heart when I became aware of the need to enter the Catholic Church. In addition to participating annually in 40 Days for Life, it has also been a joy to attend weekly Eucharistic Adoration and to serve as a lector and as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. Paula volunteers weekly to publish the bulletin. Our son, Sean, is now an officer in the United States Air Force, training as a pilot.

In gratitude I offer the following prayer:

*Heavenly Father we pray that, in Your mercy,
You will forgive those of us who have grieved Your Son,
Jesus Christ by ignoring His Mother Mary, the Woman,
(Gen 3:15; Jn 2:4; 19:26f; Rev 12)
whom He honors. (Ex 20:12; Lk 2:51; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15)
Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that in Your mercy
You will forgive those of us who have defied Scripture
by not blessing Mary. (Lk 1:48)
By the power of the Holy Spirit,
grant that we may enjoy full communion with Your Church
and with all Your saints.
Grant that by recognizing You as our Savior and brother,
(Rom 8:23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5) we may recognize Mary
as our Blessed Mother. (Jn 19:26-27; Rev 12:17)
Blessed be Mary, at whose request,
You revealed Your glory at Cana. (Jn 2:1-11)
Blessed be Mary, Mother of the “Lord of lords.” (Rev 17:14)
Blessed be Mary, Mother of the “King of kings.” (Rev 17:14)
Blessed be Mary, “Ark of the Covenant.” (Rev 11:19)
Blessed be Mary, Mother of God. (Lk 1:43; Jn 1:1)
Blessed be Mary, “clothed with the sun, with the moon
under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”
(Rev 12:1)
Blessed be Mary, who reigns as Queen Mother
of Your Kingdom. (Ps 45:6-9)
Grant that all who love You, grow to love her.
Grant us understanding that to honor You, is a blessing to
her, and to bless her, is to honor You.*

Amen. ■



WESLEY VINCENT is a private practice psychologist in Enfield, Connecticut.

BLOG

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GET INVOLVED!

The Coming Home Network International invites members to assist in our mission this month to help non-Catholic clergy and laity come home to the Catholic Church in the following ways:

1

Consider passing this newsletter along to a friend and telling them of the CHNetwork.



2

Go to our website, www.chresources.com and check out all the books and resources we have about conversion and the Catholic Faith.



3

Spend one hour this month in prayer for the needs of those men and women who are on the journey to the Catholic Church.

