



January 2013 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The “Full Gospel” by Ernest R. Freeman

The Drill Sergeant walked into the barracks and yelled, “Who wants to go to church? Be out front in 10 minutes!”

Being an eighteen-year-old raw recruit in desperate need of a break from military training, I decided to go. I assumed it would be a Protestant gathering; to my astonishment it was a Roman Catholic Mass. A sense of alienation set in as the Mass began; it was as if I had been transported to an alternate universe. I didn't know what to say, what to do, or when to do it. However, in the midst of my confusion I was stirred by the deep reverence and quiet devotion. The Mass was an expression of holiness I'd never encountered. It conveyed the impression that an awareness of the holy permeated all the actions.

Pentecostal was the Protestant flavor of my upbringing, so I had no experiential or social framework to analyze or understand the Mass. Although Pentecostals also had a commendable concern for holiness and obedience to scriptural precepts, it seemed to my limited understanding that in order to maintain holiness and be sure one remained a Christian, it was necessary to adhere to a list of prohibited practices. The most common restrictions were summarized in what we laughingly called the “Big Five” – no dancing, smoking, card playing, going to the movie

theater, or drinking alcoholic beverages. Catholics did all of these things and so were targets of disdainful, critical, condemning comments, and commonly used as negative sermon illustrations. I was taught, and believed, that Catholics were deceived, generally led dissolute lives, and likely weren't “saved.” The first encounter with the Mass didn't alter my thinking, but it did become part of a curiosity in Catholicism that took decades to flower.

Ill at ease

My early life in Christianity instilled in me a passion to know the truth in the biblical sense: intellectually and experientially. This eventually led me to pursue Biblical Studies as a college major, then to Graduate school at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and to ordination in the Assemblies of God, the denomination of my upbringing. My ministry included fourteen years as a pastor, seven years as a Bible College faculty member, and an additional eight years as an Independent Charismatic minister.

The Nicene Creed was a succinct expression of my faith, yet all the while I was theologically restless, searching, and ill at ease with some of the doctrines I was required to affirm, particularly those that dealt with authority, unity, the Eucharist (communion), and ... *continued on page 2*

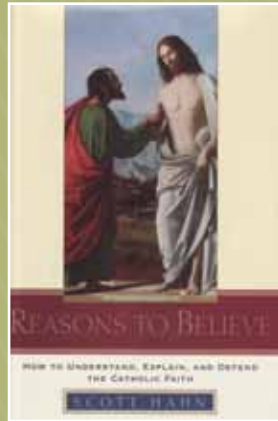
FEATURED RESOURCES

The Holy Spirit as Living Tradition



Why do Catholics believe in Tradition? Dr. Scott Hahn, describes the way in which the Holy Spirit creates a “living Tradition” to help guide Christians in the Truth of God throughout the ages; both Scripture and Tradition are the result of God’s Revelation.

Reasons to Believe — Dr. Scott Hahn



In *Reasons to Believe*, Dr. Scott Hahn explains the “how and why” of the Catholic Faith—drawing from Scripture, his own struggles and those of other converts, as well as from everyday life and even natural science. At the heart of the book is Hahn’s examination of the ten “keys to the kingdom”—the characteristics of the Church clearly evident in the Scriptures. As the story of creation discloses, the world is a house that has a Father, a palace where the king is really present. God created the cosmos to be a kingdom, and that kingdom is the universal Church, fully revealed by Jesus Christ.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive *The Holy Spirit as Living Tradition* CD.

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For a donation of \$50, receive *Reasons to Believe*.

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For a donation of \$75, receive *The Holy Spirit as Living Tradition* CD and *Reasons to Believe*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

...Journeys Home Continued...

the nature of salvation. Since I took my ministerial responsibilities seriously, especially the teaching of Scripture, it was puzzling and increasingly frustrating that there were other ministers teaching from the same Scriptures, but reaching different conclusions – yet we all claimed to be led by the Holy Spirit and relied on theological/denominational statements that claimed the same authority. My obvious conclusion was: Somebody is wrong. From this came the further questions, “Who carries the full expression of truth?” or, “Who has the authority to state the proper interpretation of Scripture?” Often, before I approached the pulpit to teach the Word of God, I experienced a fear and trembling, not based in stage fright, but in the simple hope that what I was about to say was actually correct (James 3:1, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness”). The intensity of my restlessness ebbed and flowed over the years as I studied the doctrinal positions of various denominations and theological positions within the Protestant realm.

Then, one fateful day, I wandered into a Catholic bookstore. Normally, this would have been one of the last things I would ever do; even if it had been raining, I would have stood on the sidewalk and gotten soaked rather than set foot

inside such a place, one with the smell of incense and the sound of Gregorian Chant wafting through the open door. However, the night before I had encountered EWTN while flipping through TV channels. I was surprised, to say the least, at the depth and clarity of the biblical teaching and was disarmed by the obvious devotion to Jesus Christ. The writings I encountered in the bookstore brought me to a shocking and embarrassing fact regarding my opinions of Catholicism: I had formed those opinions without having done any firsthand study of Catholic teaching. I had never read a single book written by a faithful Catholic in explanation and defense of the Catholic Faith, nor read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Instead, I had relied on statements passed on by other misinformed Protestants and poorly catechized, disgruntled ex-Catholics. I was judging and condemning without consulting any objective doctrinal source.

Those initial encounters were the impetus for a serious study that lasted several years. Yet, I approached this endeavor with my preconceived ideas and Protestant interpretive grid firmly in place. After all, I was a child of the Reformation and so wasn’t troubled by this inexcusable lack of objectivity. My attitude was that the issues had already been settled and I was on the right side, wasn’t I? My response to

...Journeys Home Continued...

Catholic teachings, however, followed an unexpected route. It went from an initial, “This is not true,” to “This can’t be true,” to “I don’t want this to be true,” to “This *is* true.”

Historical foundations

Like many of my fellow Protestants, I looked longingly at the church of the Acts of the Apostles, grieved over the (assumed) centuries of corruption and decline that followed, and rejoiced at the Reformation. In my yearning for “New Testament Christianity,” I made the mistake of giving little thought to the teachings and experience of the first generation after the Apostles, the very ones taught and appointed by Apostles, many of whom died as martyrs. I was faced with the reality of my unwillingness to listen to those who experienced the original developments of the early church. My denomination’s history spanned less than one hundred years. It was created, as many Protestant groups are, with a desire for reform (in this case, even a desire for reform of the churches historically associated with the Reformation), and in the belief that it had discovered a lost or neglected truth of the New Testament Church – the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This supposed forgotten dimension of the faith became the centerpiece for the formation of yet another denomination, one that claimed to teach the “full Gospel.”

An oft-quoted statement by Cardinal Newman, “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant,” points to a crucial failing: I had a myopic view of church history. Out of delusional arrogance I failed to fully understand the implications of my historical view, especially as it related to the promises of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to guide the Church into all truth (Jn. 16:13), to be with His Church until the end of time (Mt. 28:20), and that the “gates of hell would not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). My unconsciously held conclusion was that Jesus failed to keep His promises – resulting in the Church falling into error and corruption only to be rescued by the Reformers after fifteen hundred years.

Not a “works-based” faith

I discovered several scriptural clarifications that exposed as fallacy what I had heard about Catholic doctrine and practice. I also encountered Scriptures which contradicted Protestant teaching.

The first hurdle was the misconception that Catholics believe in salvation through works. Rather than merely trusting what I’d been told about Catholic belief, I turned to Catholic teaching itself. Through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), one learns that Christians are saved/justified by grace alone: Our justification comes from the grace of God ... [it is] free and undeserved ... grace is a *participation in the life of God*. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life ... This vocation ... depends entirely on God’s gratuitous initiative ... The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it (CCC 1996-1999).

Indeed, in a clarifying response to the charges of the Reformation, the Council of Trent declared, “If any one says, that man ... continued on page 4



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, Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET, Sundays 1:00 AM ET

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

January 7

Kenn Cramer*

Former Agnostic, non-denominational, Episcopal

January 14

Trevor Lipscombe*

Former Agnostic, nominal Anglican

January 21

The Journey Home International

January 28

Kelly Nieto*

Former Atheist, New Age

**Schedule is subject to change.*



MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

March 2, 2013

Columbus Catholic Men's Conference
Lausche Building, Ohio State Expo Center
Columbus, Ohio
www.columbuscatholicmen.com

March 11, 2013

Annual Bishop Lucker Lecture 7pm
Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota
www.dnu.org
1400 6th St. N. New Ulm, MN 56073

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Back issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at www.chnetwork.org/newsletter-archive.



UNSOLICITED MAIL

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

...*Journeys Home Continued*...

may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.” Furthermore, we are not justified by faith that is alone (Jas. 2:14-26): “The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that *God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace* ... the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful” (CCC 2008; cf. Mt. 25:31-46; Jn. 14:20-21).

Once a wealthy ruler inquired of Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk. 19:18-23) The answer includes obedience: keeping the commandments, flowing from true faith. Good works are the means to “work out [our] salvation” if it is to be finally realized (Phil. 2:12-13).

A literal interpretation of Scripture

Secondly, I came to understand that belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist does have scriptural basis and a defense in Church Tradition. The words of Jesus in John 6:26-59 are taken literally by Catholics; in doing so, Catholics are following the early Church Fathers.

Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of the Apostle John and a martyr; in his *Letter to the Smyrneans* (6:2-7:1), he refers to “those who hold heretical opinions” and stated “how contrary they are to the mind of God ... they abstain from the Eucharist and prayer, because they refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by His goodness raised up.” In another letter he says, “Therefore, be diligent to employ only one Eucharist so that whatever you do, you do according to God: for there is only one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and there is only one cup for unity in his blood. There is one altar as there is one bishop together with the presbytery and the deacons my fellow servants” (*To the Philadelphians* 4:1).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 A.D.) clearly re-enforced this teaching: “Therefore, when He has spoken and says about the bread, ‘This is My Body,’ who will have the nerve to doubt any longer? And, when He affirms clearly, ‘This is My Blood,’ who will then doubt, saying that it is not His Blood? Once, by His own will, He changed water into wine at Cana in Galilee; is He not worthy of belief when He changes wine into blood? ... the visible bread is not bread, even if it is such to the taste, but the Body of Christ; and the visible wine is not wine, even if taste thinks it such, but the Blood of Christ” (*Mystagogic Catechesis* 4:1,2,6,9).

These, and other references, reveal the early Christians’ belief that Jesus was not speaking metaphorically, but literally, when He said, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:53-56). In other words, He meant what He said. Jesus was “murmured” against and abandoned by many of His followers over this very issue, because they also believed He was speaking literally –

...Journeys Home Continued...

and He did not correct them. Even the Reformer Martin Luther admitted that the Real Presence was the teaching of the Church from its inception.

At every Mass, at the consecration, the miracle of “transubstantiation” takes place as the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. The *Catechism* notes, “We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch” (CCC 170). A mere symbol does not grant grace; it is empty ritual. But the sacraments, based on the teachings and actions of Jesus and the Apostles, are true blessings, a means to impart grace.

Unity: Jesus’s fervent prayer

Thirdly, the prayer of Jesus in John 17 had long haunted me as I surveyed the state of the Protestant world. It records that Jesus intercedes for His disciples and repeatedly prays for their unity – a required ingredient if the world is to know the Gospel as truth. Consequently, unity and authority are of paramount concern, for unity is sustained and directed by authority. A Church led by the Holy Spirit, made up of Spirit-filled people, would by definition be consumed by these prayer concerns. There is then an inconsistency in claiming to be Spirit-led while furthering disunity and rebellion.

I once read the words of Sagoyewatha (ca. 1758-1830), also known as Red Jacket, a chief of the Seneca tribe. He responded negatively to the request of a Protestant missionary to work amongst his people by saying, in part, “Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book?”

He further stated, “[Also] we have been told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place ... we will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them.”

Sagoyewatha intuitively understood a painful fact: disunity and increasing fragmentation is a witness that brings disrepute to the Gospel. Jesus established a Church that was united under a hierarchy of bishops, whose authority is traced to the Apostles, and focused in its message and purpose, not a fragmented, chaotic entity that communicates to the unbelieving that the love of God is weak and His purpose in the Gospel is a failure. Those who remain divided are unwilling to consider how disunity has worked against the growth of the Kingdom.

When authority is rejected and unity is merely symbolic, confusion reigns and truth becomes relative. Instead of a church standing in powerful unity, Protestantism has so far birthed over 36,000 denominations. Admittedly some practices in the Catholic Church of Luther’s day needed correction, but others had brought about renewal within the Church without following the path of rebellion and pride.

Two foundational principles of the Reformation are “Scripture alone” (*sola scriptura*) and “Faith alone” (*sola fide*). The former rejects the authority of the Church and makes unity virtually impossible, and the latter denies the importance of good works. However, Scripture itself doesn’t support either principle, nor are they taught by the early Church Fathers. ... continued on page 6



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TAX LETTERS

If you need a record of your 2012 contributions for tax purposes, please contact Wendy Hart.

wendy@chnetwork.org
740-450-1175 ext. 100

KEEP IN TOUCH!

The CHNetwork would like to keep in touch with you via e-mail. Please go to www.chnetwork.org/update to ensure the CHNetwork has your e-mail address on file. We especially ask non-Catholic clergy and converts to provide us with your e-mail to allow us to keep in contact.

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.

...Journeys Home Continued...

The Reformation leaders thought they could restore the “true church” and maintain doctrinal unity; but this type of rebellion is wrapped in deception and the results are an ever-increasing dissension, fragmentation, and chaos. The Apostle Paul said to beware of “those who cause dissensions ... [to] avoid them” (Rm. 16:17) and appealed “that there be no divisions” (1 Cor. 1:10). The underlying spirit of Protestantism is one of division and disunity. Even the Reformers lamented what they unleashed, and a united, coherent, powerful witness to the world was lost.

Authority: the path to unity

Where, then, is the unity for which Jesus prayed to be found? I was initially uncomfortable, and humbled, by the answer: in the Church Jesus established, the visible, historic fellowship that by the faithful promise of its Lord has persevered for 2,000 years. This point is well stated by Dr. Scott Hahn in his book, *Reasons to Believe*:

The only candidate for such unity is the Catholic Church, which transcends all ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries. It is the only Christian body that professed one faith, undivided, unchanged, throughout the ages. Those separated Christians who profess “scripture alone,” on the other hand, have multiplied denominations into the tens of thousands. And those Christian bodies differ from one another on such key matters as the nature of the atonement and the meaning of charismatic gifts, the appropriate age for baptism and the optimum frequency of communion, the morality of abortion and euthanasia, the nature and function of the clergy, even the day of the week on which Christians should worship. Many of these interpretations are mutually contradictory and mutually exclusive ... could such confusion be what Jesus and St. Paul meant by the Church's unity? (79-80)

I also confronted the fact that I had previously brought theological presuppositions to the New Testament text that allowed me to ignore the possibility that Protestantism functions with final authority in the individual. The principle is played out in a familiar pattern: the person joins an organization or spiritual leader who agrees with one's preconceived ideas. Others seek out those groups that provide the “spiritual” experiences on which, sadly, their faith is built. I was increasingly uncomfortable with the doctrinal pick-and-choose process and church affiliation based on personal whims.

Fr. Dwight Longenecker says;

Ironically, in rejecting an external infallible authority we are encouraged to embrace the most fickle and fallible of all authorities – our own judgment. We then cling to our opinions like a shipwrecked man clings to a splinter of wood, and before long, our opinions are unsailable. In the end we don't have one objective, infallible authority but millions of subjective “infallible” authorities, and in this absurdity, we rejoice (*St Benedict and St Thérèse: The Little Rule and the Little Way*).

...Journeys Home Continued...

The Church is the creation of Jesus, from whom it receives its authority; He gave authority to the Apostles to determine and institute doctrine, to declare the correct and false, to establish faith and morals. In 1 Timothy 3:15, the Apostle Paul says something to which I had never given proper attention: “if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” In Ephesians 3:10, he likewise taught that it was God’s intent “that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” According to Paul the *Church* is the foundation of truth, the propagator and preserver of truth. There is only one Church that has fulfilled that role and remained doctrinally consistent for 2,000 years, the Catholic Church. The truth embodied there, the “pearl of great price,” had been hidden in plain sight all of my life; but it was hidden by layers of misinformation, theological suspicion, intellectual laziness, and religious pride.

The pearl of great price

I experienced a unique and profound blessing in this journey: my wife, Lois, grasped the truths discovered with ease and joy. She is more spiritually intuitive than I and has less of an ego. Her heart is open to God and, thus, she embraced the truth and insights of Catholicism with less struggle. I can honestly and thankfully say that the best person I know happens to be my wife. Consequently, by the grace of God, at Easter Vigil, April 3rd, 2010, Lois and I came into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

The word “convert” is a useful designation but we are somewhat uncomfortable with it because we have not converted to another faith. Instead, we’ve reconciled to the Church which is the expression of the *fullness* of the Faith. Contrary to the concerns of some Protestant friends we haven’t lost or given up anything; instead, we’ve gained so much more. For instance, there is no loss of the charismatic dimension. The Catholic Church fully recognizes the reality of biblical charisms. As someone has said, “We belong to the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world.”

In another sense, however, we *have* converted – from dissenter and Protester (the root of “Protestant”) to ones who bow in grateful, joyous, submission to the Lord Jesus and to the “pillar and bulwark of truth,” the Church He founded.

The Catholic Church teaches – and my wife and I have found by experience – that Jesus is truly present in the liturgy. He is beautifully active in sustaining and sanctifying grace that we receive in faith and obedience; as the *Catechism* says, “[T]he Church celebrates in the liturgy above all the Paschal mystery [Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection] by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation. It is the mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in the liturgy” (CCC 1067-1068).

There is profound joy in the Mass; it draws you out of yourself, and peace is experienced in worshipping in a manner that focuses on God and His glory. It is not worship based on personal whims, or likes and dislikes, but on knowledge that one is sacrificially submitting to a liturgy ... continued on page 8

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

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SPOUSE'S NETWORK

Are you the spouse of a Protestant minister interested in becoming Catholic?

The Spouse's Network exists to aid and provide fellowship for the spouses of ministers on the journey to the Catholic Church as well as those who are new Catholics. The mission of the Spouse's Network is that through one-on-one assistance given by the wives of former Protestant clergy who have embraced the Catholic faith, those 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 are a spouse of a clergy who has become Catholic and would like to assist someone, or if you are the wife of a pastor who is in need of support on the journey home, we would like to invite you to contact Mary Clare at maryp@chnetwork.org or by phone at 740-450-1175 ext 105.

We ask all the Coming Home Network International's members to please keep the Spouse's 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...

saturated in Scripture, directed by the Holy Spirit, and historically united to Christians through the ages. The joy experienced is not of an earthly type based on the idea of fun, nor is it similar in content, style, and purpose to that of a rock concert or the theater. It is Spirit-induced joy, awe, and reverence. To enter into the Mass is to find that one has submitted to the forgiving Father who calls the prodigal home.

Although many friends and family remain supportive, our "reconciliation" hasn't been without cost. There have been varying levels of rejection, from puzzlement to an avoidance of the subject, to embarrassment about our decision, and to angry or tearful words of objection.

My greatest area of difficulty was (is) the loss of ministerial position and income. I experienced it as a loss of identity. But what is the "pearl of great price" worth? Its discovery requires one to sacrifice all to obtain it. As a Protestant I preached about giving all for Christ, and sang the hymn "I Surrender All," many times. Now there is a new reality to what that means. For reasons known to God, it involved a breaking and being stripped of position, source of sustenance, and reputation in order to consider what is of eternal value. Without the grace and sustaining power of God, I could not have come this far.

Let it be clearly understood that entrance into the Catholic Church is not a repudiation of our Evangelical heritage. We are humbled and thankful to God for the opportunity of service afforded us there; that tradition introduced us to the triune God, taught us to embrace the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, and nurtured a desire to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for worship and service. For this we are eternally grateful. Not only to God, but also to the family and friends who were His instruments on our behalf. We have the peace of having arrived at the fullness of truth, restlessness has ceased, a sense of peace is greater now than at any other time in our lives, and love for the Lord Jesus Christ is deeper and clearer. ■

For personal study I would recommend these readable and informative works:

Surprised By Truth: 11 Converts Give the Biblical and Historical Reasons for Becoming Catholic, Patrick Madrid

Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians", Karl Keating

Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic, David B. Currie

Rome Sweet Home, Scott and Kimberly Hahn



Ernest and his wife, Lois, reside in Newburyport, MA. They are active members of their parish Our Lady of Hope in Ipswich, Ma.

BLOG

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

THE **PAST** TO GOD'S

Mercy,

THE **PRESENT** TO HIS

Love,

AND THE **FUTURE** TO HIS

Providence



Kenneth J.
Howell, Ph.D.

“Becoming Catholic and becoming comfortable with being Catholic is a long process of reshaping our identity based on a relationship with Christ by participation in His Church.”

The journey to the Catholic Church is long and arduous for many people. Often the path is strewn with almost insurmountable obstacles, and many doubts, including self-doubt, seem to lie on the way. Even after entering the Church, which is an occasion of great joy, some converts find their new environment full of unexpected challenges. Yet, one thing characterizes all who find their way to the fullness of the faith in the Church: trust. Without trust they would not have begun their journey nor brought it to completion in being united finally with the Church.

There is an old Catholic saying with several variations which expresses the essence of trust in God's goodness. *Commit the past to God's mercy, the present to His love, and the future to His providence.* In my sixteen years as a Catholic I have come to understand these words with an increasing appreciation of their wisdom and truth. Often wise priests console their penitents in the confessional to commit the past to God's mercy, knowing that we cannot change what has already taken place. When we muse over our past sins or failures, such wise confessors encourage us to let go of our past and place it into the merciful hands of God.

Committing the past to God's mercy is not only to give Him our sins and failures but also to give Him our successes as well. Many clergy converts can remember times of great blessings in their former ministries, occasions when God used them mightily in helping others to know Christ and His salvation. They fondly recall how people responded to their biblical teaching, counsel, or direction with a heart fully open to God. It is easy to form an identity around the things that we have done or accomplished. That in fact is how most people form their personal identities in our culture. But basing our identity on our accomplishments is not the way of Christ. If it were, Paul would not have said, "Whatever was gain to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil 3:7). Christ's way is for His disciples to form an identity through relationship rather than through accomplishment. Becoming Catholic and becoming comfortable with being Catholic is a long process of reshaping our identity based on a relationship with Christ by participation in His Church. Committing the past to God's mercy involves thanking Him for His blessings and giving those successes back to Him. As we relinquish our successes, we come to love God more in the present.

Committing the present to God's love means that we are willing for God to show us how wide and how deep is His love for us. This four letter word, of course, suffers from overuse in contemporary America, but that fact does not lessen its true meaning or the Divine Reality behind it. The Scriptures speak over and over again of God's love as covenant faithfulness or *chesed* (חסד). In the Psalms and the Prophets God constantly reminds His people of His loving goodness in contrast to their apostasy. Like Israel, our past can cause us to doubt God's love in the present both in our failures and in our successes. But if we know that God's loving faithfulness never changes, we can commit

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“...a true faith, a sustained and enduring faith, knows that God alone can make us happy. The knowledge that God is the true source of our happiness beckons us to place our trust in Him.”



our present circumstances to Him with the expectation that we will find the traces of His love marking our path as we move forward. God's love for us is like an ever flowing stream coming down from above.

Committing our present to God means believing that God is enough to make us happy. Everyone desires happiness, longs for it, needs it. Everyone senses that happiness is the goal of life. But few know how to find it. One reason is that we all too often think that the right set of circumstances will make us happy. The right job, the right house, the right spouse. And so our constant temptation is to substitute things or people for the one thing that can truly make us happy. But a true faith, a sustained and enduring faith, knows that God alone can make us happy. The knowledge that God is the true source of our happiness beckons us to place our trust in Him.

The great spiritual writers throughout the history of the Church emphasize that happiness in God carries with it a process of detachment from lesser goods. The lesser things, good in and of themselves, are not evil but they can become obstacles to a more profound trust in God if we allow them to substitute for God as the center and source of our contentment. Through consciously detaching ourselves from lesser goods we open up our hearts to a greater good of God's indwelling presence. When we allow God's love to dwell within our hearts with increasing frequency and depth, we gradually come to see that He is the source and ground of our happiness. So, detachment from lesser goods and attachment to the Ultimate Good requires conscious effort through prayer, meditation, and participation in the sacraments of the Church.

The increasing perception of God's love in the present causes us to place greater trust in God's providence for our future. We come to know that whatever our future brings, God foresaw it and is showing us His love through it. The word providence derives from a Latin verb *providere* "to see beforehand." When we are beseeching God in the present, He already sees our future because it is present to Him for whom all things are like the present. To Him there is no past, present, or future. It is all one Now! Providence also translates a Greek word beloved by Christian writers. That word *pronoia* (προνοια) derives from a verb *pronoiein* (προνοειν) meaning "to mind ahead of time." While we are blinded by our present circumstances, God is already minding the store, as it were, of our future. Like a good shopkeeper, He is arranging the furniture and goods inside the store to make us more and more to be saints.

Consider the life of Mary, Jesus's mother. While humbly accepting God's plan for her to bear the Eternal Word (Logos), she still could not see all that her vocation as the Mother of God entailed. She could not see herself standing by the cross of Jesus (cf. Jn 19:25-27). Yet God was preparing her all along to face the ignominious death of her Son. God also prepares us to bear future trials by strengthening our faith through lesser trials of the present so that we may become triumphant when the great trials arise.

Most of us who were Protestant clergy never foresaw ourselves as Catholics when we began our ministries, but it was already in God's mind and heart. He was guiding our every step in both success and failure to bring us to the point where we are now. Even if we were unaware of or inattentive to God's providence, it was there all the same. God was minding the store of our lives to reveal our future step by step. Even now, within the walls of Holy Mother Church, we still often do not know where our future is leading in practical service but we can be sure that He is preparing our steps. And our way of stepping into that future is really the same as when we were in Protestant ministry: trust. We trust best when we commit ourselves daily to His love, that is, being loved by Him and to returning His love for us. ■

BLOG

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

Prayer List



Clergy

- For a former Baptist minister in Nova Scotia, that his heart may become ever more open to the truth of Jesus in the Catholic Church.
- For Jack, a Non-denominational Charismatic lay minister in Texas, that the Holy Spirit would guide him home to the Catholic Faith.
- For an Orthodox priest in Ethiopia, that God would grant him the grace to journey to full-communication with the successor of St. Peter in Rome.
- For David, a Non-denominational minister in Kenya, that the Father would show him the path home to the Catholic Church for him and many of his people.
- For Glenn, a faithful husband, father, and Protestant minister, to enter eternity as a friend of God.
- For Rob, a former Baptist American seminarian now living in China, that as he prays and studies the truths of the Catholic faith our Lord Jesus would guide him to a faithful Catholic who will assist him on his journey.
- For Daniel, a Lutheran pastor, that Jesus guides his heart and mind towards the Catholic Faith.
- For a Baptist minister in Delaware, that the Holy Spirit touches his heart to be open to the Catholic Church.

■ For Mark and his wife, that God guide their steps and open the necessary doors as they continue to journey towards Him.

Laitiy

- For Fernando and Rose to allow God, through His holy Catholic Church, to powerfully work in their marriage.
- For Dawn, that her journey through RCIA be a fruitful time of drawing closer to Jesus and culminate in receiving His Body and Blood at the Easter Vigil.
- For Mark, that the Holy Spirit guide his heart as he seeks to learn more about the Catholic Faith.
- For Adam, that he be led towards the fullness of all truth found within the Catholic Church.
- For Sue, that God answers her prayers and makes it possible for her to return to full communion with the one, holy, Catholic Church.
- For Francis and his wife, that they come to feel at home in their new life as Catholic Christians.
- For Brad, that his zeal for the Lord and His Church burns brightly and leads others towards the truth that he has found.
- For Rick, that his time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament bring him closer to Our Lord as he waits to receive Jesus truly present in the Eucharist.

■ For Teresa, that she be blessed beyond measure in her walk as a newly confirmed member of the Catholic Church.

- For George, that he finds good, faithful Catholic friends and the support he needs as he moves forward with his faith journey.
- For Marcus, that he finds support and fellowship as he journeys towards full communion with the See of St. Peter.
- For Jon, that he and his wife will be able to journey together through RCIA and come into the fullness of the Faith.
- For Jared and his family in their new life as Catholic Christians, that their needs be provided for and they continue to draw closer to our Lord in the Eucharist.
- For Barbara, who recently passed away, that her soul rest in peace and her husband find comfort in this time of sorrow.
- For Bill, who has been diagnosed with cancer, that God give him and his wife strength during this difficult time.

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.

The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

GET INVOLVED!

The Coming Home Network International encourages 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

Get the January 2013 **Featured Resources** specifically designed to provide our members with excellent material to deepen their understanding of the Faith and in turn pass it along to non-Catholic family and friends.

For more information, see page 2 of this newsletter.

2

"Like" us on Facebook and get exclusive news and updates about our apostolate.



3

Consider making a monthly donation to the Coming Home Network International this year to help us continue assisting men and women on their journeys towards the Catholic Church.

