



January 2014 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Reflections of a Journey

By Clifford L. Rogers, Ed.D.

My wife, Jeanette, and I were both raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and learned to hold strong negative feelings about the Catholic Church. My mother took great pride in being opposed to the Catholic Church; she did not know much about it, but she knew she was against it.

As a child, I was, however, drawn to the Catholic Church. I enjoyed the music and appreciated the pomp and liturgical attire. I can remember the church I attended was rented to an Orthodox group for special services. I watched from the balcony and enjoyed the music and incense. It reminded me of the stories I had read in the Old Testament about the temple, priests, and incense. During my high school years, I often listened to a radio station that broadcast the Mass, which was in Latin in those days, but I still listened and learned a few of the songs and parts of prayers. My mother was furious when she found out, so afterwards I had to be very discrete about listening.

My goal was to graduate from college and be a church schoolteacher for the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA). As I progressed through life, the feelings of being drawn to the Catholic Church went from being mildly interested to being very strong. I frequently pondered the words of Jesus when He gave Peter the task of feeding His lambs and His sheep.

Jeanette and I attended Seventh-day Adventist schools from the elementary level through college. We attended the same high school and college and started dating in college. We were married half

way through college. Through all the levels of education, we were taught that the "true church" must follow the Bible. Therefore, any church that did not follow the Bible to the letter was not the true church of God.

My impression of the SDA church was that individuals with advanced academic degrees or money are held in high regard and serve on committees and the higher offices of the church. The anti-Catholic beliefs and the respect for money and degrees I had been taught early in life were reinforced in my thinking throughout my education. I served at various levels of the SDA Church up until the age of about 50. I did just about everything, including such diverse positions as Bible instructor and church organist. I also taught middle school for two years and even preached a few times.

Is Seventh-day Adventist a "Bible church"?

I began to see that while the SDA claimed to follow the Bible, upon closer scrutiny, it only followed selected parts of the Bible. For instance, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a list of vows to which every prospective member must agree. Many of them are the standard Protestant thinking but baptismal vow #8 requires that every prospective member acknowledge that the church has spiritual gifts. Later, the new member learns that the term "spiritual gifts" means the writings of Ellen G. White. Seventh-day Adventists hold their proph-

"Journeys Home" is continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

Mrs. Ellen G. White (1827 – 1915), in the highest regard. However, I had serious doubts about her. For example, White wrote that Christ went into the most Holy Place to be with God the Father in the year 1844, but the Bible says that Christ went to the Father and was at His right side following His Resurrection (see Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69, Acts 7:55-56, in addition, there are at least eight more New Testament texts on this issue). J. N. Loughborough, an SDA pioneer, told of White having a vision about the stars and planets. Her vision, which did not convey any information about the stars other than what was already known by science, but did, however, produce a lot of false ideas and misinformation. For example, she wrote in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 362, that eating eggs, meat, and butter increased the sex drive in children. In *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 505, she wrote that salvation depends on worshiping on Saturday. In another part of her writings, she tells how man has defiled the image of God by mating with animals and producing such beings as the wild bushman in Africa, the Patagonians, the Hottentots, and the Digger Indians. (References for these concepts and many more can be found on the Internet at <http://nonsda.org/egw/critica.shtml>.) Her writings on health include her advice that eating pork causes leprosy, among other diseases (*Healthful Living*, p. 183.) It is difficult to find original publications written by White, because the SDA church is editing many of her writings to make them more acceptable to the public. Since the SDA Church holds White's visions and writings as coming from God, editing her books is tantamount to rewriting the word of God.

As I moved into my fifties, I drifted progressively farther away from Adventism but I never could get over the idea, implanted in my thinking, that the true Church of God would follow the teachings and principals of the Bible literally. When I realized that the SDA church was not doing that,

I had no choice but to leave. I stopped going to church and for many years had no interest in attending any church. I felt I had been lied to and did not want to be a victim of any more religious lies.

Interest in Catholicism

I bought a book entitled, *Why Do Catholics Do That?* by Dr. Kevin Johnson. I had no intention of starting a journey toward the Catholic Church. I was just curious. Then, while I was channel surfing one day, I came across EWTN. I was immediately interested and spent many hours watching and then began reading various Catholic websites. Over the next four and a half years, I completed three sets of lessons over the Internet from the Catholic Home Study Service and read 26 books and pamphlets about Catholicism. The more I found out about the Catholic Church and what it actually taught, the more I studied. I could not buy and read the books fast enough! Everything I had been taught in my youth about the Catholic Church was wrong. Reflecting on this situation now, it seems logical: How could one person teach another person about a subject that the first person had never truly studied? Finally, I turned to the Bible and found that the teachings of the Catholic Church were in the Bible, some going all the way back to the time of Abraham!

My curiosity prompted me to go a Mass. I noticed that the priest, following the consecration of the bread and wine, gave the bread and wine to those who would walk up to him. What I was seeing in the Mass seemed to be similar to what happened in Genesis 14:18-20 when Abraham encountered Melchizedek. Melchizedek was both a king and a priest, the only one under the Old Covenant. When Abraham went to him, Melchizedek brought out wine and bread and then blessed Abraham. Was this a coincidence or something more?

"Journeys Home" is continued on page 5 ►

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

January 6

Dr. Norman McCrummen*
 Former Presbyterian minister

January 13

Sara Piazza*
 Revert from Judaism

January 20

Abby Johnson*
 Former Baptist and Episcopalian

January 27

Nancy McCall*
 Former Baptist and Evangelical

*Schedule is subject to change.

Loving Our God and Our Spouse

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell



One of the most beautiful and life-giving gifts that God has given to humanity is marriage. When a man and a woman make a covenant to spend their entire lives together in friendship and mutual support, they are modeling the relationship between God and His Chosen People. In the Old Covenant, the Lord called Israel His spouse because of His desire for intimacy with His people. It was natural then that the prophet Hosea would portray idolatry as adultery, a kind of betrayal of that intimacy with God that is as unique as the intimacy of marriage is supposed to be. This prompted the apostle Paul to speak of marriage as carrying a high and sublime meaning, that of the love of Christ for His Church and of the Church's loving submission to the will of Christ.

Our culture has, by and large, lost the meaning of marriage but there are still couples who understand and believe in the high and holy vocation of marriage. Even for those who believe in the permanence of marriage, however, living out their marriage vows can be a challenge. There are the usual challenges of misunderstandings, miscommunications, and misdeeds but there are also exceptional moments when everything seems in doubt. One of those moments can be when spouses are at different places in their spiritual journeys.

In our work with Protestant clergy and laity at the Coming Home Network we have seen many instances of the turmoil caused in a marriage when one spouse desires to move toward the Catholic Church and the other does not. Some of us, in fact, who work with these men and women have experienced the same problems in our own marriages. What we tend to forget in the midst of difficult times is that God has always been there for us and will continue to be. Our part is to call upon Him for help. He is our Father and therefore desires to give good gifts to His children. One of those gifts is surely love and mutual respect in marriage.

Marriage counselors will tell you that to heal a marriage relationship or to make a good one better, the spouses sometimes have to step back and look at their relationship with a little distance, the way others from the outside may see it. One of the functions of a good marriage counselor is to uncover sources of tension and misunderstandings as well as returning to the basics of marital communication.

Three Sources of Tension

Healing relationships requires identifying sources of tension and looking for ways to eliminate or minimize them. When a person is exploring the Catholic Church intensely, that very process can trigger something in his/her spouse that neither of them can fully understand. The reason is that each marriage possesses a kind of unique identity just as each individual person does. Any threat to the identity of the couple makes understanding the relationship more difficult. Some of the more common sources of tension are prejudice, embarrassment, and a sense of abandonment.

One kind of tension can be produced by prejudice, that attitude which demonizes another religion because a person doesn't un-

derstand the teachings or practices of that religion. Among Christians these prejudices can arise from two different sources. Christians from a Protestant fundamentalist background who have heard their whole lives that Catholics are not Christians struggle to overcome prejudice against the Catholic Church.

To a lesser degree, Evangelicals in general have heard that much of what the Catholic Church teaches is against the Bible. On the other end of the spectrum, one sometimes finds strong reactions from people who have lived much of their Christian lives in a secular mindset that characterizes so much of mainstream—or what used to be mainstream—Protestantism.

Prejudice is not that difficult to understand. We all have it in one form or another. Some Catholics have prejudices

against Protestants too. The answer to prejudice is to be willing to understand what one has not understood before. Someone open to change asks these kinds of questions: "Is what I thought the Church teaches what it actually teaches?"; "Have I taken the time to listen and understand before agreeing or disagreeing?"; "Do I know any good Catholics with whom I could talk?" To overcome prejudice, one must be willing to learn from those whom he/she thought had nothing to teach. This requires humility. And it is not wrong to point out lovingly to our spouses that humility is a virtue we all need. Disagreement may remain after learning but at least it will not be prejudice based on ignorance.

Embarrassment and shame are also a common reaction of spouses who feel threatened by the spiritual meanderings of his/her spouse. This reaction often arises because of the network of family and friends the couple has been involved with. Depending on the depth of the feeling, a spouse may see becom-

“Our culture has, by and large, lost the meaning of marriage but there are still couples who understand and believe in the high and holy vocation of marriage. Even for those who believe in the permanence of marriage, however, living out their marriage vows can be a challenge...”

ing Catholic as akin to his/her spouse committing some grave moral evil or crime against society. Even in lesser cases, a spouse may worry how family and friends will react to the news and cringe in shame.

Embarrassment and shame arise in us all because we don't want to be humiliated in front of those we respect or who respect us. Some spouses are embarrassed by any association with the Catholic Church because it seems to be such a different way of thinking and living. And they are right. Being Catholic is different from our secular world and even from other forms of Christianity. It would be dishonest not to recognize that fact. However, sometimes the differences are exaggerated or misrepresented. Often what people think are the differences between Catholicism and other forms of Christianity are not the true differences. Only patient learning of the true differences will reveal the real issues. Seeking to learn requires another virtue in addition to humility. That is the virtue of fortitude or stick-to-it-ness. The pursuit of truth, any truth, requires a commitment to pursue the questions through to the end.

The third tension is due to a sense of abandonment by one spouse who doesn't share the journey with the one who is changing. When one spouse is exploring Catholicism, the other may experience disorientation because all that is familiar seems to fly out the window. All that the couple has held in common and has given them common ground seems to be disintegrating. My wife went through an extensive time feeling this separation from me when I was exploring the Catholic Church. She felt left behind as if I were going off to some far and foreign land. The sense of abandonment can only be lessened by reaffirmations of love from the spouse who is exploring the Catholic Church. The duty and joy of expressing love for our spouses is heightened in this instance because developing beliefs that seem different than those shared heretofore can produce distance in our marriages.

Back to Basics

When we as human beings are troubled or experiencing the pain of separation from those whom we have loved, we must return to some foundational truths that can guide us as we navigate troubled waters. The first truth is that marriage is permanent and must be the greatest priority of all our human relations. In other words, divorce is not an option. This is made doubly difficult because, in the last forty years, many churches that had formerly held to the biblical idea of marital perma-

nence have abandoned it. Even those churches who profess belief in the infallibility of the Bible have relinquished the permanence of marriage in practice. They have simply succumbed to the secular culture. Couples who have lived their common life in these churches may feel justified in contemplating divorce. It is crucial for Christian couples to reread the Bible on marriage and divorce, making a commitment to the integrity of their marriages.

The second is that truth cannot be ignored. God gave us minds precisely to understand and live the truth. Even the pagan philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome understood the importance of truth. How much more should those who profess

that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life be committed to the pursuit of truth? This commitment means recognizing that we only understand truth imperfectly and that our whole life we will be pursuing truth. Blessed John Henry Newman, one of the most famous converts to the Catholic Faith from Anglicanism, understood this well when he said that to live is to change and to live long is to change much. For most who investigate the Catholic Church, a major part of their journey is the pursuit of truth.

Spouses may need to grow together in understanding the importance of a well-formed conscience. That means we have to give people the space to follow after God. I know this well from the day I told my wife that I had to join the Catholic Church because I believed in my heart

that it was the true Church of Christ. Not yet understanding my convictions, but wishing to support me, she encouraged me to follow my conscience.

The third reality is that love is the oar that guides us through the troubled waters. No one who truly is searching for God can turn away from love. As Jesus explained, it is easy to love those who love us; the challenge is when we feel separated and alienated from others. While spouses in love always hope for the best, they can sometimes experience alienation and loneliness from one another. It is precisely during such times that love and charity must prevail with patience and faith that God will work things out for good. And He does so because He promised "all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). ■



Starting Anew

By Mary Clare Pieczynski



This month heralds the start of a new year and everyone is making resolutions, attempting to shed holiday weight, getting our finances under control, and reconnecting with friends we have lost touch with over

the years. January, though, is also a great opportunity to re-focus our spiritual lives and is another chance for us to resolve to grow closer to Christ and His Church. We have just celebrated the nativity of our Lord Jesus: the event when the Second Person of the Trinity, who had taken on human flesh, was born of the Virgin Mary and began His earthly life in order to bring about our redemption. What an opportunity for us to reexamine our lives in order to ask ourselves:

- "In what ways have I drawn closer to Jesus this past year?"
- "Where do I want to be spiritually at this time next year?"
- "What concrete things can I do in the next 12 months to live my Christian faith in a deeper way?"

Sometimes, reflecting on the first question can be sobering. Have I neglected my morning prayers more often than not because my bed just seems too comfortable? Have I put off calling up my local Catholic parish to inquire about RCIA classes out of fear or uncertainty? Have I not given my family the time and attention they deserve out of work busyness or other "important" projects? Whether we are lifelong Catholics, converts or reverts to the Catholic Church, or somewhere on the journey to the Catholic Faith, I suspect we would all be able to identify at least one or two key points where our faith life needs to grow.

Perhaps to move forward into a deeper relationship with God we need to start with the basics and ask ourselves "What is my perception of who God is?" Does that need healing? The Apostles Creed begins with the simple statement "I believe in God, the Father almighty." St. Paul and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* remind us we are to strive

to be "imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love" (CCC 1694, Eph 5:1-2). Do we have a wounded idea of fatherhood, a broken relationship with earthly examples of fatherhood that prevents us from fully embracing the love, mercy, and tenderness of our heavenly Father?

Or maybe we need to work on being a friend of God. Our relationship with Him might be one of obedience and "following the rules" but still lack an enthusiastic commitment, a complete surrender that gives God permission to work in our lives and transform us from within. Jesus calls us His friends (John 15:15). What a privilege and a responsibility! A friend truly cares about the other, wants to spend time with the other, and has a close and honest relationship with the other. Do we do the same in our relationship with God? Ultimately, though, our relationship with God needs to be as one lover to another. As God tenderly loved His Chosen People, we are called to be in a passionate, loving embrace with the Lord. While, as in any relationship, we might not always have warm feelings of love and happiness when we think of God (which may be something called aridity or spiritual dryness), we are always called to a deeper, more full surrender to Him who first loved us (1 John 4:19) and wills for us to enter into a loving, life-giving relationship

"Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life...and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Eph 4:22-24



with Him. He loves us every moment of our lives. Thus, we are called to love likewise.

In what ways can we practically pursue this call to love? It might prompt us to make a radical choice such as giving up a pastorate in a Protestant denomination and becoming Catholic, or it might be something as simple as not hitting the snooze button so we have a few minutes in the morning to dialog with Jesus. In addition, many of us would benefit from more frequent reception of the Sacraments, especially receiving the Eucharist or frequenting Confession. Can you make room in your schedule to go to Mass one day each week besides Sunday? Can you take out an hour once or twice a month to make sure you get to the Sacrament of Reconciliation or sit before Jesus in adoration? For those who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, one may always attend Mass, read spiritual authors, and delve deeper into the teachings of the Catholic Church.

One simple, practical tool a number of members of the Coming Home Network International have found helpful is our daily *Read the Bible and the Catechism in a Year* guide. By this time next year, you might be able to say that you have read through the entire Bible and Catechism! You can download the guide for free from our website (www.chnetwork.org), or place an order through our office for a durable, full-

color copy (740-450-1175 or www.chresources.com). Better yet, order more than one and have friends and family members join you in your commitment.

Whatever form your continuing faith journey might take, we are always called to move forward in Jesus's call to love Him more fully and recognize our need to put Him first in our lives. God does not disappoint. He will honor our efforts and desires to come closer to Him. And the benefits are out of this world!

We are all called by virtue of our Baptism to a life of holiness—not next year, not in ten years, not when we retire, but now. What steps can we take to draw closer to the Lord of our life? While we might be excellent examples of Martha's busyness and hospitality, we also need to sit at our Master's feet, listen to Him speak to our hearts, and allow Him to mold our lives into a more perfect image of Himself. What better way to spend this next year and the rest of our lives? ■

Mary Clare Pieczynski is the Publications and Laity Coordinator of the CHNetwork. She has a degree in theology from Ave Maria University.

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

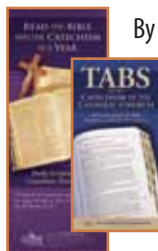
Please go to www.chnetwork.org/resources to see current job listings. Or, if you know of an employment opportunity that you would like posted for the CHNetwork membership, please e-mail the job description to maryp@chnetwork.org.

FEATURED RESOURCES

Deep in Scripture

Special guest Teresa Beem joins Marcus Grodi in this episode of *Deep in Scripture*. Teresa discusses one of the Scripture verses she never saw when she was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church before converting to the Catholic Faith.

Read the Bible and the Catechism in a Year guide and Catechism Tabs



By using this *Read the Bible and the Catechism in a Year* guide and making a commitment of only twenty to thirty minutes a day, you can prayerfully read through the entire Bible and Catechism in one year! Use whatever Bible translation you like that contains the entire Canon of Scripture. This guide is divided by month, but you can start at any time. Receive a packet of 10 and share with your family and friends! Also included is a set of Catechism Tabs. These handy tabs give quick and easy reference to the teachings of the Church on 25 topics and include a subject index.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive a set of Catechism Tabs and 10 copies of *Read the Bible and the Catechism in a Year*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD, a set of Catechism Tabs and 10 copies of *Read the Bible and the Catechism in a Year*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

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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

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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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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.



Laity

■ For Dan, that he be able to find local Catholic connections to help him go forward with his interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a woman who comes from an Eastern religion and recently made a number of sacrifices to be received into the Catholic Church, may our Lord reward her courage.

■ For Deb, who is watching EWTN and reading about the Catholic Faith and wondering what her next step is towards the Catholic Church.

■ For Tony, who through his reading of the Church Fathers has been drawn closer to becoming Catholic.

■ For Lynn, that she come to understand that the Church's teaching is a loving reflection of the truth found in Jesus.

■ For Jamie, that she find assistance and encouragement as she looks to continue with 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.

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*)

Fr. Ray Ryland (former Anglican priest), Dr. Charles Feicht (revert from Evangelicalism), Dr. Robert Geiger (revert), Bruce Sullivan (former Church of Christ minister)

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart
(former United Methodist)

...Journeys Home Continued...

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I had been taught that when a person died, they were totally dead and that their soul went somewhere to wait for the resurrection. This didn’t make sense to me. I knew a story from the Old Testament where it said that “Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:24). Then there was the story in the New Testament about the Transfiguration. If people who died were totally dead, how could Moses and Elijah be conversing with Jesus? Also, where did all those people, whose graves were opened after the Crucifixion, go following the Ascension? Then I came across the text, Romans 8:35-39, where it says that nothing, including death, can separate us from God.

A major hurdle for me to get over was the Catholic teaching that the bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Christ. I cannot remember how many times I studied and re-studied the passages in the Bible that concerned the Eucharist. The more I studied the higher the evidence piled up. I learned that the Eucharistic elements were not symbols of Christ but each was Christ and they were required to be recognized as such by the Christian. Support for this can be found in Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-22, John 6:47-63, and 1 Corinthians 11:24-30.

Each time I came across a Catholic teaching that could be answered by the Bible, I was drawn closer and closer to the Church. I still, however, had questions and misgivings. For example, I “knew” it was totally wrong to confess sins to a priest. But, in spite of my preconceived notions, I decided to look further into the idea of confession. I came across Matthew 18:18, “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This text was followed by John 20:22-23, “...he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” Once again, my preconceived notions were proven wrong — by simply reading the Bible!

Another of my misconceptions was about Mary. I had thought that Catholics make far too much fuss over her. She was a woman chosen by God to give birth to His Son because He needed someone for the task, but that was all. Then there was the issue of calling her “Queen of Heaven.” So, I went back to “the Book” plus this time I included some history books as well. I found that in biblical times, the mother of the king often had an influential role as “Queen Mother.” The mother of Assyria’s king was the king’s counselor and an intercessor for the people. The mother of the Babylonian king served in a similar capacity.

In Judah and Persia, the king’s mother was listed ahead of the king’s wife and other members of the household. Solomon had 700+ wives but only one mother and when she entered the room he stood up, paid her homage, and called for a throne to be brought for her to occupy beside him (1 Kings 2). So, what does all this have to do with Mary? Christians believe that Jesus is the king of heaven and earth. Even Pilate, not knowing what he was really saying, made reference to Jesus being a king. Following the practice of the Jews and other kingdoms of the era, since Jesus is the king, we can see why Mary is honored as the “Queen Mother.”

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One other thought-provoking point for me came not from the Bible but rather from within the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself. Their pioneer, leader, and authoress, Ellen G. White, wrote, in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, page 404, paragraph three, and in *God’s Messengers*, chapter 191, “God has never left his people without a witness.” That was a shocker to me because I knew from history classes that only the Catholic Church has survived and served as a source of inspiration, guidance, and a witness in Christian matters through the ages from the time of Christ to the present. In other

words, the Catholic Church has survived over 2000 years, withstanding the gates of Gehenna, pagan worship and sacrifices, dictators, wars, the Reformation, hatred, and discrimination. This perspective was a clincher for me. I knew from this point forward that I had no choice but to associate myself with the Church Christ had personally started 2000 years ago. Part of my decision in this matter can be accredited to my Grandmother, with whom I had lived for a few years as a child. She had taught me that no matter what circumstances I found myself in, I should choose and do what I thought was right.

After the four and a half years of study, I was convinced that the Catholic Church was correct and was instituted by Christ by a direct command to St. Peter. I was ready to begin attending a Catholic church. However, I was having a considerable amount of negative reaction from my spouse. She did not even want to discuss the possibilities of any religion, particularly Catholicism.

I appealed to EWTN and several websites for prayers regarding my situation. I was put in touch with a mentor, B.W., from the CHNetwork who was very supportive. I was stunned when I found out that not only was B.W. a convert, and, thus, knew what I was going through, but that she also came from the same SDA church, attended the same college, and did not have her spouse’s support for her conversion.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

One Sunday, I decided to attend the 7:30 a.m. Mass. I arrived early for the service and sat in my truck watching the members entering the church. I was a little taken back by how they were dressed. I had assumed that church attendance meant white shirt and tie. I understood that God accepted us as we are, but I had a real problem adjusting to seeing well-worn jeans, shorts, and sandals in church. I can remember going into the church and doing all the things I knew Catholics did as they entered the worship area. I thought that those actions would help me slip into a pew inconspicuously.

RCIA

The next week, I attended a RCIA meeting. My wife was not pleased. Jeanette and I had both been taught that Catholics were not Christians. I think knowing that helped me handle the situation. I felt like I was being persecuted for the cause of Christ and, while I was sad that it was happening, I felt good that I could do that for Christ. The home tensions went on for several days thereafter. Before our annual trip to visit her relatives up north, I was warned not to mention anything about the horrible things I was studying and doing.

The RCIA classes started in September. I think my wife was experiencing some of the same fears I had been going through since I first started to recognize that I would someday have to follow what I was learning to be true. As I attended church, learning and trying to participate in the Mass as best I could, I realized how good it felt to be there.

I continued to read, study, and ask questions. I can remember waking up at night, watching EWTN, and feeling like I was grieving over the fact that I was being called to forsake what I had learned from my youth and cross the threshold into the Catholic way of life. I think I have some idea of what “The Rich Man” went through when he was invited by Christ to follow Him (Matt 10:17-22). It felt like I was slowly dying from one life, while being born into a new life. At times I found my hands shaking from the tension and stress of leaving a set of beliefs, which I had held for decades, and venturing out in the world of truth and enlightenment.

Each RCIA meeting was followed by the refrigerator treatment at home. One day my wife mentioned that she was afraid that I was turning into a religious fanatic. She was concerned that her family — all Seventh-day Adventists — would make fun of her if she was married to a Catholic.

Since I had been taught from childhood that I should do what I thought was right, even though it might be unpopular, my journey continued via reading, Internet explorations, and RCIA meetings. It wasn't long before I was thinking of myself as a Catholic. I caught myself referring to the pope as “our pope” or to the Church as “my Church.” I found it intriguing that the occupants of the Chair of St. Peter could not only be traced by name, but also by the dates that they occupied the chair. I learned that three of the first four popes were mentioned by name in the Bible. I also learned that some popes led holy and

dedicated lives while others were reprobates in every sense of the word. Such information gave me the feeling that the Church has always been run by humans and we all make mistakes and are in need of forgiveness.

About this time in the United States, cases of child and adolescent molestation by priests were coming into the public eye. This situation bothered me a lot. I decided not to jump to conclusions or pass judgment based on surface information, but to investigate the total picture. Considering priests as members of the clergy and then investigating instances of child molestation by the clergy, I saw a significantly different picture. Child molestation was not a Catholic problem, but rather a clergy problem. Broadening the picture even more, I found that child molestation is not merely a *clergy* or religious problem, but rather a *people* problem.

Eventually, my RCIA group experienced the Rite of Acceptance. When Fr. Tony sprinkled holy water on the wooden crosses we were given, I sensed a strong smell of roses. The fragrance was so strong I could hardly breathe. I mentioned it in RCIA and found that nobody else had smelled it. It bothered me so much that I went to Fr. Tony and asked if he used a fragrance. He said, “No.” I sensed the same fragrance when the Bibles they gave us were blessed with holy water. Through Internet research I found that others have experienced the association of roses and the presence of Mary. I believe that I was being supported and encouraged by Mary to continue my journey.

I was baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist Church when I was nine years old. The week before Lent, I found my Baptismal certificate and submitted it to our RCIA leader. I can remember my sponsor teasing me about finally finding it because that meant I had to go to Reconciliation, rather than simply be baptized.

First Confession

I had not realized what a boring life I had lived until I started trying to get some thoughts together for my first Sacrament of Reconciliation. There I was, nearly 70 years old and I could only think of a half-dozen or so actions that I felt I needed to confess. Having been raised in a very strict home, my youth was spent more in mischief than sin. I guess I had been so busy working two or three jobs to put my children and myself through private schools and private universities that I had little time to get into trouble. I did have one huge sin to confess. For years, I held that abortion was acceptable. I became very upset when I was talking with the priest about it. However, I managed to get through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and head for home.

I expected to feel relieved immediately after receiving forgiveness. Well, it did not happen that way at all. Afterward, I went to the nearest Wal-Mart and walked around trying to calm down from the experience of Reconciliation. In a little while, I felt better and went home. As I sat in my chair watching TV, I kept re-thinking my recent experience. I think it was taking awhile for the concept of forgiveness to soak into my brain. The more



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...Journeys Home Continued...

I sat there and thought about the experience, the better I felt. In about 45 minutes, I felt so good and so high that when bedtime came, I was not the least bit tired. In retrospect, I can see that Reconciliation is not a “confess and get out of there” process, but rather a process that leads a person to thinking beyond the act to the meaning of the total experience.

Holy Week

As I sat in the church before the Easter Vigil, waiting for the ceremony that would allow me to become a member of the Catholic Church and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, I remembered how far away Easter seemed when we began our RCIA process the previous fall. It seemed like I started my RCIA journey only a few weeks ago. Now, Easter was arriving and there I was, with my fellow travelers, ready and eager to receive First Communion.

Coming home after my Easter Vigil was a step into the past. There were more tears and angry words from my wife. That night she slept on the couch. The next morning she seemed to have made an adjustment and breakfast came and went without incident or comment. In the weeks that followed Easter, I realized that I was more relaxed. I no longer felt starved for information. My reading turned from the “Why do Catholics do that?” to “How do Catholics do that?” and to the rosary and other prayers.

In the time following the Easter Vigil, I frequently found myself reflecting on the events of my journey. As I mentioned previously, I had been taught early in life that a person should stand up for what they believe to be right. Therefore, I had no choice but to become a Catholic. I had always thought that the Bible should be the basis for a religion. Therefore, when I saw that the Catholic Church came directly out of Jewish beliefs and practices and that the basic teachings of the Church came right out of the Bible, I felt that I must become Catholic.

I am thankful

I am thankful for the people who helped me get to this point in my life. If I made a list, the list would include all of the people who supported me through the difficulties I encountered on my journey so that I could look to the future with optimism.

So, what is my life like now? I now serve as an Extraordinary Minister of the Holy Eucharist. I also take the Holy Eucharist

to shut-ins and help out with our RCIA group. I am continuing to study and hope to become better informed, so I can speak a word for God when opportunities arise. It may seem a little strange that my goals and activities do not include the conversion of my wife. However, I think I will have to leave the major portion of that project to the Holy Spirit. All I can do at this point is to lead a Christian life.

I have some of the physical situations that go with my age and thus thoughts of the future frequently cross my mind. I feel that I am now better prepared to face the future and I find great comfort in the phrase, “Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” ■



DR. RODGERS has been married for fifty-eight years and has four children, all grown and on their own. He has served in a variety of public and private educational and mental health services. During his working years, he acquired credentials for educational and psychological services in the public schools of California covering grades kindergarten through Community College. He also acquired a license in psychology and one in family therapy. His publications have covered a large span of topics in both professional and general topics.

His community service has included being a member of the board of directors for a local Lions Club, Administrators Association, County Attendance Review Board, and President of the local Mental Health Association. He has taught religion classes, helped in the youth activities, occasionally filled in as the preacher, and was church organist for seventeen years before becoming Catholic.

He has enjoyed a variety of hobbies and pastimes such as photography, bowling, golf, amateur radio, chess, and a little hiking.

BLOG

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The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

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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

Invite friends and family over one Monday night this month to watch *The Journey Home* program with host Marcus Grodi.



2

Go to chnetwork.org to read additional conversion stories not published in the newsletter and share them electronically.



3

Make a New Year's resolution to faithfully pray for the CHNetwork and those we minister to who are on the journey to the Catholic Church.

