

The

# Coming Home Network International

JULY 2008 NEWSLETTER

## Journeys Home

### Race With The Devil:

A Journey from the Hell of Hate  
to the Well of Mercy

by

Joseph Pearce



"A sound atheist can not be too careful of the books that he reads."

So said C.S. Lewis in his autobiographical apologia, *Surprised by Joy*. These words continue to resonate across the abyss of years that separates me from the abysmal bitterness of my past. What is true of the atheist is as true of the racist. Looking back into the piteous pits of the hell of hatred that consumed my youth, I can see the role that great Christian writers played in lighting my path out of the darkened depths. Eventually, with their light to guide me, I stumbled out into the dazzling brilliance of Christian day.

Looking back along that path, I can see, in my memory's eye, the literary candles that lit the way. There are dozens of candles bearing the name of G.K. Chesterton, of which *Orthodoxy*, *The Everlasting Man*, *The Well and the Shallows*, and *The Outline of Sanity* shine forth particularly brightly. Almost as many candles bear the name of Chesterton's great friend, Hilaire Belloc, and several bear the name of John Henry Newman. And, of course, there is the flickering presence of Lewis and Tolkien. These and countless others light the path by which I've traveled.

Long before any of these candles were lit, I found myself groping in the unlit tunnel of racial hatred, the angst and anger of which had all but obliterated the blissful memories of a relatively carefree childhood. Guilty of ignorance, I left my innocence behind and advanced into adolescence with the arrogance of pride and prejudice - boyhood bliss blistered by bitterness.

I grew up in a relatively poor neighborhood in London's East End at a time when large-scale immigration was causing major demographic changes. The influx of large numbers of Indians and Pakistanis was quite literally changing the face of England, darkening the complexion and adding to the complexity of English life. Perhaps inevitably, the arrival of these immigrants caused a great deal of resentment amongst the indigenous population. Racial tensions were high and violence between white and Asian youths was becoming commonplace. It was in this highly charged atmosphere that I emerged into angry adolescence.

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

My Dear Brother and Friend: A Letter from Fr John Thayer .....	pg 3
What they're saying about our DIH Conferences .....	pg A
Quo Vadis News & Bulletin Board .....	pgs B & C
Prayer List .....	pg D



At the age of fifteen I joined the National Front, a new force in British politics which demanded the compulsory repatriation of all non-white immigrants. As a political activist, my life revolved around street demonstrations, many of which became violent. I filled my empty head and inflamed my impassioned heart with racist ideology and elitist philosophy. It was at this time that I made what I now consider to be my Faustian pact, i.e. my pact with the Devil; not that I had heard of Faust nor, as an agnostic, did I have any particular belief in the Devil. Nonetheless, I recall making a conscious ‘wish’ that I would give everything if I could work full-time for the National Front. My ‘wish’ was granted and I abandoned my education to devote myself wholeheartedly to becoming a full-time ‘racial revolutionary’.

I never looked back. At the age of sixteen I became editor of Bulldog, the newspaper of the Young National Front, and, three years later, became editor of Nationalism Today, a ‘higher brow’ ideological journal. At eighteen I became the youngest member of the party’s governing body. Whether I believed in him or not, the Devil had certainly been diligent in answering my ‘wish’.

Apart from the racism, the sphere of my bitterness also included a disdain for Catholicism, partly because the terrorists of the IRA were Catholics and partly because I had imbibed the anti-Catholic prejudice of many Englishmen that Catholicism is a ‘foreign’ religion. Such prejudice is deeply rooted in the national psyche, stretching back to the anti-Catholicism of Henry VIII and his English Reformation, to Elizabeth I and the Spanish Armada, to James I and the Gunpowder Plot, and to William of Orange and the so-called ‘Glorious’ Revolution. I knew enough of English history – or, at least, enough of the prejudiced Protestant view of it that I had imbibed in my ignorance – to see Catholicism as an enemy to the Nationhood which, as a racial nationalist, I now espoused with a quasi-religious fervour.

It was, however, in the context of ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland that my anti-Catholicism would reveal itself in its full ugliness. The IRA’s bombing campaign was at its height during the 1970s and my hatred of Republican terrorism led to my becoming involved in the volatile politics of Ulster. I joined the Orange Order, a pseudo-masonic secret society whose sole purpose of existence is to oppose ‘popery’, i.e. Catholicism. Technically, although only ‘Protestants’ were allowed to join the Orange Order, any actual belief in God did not appear necessary. As a ‘Protestant’ agnostic I was

allowed to join and a friend of mine, an avowed atheist, was also accepted without qualms. Ultimately the only qualification was not a love for Christ but a hatred of the Church.

In October 1978, still only seventeen, I flew to Derry in Northern Ireland to assist in the organization of a National Front march. Tensions were high in the city and, towards the end of the day, riots broke out between the Protestant demonstrators and the police. For the duration of the evening and well into the night, petrol bombs were thrown at the police, Catholic homes were attacked and Catholic-owned shops were looted and destroyed. I had experienced political violence on the streets of England but nothing on the sheer scale of the anger and violence that I experienced in Northern Ireland.

My appetite whetted, I became further embroiled in the politics of Ulster, forging friendships and political alliances with the leaders of the Protestant paramilitary groups, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).

During a secret meeting with the army council of the UVF it was suggested that I use my connections with extremist groups in other parts of the world to open channels for arms smuggling. On another occasion an ‘active service unit’ of the UVF, i.e. a terrorist cell, offered their ‘services’ to me, assuring me of their willingness to assassinate any ‘targets’ that I would like ‘taken out’ and expressing their eagerness to show me their arsenal of weaponry as a mark of their ‘good faith’. I declined their offer, as politely as possible – one does not wish to offend ‘friends’ such as these! They were dangerous times. Within a few years, two of my friends in Northern Ireland had been murdered by the IRA.

Back in England, violence continued to erupt at National Front demonstrations. Outside an election meeting in an Indian area of London in 1979, at which I was one of the speakers, a riot ensued in which one demonstrator was killed. A few years later a friend of mine, an elderly man, was killed at another election meeting, though on that occasion I was not present.

Predictably perhaps, it was only a matter of time before my extremist politics brought me into conflict with the law. In 1982, as editor of Bulldog, I was convicted under the Race Relations Act for publishing material ‘likely to incite racial hatred’ and was sentenced to six months in prison. The trial made national headlines with the result that I spent much of my sentence in isolation and in solitary confinement because

“Whether I believed in him or not, the Devil had certainly been diligent in answering my wish.”

*Continued on page 5* **F**

# *My Dear Brother and Friend*

## *A Letter from Father John Thayer*

*The following is a truly amazing letter written nearly 220 years ago! It's amazing for several reasons: the author, Father John Thayer, originally a staunchly anti-Catholic Puritan Congregational minister from Boston, who served as chaplain to the forces under John Hancock in the American Revolution, eventually converted to the Catholic faith while on a trip to Europe and became the first American born Catholic priest. As far as we know, therefore, Father John Thayer is the first American born clergy convert!*

*His own account of his conversion was published in 1787 and reissued in several editions in the United States, London, and Ireland. It was also translated into French and Spanish, and created a great controversial sensation at the time.*

*Eventually he would return to America with the following conviction:*

*"This is the prevailing wish, this is the only desire of my heart, to extend as much as lies in my power, the dominion of the true faith, which is now my joy and comfort. I am ambitious of nothing more; for this purpose I desire to return to my own country, in hopes, notwithstanding my unworthiness, to be the instrument of the conversion of my countrymen; and such is my conviction of the truth of the Roman Catholic Church..."*

*Before returning to America, however, he received a letter from his still very anti-Catholic Puritan brother, Nathaniel, despairing of John's salvation. Here is Father Thayer's loving, brotherly defense of the Faith.*

*(This is also amazing because this letter was written fourteen years before John Henry Newman was born!)*

My dear Brother and Friend,

It is with the greatest satisfaction I have received your letter ... and what has afforded me particular pleasure is to find that you still entertain the same tender affection for me you always did. Be persuaded that mine is always the same towards you; and so far from time, distance, or difference of opinion having weakened it in any manner, it has on the contrary received additional strength in the holy religion I have embraced, a religion whose proper and essential character is to perfect those moral virtues which she finds in us.

After the tender effusion of your heart, you express to me your regret at my having left the religion in which I was brought up, to follow one, which (as far as you have any knowledge of it) abounds in bigotry and superstition. You have done well, my dear brother, to add, as far as you have any knowledge of it; for, give me leave to tell you, that you have no knowledge at all of it, and nothing could lead you to express yourself thus, but the false representations, and black clunnies of our enemies, who have the talent to conceal all that is reasonable in this religion, the most holy, and most worthy of our veneration. This ignorance is common to most Protestants: for, I cannot imagine there are many so malicious and wicked, as to impute errors to us, which they know, in their conscience, we do not believe.

I was, like you, in the grossest ignorance in this particular, and must own to you that nothing surprised me more than the exposition of the Catholic religion, such as I heard it from the mouth of those who profess it, so different did I find it from

that represented to me when I was at school. Believe me, My Dear Brother, I have no interest in deceiving you; I desire nothing so much as your salvation, and that of all my dear relations. I declare to you before God, who sees the sincerity of my heart, to obtain this grace, I would willingly endure death itself.

Before you read my answers to your objections, I beseech you to retire for a few minutes into some lonely spot, and there with your whole heart, and on your knees, promise God firmly to renounce all your passions; ask of him the grace to avoid all that the voice of your conscience shall declare to you to be sinful, and offer up to him this prayer: "God of mercy, I intreat thee humbly, through thy infinite goodness, to enlighten my mind and to move my heart, in order that by the means of true Faith, Hope, and Charity, I may live and die in the true religion of Jesus Christ. I am certain that, as there is but one only God, so there can be but one only Faith, one only religion, and one only way to salvation, and that all the ways which are opposed to this can only lead to hell. It is this Faith, O my God, that I seek with eagerness, in order to embrace it and obtain salvation. I protest, therefore, before the throne of thy Majesty, and swear by all thy divine attributes, that I will follow the religion which thou shall have pointed out to me as the true one, and will renounce, whatever it may cost me, that in which I shall discover error and falsehood. I do not deserve, it is true, this favor of thee on account of the multitude and enormity of my sins of which I have a sincere grief, since they are displeasing to thee, a God so good, so great, so holy, and so worthy of being loved; but what I do not deserve, I yet hope to obtain of thy in-

finite mercy, and I conjure thee to grant me this favor through the merits of the precious blood which has been shed for us, poor sinners, by thy only Son Jesus Christ. Amen.”

If such be your disposition, and if you really desire to cherish it, my answers, although short and imperfect, will be sufficient to dispel all the clouds which darken your mind: but if you are disposed to act otherwise, you seek not the truth with an upright mind.

1. What you tell me of the persecution which Catholics have raised against their enemies, shows only that at all times there have been bad Catholics, who have made religion serve to exercise the malignity of their heart. Far from our religion approving of such Christians, she on the contrary highly condemns them, and never has she employed other arms in her defense than mildness, patience, and charity. There have been, and perhaps there may be yet cruel and vindictive Catholics, as there have been and there may be yet cruel and persecuting Protestants, but neither these nor those are so in consequence of their principles; it is on the contrary because they depart from them.

We do not pretend to assert that all Catholics are Saints; we see unhappily how far they are from being so, and this is what grieves the good. I can notwithstanding assure you that of all those whom I have met with in several kingdoms of Europe, I have never yet seen a single one utter the least word of any thing like harshness, or show the slightest animosity against Protestants; they pity and pray for them as for brethren who are deceived and gone astray. Here is their whole crime, but see how your different Sects are affected towards us; see even how they are affected towards one another, and judge for yourself to whom the charge of persecution is more justly applicable, whether to you or to us? I leave the decision to your conscience.

2. As we lay great stress upon the unity of Doctrine which has always prevailed and will always prevail among Catholics, you think to weaken the force of this argument by opposing the unity which reigns among the Mohammedans; but the unity which you attribute to them is purely imaginary; for, according to the best historians, they are divided into two great Sects, the one of Omar, and the other of Ali. These last, named Shiites, form five principal Sects which, like so many trees, extend into seventy branches. Their belief is extremely varied in all these different societies: some doubt of their religion, and by dint of doubting end by becoming pure Deists; others admit the Metempsychosis; many advocate absolute predestination, etc; All apply mutually, from Sect to Sect, the well known terms of

Orthodox and Heterodo. Their hatred of one another is carried to such an excess, that in making the pilgrimage to Mecca, they divide themselves into as many different bands as there are Sectaries, and sympathize so little with, that they will not even pray for one another.

Let us then talk no more of Mohammedan union. Let us confine ourselves to that of Protestants. I maintain that were you all of one mind, and of one opinion it would be more the effect of chance than the result of your principles. That which serves as a foundation to all others, is it not the liberty which each one enjoys to examine and judge for himself? Now, so far from such a principle producing union, it is sure on the contrary to prove a natural source of division.

The same cannot be said of our Church. By its very constitution and doctrine, it is impossible that there should arise divisions in what regards the articles of faith—take notice of these words, “articles of faith.” In a mere matter of opinion,

each one is free to adopt or to reject as he pleases, but as soon as the Church has declared that such or such point is of faith, from that moment all true Catholics submit upon the spot, because they believe the Church infallible. Should any one refuse to submit on such an occasion, he would be instantly excluded from her communion, because he would reject this fundamental principle, that she is “the pillar and ground of truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

3. This indivisible unity of faith is evidently pointed out in Scripture, and Jesus Christ has established it as the foundation to the whole edifice, when he established his Church. She is one body, says St. Paul

to the Ephesians (4:4-5), and we recognize but one Spirit which animates it, but one and the same Lord, but one and the same faith, but one baptism; that is to say, that our faith ought to be one in the same sense that Our Lord Jesus Christ is one. Now, Our Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely and essentially one; our faith, therefore, ought to be absolutely and rigorously one. In the prayer which Jesus Christ addressed to his Father for those who believe in him, he prays that they may be united in faith, and that their union may resemble that of the three Persons of the Trinity, a union which he exhibits as a mark by which the world will infallibly know that he has received his mission from his Father (John 17:20-21). Without this perfect union the world would never have been able to believe that he was sent by God.

4. You will perhaps suppose that Jesus Christ prayed at that time that his disciples might be united in heart, and that he gives this mutual union formed and kept up by charity, as the distinc-

**“Now, our Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely and essentially one; our faith, therefore, ought to be absolutely and rigorously one.”**

*Continued on the bottom of page 6* **F**

## What they've been saying about our Deep In History Conferences

"The *Deep in History* conferences are intensive courses in the appreciation of the beauty, courage, and history of the Catholic Church. As inspiring as the conference talks are, the folks who have risked so much to swim the Tiber are even more inspiring. It is truly a privilege to be surrounded by people of such spiritual and intellectual integrity."

Dr. Robert Geiger (2003-07)

"People who hear about this conference sometimes marvel: How do we manage to get upwards of 800 people to show up each year for a whole weekend to study Church history? I answer: Come and see for yourself. They gather from all over the country, from every walk of life, with a contagious enthusiasm: Cradle Catholics who want to know how the Faith has grown through the centuries. Converts who testify that Church history played an essential role in their conversion. Spiritual seekers who realize that the truth about the past holds the key to their future. Dynamic speakers, stimulating dialogue, and rich Christian fellowship combine to guarantee that those who are willing to go Deep in History will truly grow deeper in Jesus Christ."

Dr. Paul Thigpen (speaker 2005-07)

"I have been attending the *Deep in History* conferences for several years, both as a participant and as a vendor. I have found the speakers to be top notch. The sessions are always educational and often inspirational. As a convert from several Evangelical Protestant traditions, I feel my newfound Catholic faith enriched by the entire conference experience... including the sessions, meeting the speakers, the Mass, and rubbing elbows with fellow Catholics excited about sharing their faith. Also, as a booth vendor, I have always found the *Coming Home Network* support staff to be exceptional and attentive."

Tim Cooper, The Faith Database (2004-07)

The *Deep in History* Conferences sponsored by the *Coming Home Network International* have been some of the best conferences I have ever attended. As a speaker and a participant, I have found the weekends full of helpful learning, joyful worship, deep prayer, and wonderful Catholic fellowship. This kind of experience of God's presence in the Church is something every Catholic should have. Anyone who comes with a heart open to God's grace will go away ready to live for the greater glory of God.

Dr. Kenneth Howell (2003-06)

"Since the first one that we attended, I have been a *CHNetwork* Helper, journeying with individuals looking at the Catholic Church. I had been reading conversion stories and apologetic works for several years and this Helper role provides a good opportunity to not only pray for specific individuals and encourage these potential converts but also for me to put to practical use some of the knowledge I had been storing up."

Deacon Francis Butel (2006-07)

"This May marked my fifty first year of leaving a Protestant seminary and becoming a Catholic. Despite all those years, the *Deep In History* Conference is for me a rejuvenation and joy. I deeply appreciate what so many others now are experiencing as the Lord draws them into the fullness of his grace and love. Although I have attended many conferences and run not a few, the *CHNetwork* Conference is just the right blend of history, theology, evangelization, and pastoral care!"

Father John D. Dreher (2003-07)

Come join us on October 24-26, 2008 in Columbus, OH  
*Battle for the Faith: 1700-1900*

For more information or to register please visit [deepinhistory.com](http://deepinhistory.com) or call 1-740-450-1175



# Quo Vadis News

## Greetings from Quo Vadis!

The **Coming Home Network International's** youth support network is growing and going strong. We are reaching out to young people who are interested in becoming Catholic while also providing fellowship and support for those youth who are already Catholic.

Our **Quo Vadis Chatrooms** have been a great opportunity to help teens and young adults understand the Catholic faith better. They'll be on break for the rest of the summer, but will resume in the fall **and all youth are invited!**

But maybe the most important aspect of **Quo Vadis** is our **Helpers Network** in which well-informed and enthusiastic Catholics are paired with youth on the journey to the Catholic Church, to assist them with their queries about Catholicism.

**E-newsletters** are also another means we use to help young people grow in knowledge of the Catholic faith. Thus far, we have explored the topics of the Eucharist, Mary, salvation, authority, and **our next issue is on the saints**. Our **Website** is continually being updated and everyone is welcome to explore it at **www.quovadis-youth.org**.

**Quo Vadis** wants you to become involved! First and foremost, **Quo Vadis** asks for your prayers. If, however, you are a young person interested in the Catholic faith, a convert to Catholicism, or even a cradle Catholic, **Quo Vadis** has a place for you.

Is **Quo Vadis** something you would like to be involved in? If, so, please contact me, Mary Clare Pieczynski, at

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



August 22-24  
10th Arizona Marian Conference  
Scottsdale, AZ

Marcus' talk: "What is Truth?"

Contact info:  
Website: <http://www.mirarizona.org>  
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Write: 6879 S. Birdie Way, Gilbert, AZ 85298

September 6  
Faith Matters Conference  
presented by  
KWKY Catholic Radio  
Des Moines, Iowa

For more information please visit  
<http://www.kwky.com>



# CHNI Bulletin Board



on EWTN television and radio

Mondays live at 8 PM EST  
Tues 1 & 10 AM, Wed 1 PM, Sat 11 PM

July 7 Open Line  
**Dr. Robert Stackpole**  
former Anglican priest

July 14  
**Janet Morana**  
revert from secularism

July 21 English Pre-Tape  
**Bro Francis Edkins, CFR**  
former non-practicing Christian

July 28  
**Richard Lane**  
former Lutheran

## DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

LIVE RADIO PROGRAM

WITH

MARCUS GRODI  
& GUESTS



WEDNESDAYS LIVE  
AT 2:PM EST

REBROADCAST ON  
FRIDAYS AT 9 PM EST  
SUNDAYS AT 6 AM EST

Since we have now started the Year of Saint Paul, I will be inviting a host of friends to join me as guests to discuss their favorite verses from the Letters of Saint Paul. Some may discuss the “verses they never saw” that opened their hearts to the Catholic Faith. Make sure you check out our website where you’ll find archived programs and discussion guides, plus other Bible study resources. [deepinscripture.com](http://deepinscripture.com)

### THE COMING HOME NETWORK

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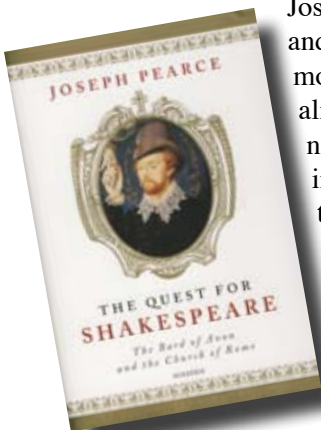
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## Featured Resources

### *The Quest for Shakespeare:*

*The Bard of Avon and the Church of Rome*  
by Joseph Pearce



Joseph Pearce presents a stimulating and vivid biography of the world’s most revered poet. Famous, yet almost unknown, Shakespeare is not only one of the greatest figures in human history, he is also one of the most elusive. Who was he? What were his beliefs? Can we really understand his plays and his poetry if we don’t know the man who wrote them? Pick up this book and be captivated with Pearce’s spellbinding case for why the Bard of Avon might indeed have been Catholic.

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

### *Literary Converts*

*Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief*  
by Joseph Pearce



*Literary Converts* is a biographical exploration into the spiritual lives of some of the greatest writers in the English language. Many will be intrigued to know more about what inspired their literary heroes; others will find the association of such names with Christian belief surprising or even controversial. *Literary Converts* touches on some of the most important questions of the twentieth century, making fascinating reading.

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





# Please pray ...

## WCLERGYW

W For Ben, an unmarried Presbyterian minister in Tennessee, as he seeks full communion with the Catholic Church and a possible call to the priesthood.

W For a Disciples of Christ minister in Texas who is struggling with the idea of authority and the pope being the successor of Peter.

W For Nathan, a Disciples of Christ seminarian in Tennessee, that the Holy Spirit would guide his studies and prayers as he and his wife are drawn deeper into the truths of the Catholic faith.

W For Terry, an Assemblies of God evangelist who is seeking and discovering the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus in the Catholic Church.

W For Sean, a Lutheran seminarian who is struggling with what he should do and how to respond to what he is learning about the Catholic faith.

W For Jim, a Charismatic Episcopal priest who has felt increasingly drawn to Rome.

W For Bryan, a Presbyterian minister in Tennessee who is on the quick-track to becoming Catholic.

W For Scott, an Assemblies of God youth minister in North Carolina, that the Lord Jesus would guide and direct his journey deeper into the fullness of the Truth he is discovering in the Catholic Church.

W For the wife of a Baptist pastor in Florida, that as she learns more of what the true teaching of the Catholic Church is the Holy Spirit would guide her to be an effective witness to her husband of the beauty and truth of the Catholic faith.

W For Edward, a former Non-denominational youth minister in Washington State, that as he journeys back to the one true Church he may truly learn how to be a Catholic.

W For Sean, a Baptist seminarian in Oregon, that as he and his wife learn the biblical basis of Catholic doctrine and the historical foundations of authority in the Catholic Church, God may richly bless them with a deeper faith and confidence in his love and mercy.

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

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to :

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

You may also email your prayer requests to:

[prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org)

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

(QV) Quo Vadis Requests

W For the other 663 non-Catholic clergy and their families in our database who are still on the journey home.

W For the 811 former non-Catholic clergy and their families who are now home in the Catholic Church.

## WLAITYW

W Jeff and his family as they face numerous trials.

W Steve, his family, and especially his daughters in Chicago as they face their own spiritual struggles.

W For Michelle, Michael, Megan in the healing needed to their lives.

W For Abby and her fiancé as he seeks to understand the Catholic truth.

W For Robert in NY as he seeks aid in his journey.

W For all Clergy and Laity who assist the *Coming Home Network*.

W For a successful 2008 *Deep in History* Conference.

W For Rose, that she she will have the courage to learn more about the beauty of the Catholic Church.

W For Mary as she listens to the Holy Spirit's invitation to explore the Catholic Church

W For Susan, as she discovers all the truth that the Catholic Church offers.

W For Cindy that her husband be more acceptive of her interest in Catholicism.

W For Tom's healing

W For all within the Helpers Network, that they may receive the fellowship and assistance they need on their journeys of faith.

W For all helpers and helpees in the Quo Vadis youth network. (QV)

W For Sarah, that her family will become supportive of her interest in the Catholic Church (QV)

W For Ashley and her continual growth as a new Catholic. (QV)





F *Joseph Pearce's story, continued from page 2.*

the prison authorities were fearful that my presence might provoke trouble between black and white inmates. Ironically one of the other prisoners in the top security wing was an IRA sympathizer who had been imprisoned for slashing a portrait of Princess Diana with a knife. He and I saw ourselves as 'political prisoners', not as mere 'common criminals', like the murderers, serving life sentences, who constituted the majority of the other prisoners on the top security wing.

Unrepentant, I continued to edit *Bulldog* following my release and was duly charged once again with offences under the Race Relations Act. On the second occasion I was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment. Thus, I spent both my twenty-first and twenty-fifth birthdays behind bars.

During the first of my prison sentences, Auberon Waugh, a well-known writer and son of the great Catholic novelist, Evelyn Waugh, had referred to me as a 'wretched youth'. How right he was! Wretched and wrecked upon the rock of my own hardness of heart. Years later, when asked by the priest who was instructing me in the Catholic faith to write an essay on my conversion, I began it with the opening lines of John Newton's famous hymn extolling the 'amazing grace ... that saved a wretch like me'. Even today, when forced to look candidly into the blackness of my past, I am utterly astonished at the truly amazing grace that somehow managed to take root in the desert of my soul.

How then did the cactus of grace, growing at first unheeded in the desert of my just deserts, become the cataract of life-giving waters washing my sins away in the sacramental grace of confession? How, to put the matter more bluntly and blandly, was I freed from the prison of my sinful convictions? How was I brought from the locked door of my prison cell to the open arms of Mother Church?

With the wisdom of hindsight, I perceive that the seeds of my future conversion were planted as early as 1980 when I was still only nineteen years old. In what barren soil they were planted! At the time I was at the very height, or depth, of my political fanaticism and was indulging the worst excesses of my anti-Catholic prejudices in the dirty waters of Ulster Protestantism. Few could have been further from St Peter's Gate than I.

The seeds were planted in the genuine desire to seek a political and economic alternative to the sins of communism

and the cynicism of consumerism. During the confrontations on the streets with my Marxist opponents, I was incensed by their suggestion that, as an anti-communist, I was, ipso facto, a 'storm-trooper of capitalism'. I refused to believe that the only alternative to Mammon was Marx. I was convinced that communism was a red herring and that it was possible to have a socially just society without socialism. In my quest to discover such an alternative someone suggested that I read more about the distributist ideas of Belloc and Chesterton. At this juncture one hears echoes once again of Lewis's stricture that 'a sound atheist cannot be too careful of the books that he reads', not least because the book to which he was specifically referring was Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, a book which would precipitate Lewis's first tentative steps to conversion. In this, at least, I can claim a real parallel between C.S. Lewis and myself. For me, as for him, a book by Chesterton would lead towards conversion. In my case, however, the book which was destined to have such a profound influence was a lesser known book of Chesterton's.

**“The wit and wisdom of Chesterton had pulled the rug out from under my smug prejudices against the Catholic Church.”**

The friend who suggested that I study the distributist ideas of Chesterton informed me that I should buy his book, *The Outline of Sanity*, but also that I should read an invaluable essay on the subject, entitled 'Reflections on a Rotten Apple', which was to be found in a collection of his essays entitled *The Well and the Shallows*. As he suggested, I purchased these two books and sat down expectantly to read the volume of essays. Imagine my surprise, and my consternation, to discover that the book was, for the most part, a defence of the

Catholic faith against various modern attacks upon it. And imagine my confusion when I discovered that I could not fault Chesterton's logic.

The wit and wisdom of Chesterton had pulled the rug out from under my smug prejudices against the Catholic Church. From that moment I began to discover Her as She is, and not as She is alleged to be by Her enemies. I began the journey from the rumour that She was the Whore of Babylon to the realization that She was in fact the Bride of Christ.

It was, however, destined to be a long journey. I was lost in Dante's dark wood, so deeply lost that I had perhaps already strayed into the Inferno. It is a long and arduous climb from there to the foot of Mount Purgatory. I was, however, in good company. If Dante had Virgil, I had Chesterton. He would accompany me faithfully every inch of the way, present always through the pages of his books. I began to devour everything

by Chesterton that I could get my hands on, consuming his words with ravenous delight. Through Chesterton, I came to know Belloc; then Lewis; then Newman. During the second prison sentence, I first read *The Lord of the Rings* and, though I did not at that time fathom the full mystical depths of the Catholicism in Tolkien's myth, I was aware of its goodness, its objective morality and the well of virtue from which it drew. And, of course, I was aware that Tolkien, like Chesterton, Belloc and Newman, was a Catholic. Why was it that most of my favorite writers were Catholics?

It was during the second prison sentence that I first started to consider myself a Catholic. When, as is standard procedure, I was asked my religion by the prison authorities at the beginning of my sentence, I announced that I was a Catholic. I wasn't of course, at least not technically, but it was my first affirmation of faith, even to myself. A significant landmark had been reached. Another significant landmark during the second prison sentence was my first fumbling effort at prayer. I am not aware of ever having prayed prior to my arrival at Wormwood Scrubs prison in December 1985, at least not if one discounts the schoolboy prayers recited parrot-fashion to an unknown and unlooked-for God many years earlier during drab and lukewarm school services. Now, in the desolation of my cell, I fumbled my fingers over the beads of a Rosary that someone had sent me. I had no idea how to say it. I did not know the Hail Mary or the Glory Be and I could not remember the Lord's Prayer. Nonethe-

less, I ad-libbed my way from bead to bead uttering prayers of my own devising, pleading from the depths of my piteous predicament for the faith, hope and love that my mind and heart desired. It was a start, small but significant ...

My release from prison in 1986 heralded the beginning of the end of my life as a political extremist. Increasingly disillusioned, I extricated myself from the organization which had been my life, and which had delineated my very *raison d'être*, for more than a decade. As a fifteen year old I had 'wished' to give my life to the 'cause'; now, in my mid-twenties, I desired only to give my life to Christ. If the Devil had taken my earlier 'wish' and had granted it infernally, Christ would take my new-found desire and grant it purgatorially. Having spent the whole of the 1980s in a spiritual arm-wrestle, fighting within my heart and my head between the hell of hatred within myself and the well of love promised and poured out by Christ, I finally 'came home' to the loving embrace of Holy Mother Church on the Feast of St Joseph, 1989. Today, seventeen years on, I still find myself utterly amazed at the grace that could save a wretch like me.

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F *Father John Thayer's Letter, continued from page 4.*

tive mark of the society of Christians without any mention of a unity of faith. But this very explanation proves the necessity of being united in faith, since nothing destroys charity so much as a difference of religion. Witness all the disturbances and all the wars which the history of the different Sects records. Our Church alone can lay claim to this union, an incontestable truth, and there needs no other proof to convince every mind not prepossessed against the Catholic Church, that she alone is the true spouse of Jesus Christ.\*

5. Besides this unity of faith and of doctrine, we have three other distinctive marks of the true Church announced in the Symbols which you acknowledge as well as we, viz: holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Examine well and see whether your Sects can boast of possessing these united marks, or even a single one of them.

\* *Thayer's footnote: "All the Fathers of the Church unanimously insist on the necessity of a union in faith in the Church of Jesus Christ. You believe as we do that they are Saints. Now, taking into view the time when they lived, and how near they were to the time of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, surely they could not be mistaken in this matter. I might produce in proof of what I here advance an infinity of passages from their works, but my limits prevent me."*

6. What shocks you most in our doctrine is the infallibility which we acknowledge in our Church; but after a few words on this subject, it will not appear so terrible to you. Remark, I pray you, My Dear Brother, that it is in the universal Church, that is to say, in the majority of Bishops united in sentiment with the Pope that we acknowledge this infallibility to reside, and not in the Pope alone. If some Doctors and Theologians hold the Pope to be infallible, their private opinion should not be imputed to the whole Church which has defined nothing on this question.<sup>W</sup>

In order then to place our doctrine on the subject of infallibility in a clear light, let us go back to the time when Jesus Christ revealed all truths to his apostles, and appointed both them, and the Pastors who were to succeed them, to be the depositories of these revealed truths. In all ages, as soon as any new doctrine appeared, this body of Pastors declared it to be contrary to the deposits committed to their care by Jesus Christ. Thus, when Arius denied his divinity, the Church condemned him, by declaring that she had received a contrary doctrine from her divine Spouse. She held the same language against

<sup>W</sup> *Papal infallibility was not defined as a dogma until the promulgation of the decree Pastor aeternus on July 18, 1870.*

Pelagius, and to prove incontestably the corruption of our origin she opposed to him the practice of baptizing; a practice as ancient as the Church herself, and instituted by Jesus Christ.

Her infallibility, then, consists in the public and perpetual testimony which she has constantly borne to the truths of fact which she holds in deposits; for the Christian religion is a public fact, or an assemblage and a succession of public facts. Is it not a public and incontestable fact that Jesus Christ has lived, that he has taught such a doctrine, that he has operated such miracles, that the Bible has been written by such authors? etc., all so many points which are matters of fact, and sensible facts — facts which cannot be known or learnt otherwise than by witnesses who have seen or heard them. The Church teaching, that is to say, the major part of the Bishops with the Pope at their head, is truly this body of hereditary witnesses. You cannot then deny them, My Dear Brother, at least this species of infallibility which consists in a capacity of relating facts exactly, since you willingly allow it to every Society, civil or religious, or even composed of simple individuals.

When the Mohammedans, who consist of different nations and consequently are influenced by different interests unanimously attest, nevertheless, that at such an Epoch, they received such a doctrine from Mohammed, would common sense dare to question a fact of such public notoriety? Why then will you refuse the unanimous testimony of the Catholic Church, composed of different nations, influenced by different interests, and often at war with one another, when all the Pastors, at least as unanimous as the Mohammedans, declare openly that they have received such a doctrine from Jesus Christ and his apostles, when they agree upon the exposition of all the articles of faith, when they affirm and declare that they have never experienced any change in their society? Besides, how can such a change be supposed?

7. For there is, in the first place, as I have already observed, a body of Pastors to prevent and reject every innovation. In the second place, in all ages, days have been specially set apart for the Faithful to assemble and to hear from the mouth of their Pastors the explication of our mysteries, and to learn what they ought to practice daily in the Church. In all ages there have been, as there are yet, Christians who daily approach the holy table. Is it reasonable, is it possible to suppose that when their Pastors presented to them what appeared to be bread, they did not inquire whether what they were about to receive in this sacrament was simply bread, or the true body of Jesus Christ? In all ages, then, the Christians ought to know what they were obliged to believe in so important a matter, in those times particularly

**“The Church teaching, that is to say, the major part of the Bishops with the Pope at their head, is truly this body of hereditary witnesses.”**

in which they approached nearer to those of the Apostles, and when the Pastors were more faithful to instruct their flocks. Whatever their faith was on this point, such it must necessarily have been handed down to us, without the slightest alteration; for in supposing it altered, people naturally inclined to reclaim would not have been silent upon so important a thing.

If you tell me that they did cry out and murmur, but that their cries did not reach us, I will answer, that nothing would be more strange, since we have contemporary historians who have related the most minutious disputes that have occurred in the different ages of the Church (I do not except even those of the greatest ignorance;). How would they have let so essential a change as this to pass under silence? It is therefore incredible, it is therefore impossible that such a change could have ever arrived.

Besides, what interest would the Church have in this change of doctrine? Could it be imagined that so many different nations, who compose her, with such opposite interests, would have concerted together such a revolution? What the French, for example, would have done, would not the English have opposed? Could all the nations of which she is composed, have been united, to produce a change of this kind? Would not those Heretics, too, who at all times have been found in these different nations, have seized upon an occasion like this to reproach them with their perfidy; and would they not have taken care to hand it down to posterity? I might form the same chain of reasoning on the other articles of faith.

You see, then, My Dear Brother and friend, that common sense obliges us to receive the testimony of the Church when she declares that she has received such and such truths from the mouth of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and has preserved them in all their purity and integrity. Now the very moment we admit her testimony in this respect, we become Catholics, since every Christian admits the truth of all the doctrines taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles. This moral infallibility, of which I have just spoken, which you are obliged to allow to the Church as to every other considerable and extensive Society, becomes divine in virtue of the promises of Jesus Christ, who has expressly communicated to her his own immutability.\*

**F** This letter continues in the next CHNewsletter. **E**

\* Excerpt from *“Memoirs to Serve for the Future, An Ecclesiastical History of the Diocese of Boston”* pages 38-44, (U.S. Catholic Historical Society, Yonkers, 1978).

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July2008