



July 2013 Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

“The Tiber — Neither Too Wide, Nor Too Deep” by James L. Papandrea, M.Div., Ph.D 1

EWTN’s *The Journey Home* Schedule 2

“Final Perseverance” by Marcus Grodi 6

Stay Connected 8

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The Tiber — Neither Too Wide, Nor Too Deep

By James L. Papandrea, M.Div., Ph.D.

The story of my conversion to Catholicism really goes back to my childhood. My father’s family is Chicago Italian and of course that meant Roman Catholic. I was born during Vatican II in 1963 and baptized in the Catholic Faith. My paternal grandfather (“Papa Lou”) would become a great influence on my faith as I grew up. He made it a priority to get to Mass every week and, though he didn’t talk like an evangelist, no one who knew him would have questioned his faith. My mother, however, was not Catholic, so when my family moved to Wisconsin, we joined a neighborhood Protestant congregation that both my parents were comfortable with and I was raised Lutheran. I still have fond memories of the Lutheran pastor and the people there.

Having been baptized as a Catholic, I suppose I’m technically more of a “revert” than a convert. In fact, everyone around me always emphasized the similarities between the Lutheran denomination and Catholicism, so I grew up with a healthy respect for the Roman Catholic Church, but also with only a very basic (and often uninformed) knowledge of what Catholicism was. After I was confirmed, I was told that I was now spiritually an adult and able to make my own decisions about my faith. So I left. Like many youth, I suppose, I was bored with my congregation. However, I must say that

the Lutherans gave me an appreciation for singing the great hymns (some of which taught me more theology than all the catechism classes put together), but I felt that there should be more to the faith than what I was experiencing in that congregation. I eventually joined another Protestant denomination — the United Methodists — partly because it was where my high school girlfriend belonged. I was also attracted to what they called “pluralism,” which, as I understood it, amounted to a license to believe and do anything I wanted without accountability to a higher authority. This sounded pretty good to a young guy in high school and college.

Evangelical enthusiasm

In college I got involved with Campus Crusade for Christ and became a fundamentalist. I had a conversion experience in the context of a neighborhood Bible study when I was younger, so this seemed like a continuation of that kind of enthusiasm. Bless their hearts, they meant well, but I could never get on board with their style of evangelism: just walking up to someone you don’t know with the “Four Spiritual Laws” booklet in hand, sharing the faith with the hope of extracting the “sinner’s prayer” from the poor soul. On the other hand, the deep reverence I have for the Scriptures is a legacy of that time in

“Journeys Home” is continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

my life, and so I have to assume that God was at work in me, in and through Campus Crusade.

It was a strange mix in those days, because while I was hanging out and playing guitar with the Campus Crusade crowd during the week, on Sunday mornings I went to the campus Methodist congregation, where I helped out the music leader by playing bass guitar. The Methodists tend to be theologically liberal, especially in Minnesota where I went to college. Thus, I bounced back and forth between the conservative approach of the parachurch organization and the liberalism of a mainline Protestant denomination. The result was that I learned to speak both languages and get along with people in both camps. In the end, the experience planted the seeds of a passion for ecumenical dialogue and the conviction that the truth is not to be found at either extreme, but in the “center of gravity.” In other words, the truest expression of the Christian faith is not in fundamentalism on the right or in extreme liberalism on the left, but in the ancient and historic Church that occupies the center.

I graduated from college in 1985 and, after trying to find my way in the world for a year, I decided to go to seminary. I figured, why not study the most important topic there is – God! I was very naïve, however, and assumed that one seminary was just like another. After all, they all study the same Bible, right? By the grace of God, I ended up at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, which was an inter-denominational evangelical Protestant seminary. I consider my time at Fuller to be my great awakening to the many treasures of the Christian Faith, especially the Church Fathers. I learned the tools of biblical exegesis, studied under professors who were both brilliant and spiritual, and grew in my faith by leaps and

bounds. It was at Fuller that I went from being a fundamentalist to an evangelical — and yes, there is a difference! It was also at Fuller that I discovered the difference between a reformed (“Calvinist”) approach and an “Arminian” approach to salvation. It seemed that many of the people at Fuller were more Calvinist than Calvin was (of course, as a scholar, I now know that they were really just more Augustinian than Augustine was — can I get an “Amen”?). This meant that their understanding of God’s providence and even their outlook on life leaned toward a kind of determinism that said, “If you’re one of God’s elect (and they all assumed they were), then God will take care of everything for you.” They assumed that God is going to do what God is going to do and that left little room for human free will. The problem, as I saw it, is that this approach didn’t adequately explain human sin. I would come to find out later that the Methodist (Wesleyan/Arminian) approach is not far from the Catholic (Thomist) approach. It turns out that, theologically speaking, I was a Catholic all along.

Reverend Salmon: Swimming upstream

When I graduated from seminary with a Master of Divinity degree, I ended up on the path toward ordination (in part, because I didn’t know what else to do with my new diploma). I was still somewhat naïve to the extremes of theological liberalism in the Methodist church and I was still a bit “holier than thou,” thus, I had no idea that the next decade of my life would be an exercise in swimming upstream.

I was ordained and accepted an appointment as an associate pastor of a congregation of about 1,000 members in south central Minnesota. After two years of butting heads

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

July 1

Matt Leonard*
Former Evangelical and Methodist

July 8

Matt Palmer*
Former United Methodist

July 15

The Journey Home International

July 22

Dr. Dale Pollard*
Former Lutheran, Baptist, Assembly of God, and Presbyterian

July 29

Dr. James Papandrea*
Former United Methodist

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

with the senior pastor there, I was moved to what they call a “three point charge,” two small churches of my own and part time responsibility as a youth minister at a third (larger) church, all along the beautiful Mississippi valley at the border of southern Minnesota and Wisconsin. Two years there eventually and inevitably burned me out and I decided to go back to school to get a Ph.D. I finally felt like I knew what my calling was. As a pastor, while many of my colleagues visited the people of their congregation all week and then wrote a sermon on Saturday, my routine was to work on my sermon from Monday to Thursday, and then on Fridays drag myself outside and force myself to visit a few people. The hospital visits were the hardest, as I felt I had nothing to offer people and I often struggled just to make conversation. I felt I was gifted in the teaching parts of ministry, but not in the pastoral parts; therefore, I decided I was going to teach. I requested and received an appointment to attend Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, the United Methodist Seminary on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. It was there that I completed a Ph.D. in Patristics, the history and theology of the early Church.

All roads really do lead to Rome

It was my study of the Church Fathers that ignited within me the dormant flame of Catholicism. As many others who have gone before me found, one cannot study the history of the early Church without realizing that many Protestant doctrines — *sola Scriptura*, for example — were an invention of the Protestant reformation and do not actually reflect the understanding of the Church Fathers, let alone the Apostles. I also realized that the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist is consistent with the way the sacrament has been understood from the beginning. This was a real revelation for me. In addition, as part of my Ph.D. studies, I got the chance to spend a summer at the American Academy in Rome. My formal studies there were in the history and topography of imperial Rome, but my informal exploration led me to a deeply devotional appreciation for the city of Rome and its churches.

I had been to Rome before. My parents took my brother and me on a trip to Italy when I was fifteen. I fell in love with Rome then, and that love has only grown over time into kind of a passion. But arriving in Rome that summer of 1995, I had a first impression like many people, I suppose. When I saw the grandeur of many of the churches of Rome — grandeur that I viewed as opulence — I had a negative reaction. “Wouldn’t it be better to use all this money to feed the poor?”, I thought. I would later realize that this is exactly what Judas said when a grateful Mary of Bethany poured out her expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet (John 12:1-5). I came to understand (and appreciate) that the architecture and decoration of the churches of Rome are part of humanity’s gift of

gratitude to God. We offer the best of our creations to our Creator, in humble thanksgiving.

Studying in Rome that summer, I began to wrestle with what it would mean to be Roman Catholic. I had no great aversion to the idea, other than the fact that I would be giving up my status as clergy, but I had already discerned that I was not called to parish leadership or liturgical presiding. The more I studied and the more I explored the long history of the Church in Rome, the more I began to think, “I have to be a part of this.” At least, that’s what was going on deep down in my spirit. It wouldn’t come to the surface until later, because at that time there were still too many obstacles. The Tiber seemed just too wide to cross. I had so many connections to Methodism and I had convinced myself that belonging to a church where you get communion every week would “cheapen” the sacrament (of course, I now know that the opposite is true and I love to receive the Eucharist as often as possible).

I continued to study the Church Fathers and I eventually settled on one who would be the topic of my doctoral dissertation. Novatian was a third century priest of Rome who wrote an excellent (and orthodox) treatise on the Trinity and who was the acting bishop of Rome for over a year during a time of persecution. However, Novatian’s story does not have a happy ending. When the persecution subsided enough to allow the proper election of a new bishop of Rome, Novatian lost the election, because he advocated excommunications for all those whose faith had lapsed under the threat of torture and death. His followers rejected the election of Pope Cornelius, called Novatian their bishop, and began a schism in the Church that lasted hundreds of years. The moral of the story is that the Church would come to the conclusion that the only thing worse than apostasy is schism, meaning the only thing worse than committing idolatry, is splitting the Church. I began to feel more and more the need to return to the original Church.

My conversion to Catholicism, however, was more complicated than simply joining with the Church of the Apostles. It was also about leaving something behind, leaving the denomination in which I was ordained. At this point, I was still determined to continue sticking it out in the United Methodist denomination, as long as I could make it work. This was for two main reasons. First, I was not yet ready to give up my status as an ordained clergyman. Second, I saw the denomination as a mission field and felt obligated to continue to try to save it. Eventually, I got to the point where I knew that my efforts were futile and I now realize that it was rather arrogant of me to think I could change an entire denomination. It was time to leave. I had to admit that I was in a place that was not right for me and that I had to move on.

“Journeys Home” is continued on page 4 ►

Crossing the Tiber

In reality, the decision to unite with the Roman Catholic Church was really just a matter of admitting in my head what my heart already knew. The Catholic Church was where I had started out (in baptism) and it was where I belonged. By this time I had married an amazing woman, Susannah (Susie), who happened to be a cradle Catholic. She was a very good sport about getting married in a Protestant chapel (two, actually: we eloped in a Methodist chapel in Rome and then later had a wedding with friends and family in a Methodist chapel built into a skyscraper in Chicago), but she never felt at home in the United Methodist congregations. Of course, she wanted us both to be Catholic, but I had to come to that decision on my own. When the time came, at my instigation, we did what any self-respecting Protestant would do: we shopped around for a Catholic church. Eventually, we found a Catholic parish with solid preaching and good music and we started going regularly. I had many meetings with the pastor and he was very gracious in giving me his valuable time as I asked him all those questions that Protestants ask (interestingly, I now get invited to go into other parishes and talk about the answers to those very same questions).

My biggest stumbling block was probably the concept of praying to the saints. I had reasoned, like many Protestants, that if you pray to the saints, you are ascribing omniscience to them; if you think they can hear your prayers, then you are implying that they are divine, because the only way they could hear prayers is if they are all-knowing, and only God is all-knowing. I also reasoned that if you pray to the saints, you are ascribing omnipotence to them; if you think they can do something for you, then you are implying that they are divine, because the only way they could help you from heaven is if they are all-powerful, and only God is all-powerful. Even though I knew it was an ancient practice, I concluded that prayer to the saints was a form of idolatry. Maybe the Tiber was just too deep to cross. The help I needed came when a friend sent me the former-Protestant pastor Scott Hahn's book *Rome Sweet Home*, which was able to answer many of my questions. In conversation with this friend, she explained to me that praying to the saints is not a form of idolatry. Catholics do not think the saints are omniscient just because they can hear our prayers. Rather, it is a pure gift from God. She also

“My biggest stumbling block was probably the concept of praying to the saints. I had reasoned, like many Protestants, that if you pray to the saints, you are ascribing omniscience to them...”

explained that Catholics do not think saints are omnipotent, because Catholics ask for their *intercession*, not their intervention. If we can ask our brothers and sisters in the faith who are here on earth to pray for us (James 5:13-18), then why not ask those who are with God to pray for us?

I am still learning to incorporate prayer to the saints into my devotional life, but I am grateful to have a “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) to intercede for me. My grandparents had a special devotion to Padre Pio (even while he was still alive) and to this day my uncle carries on that tradition. I consider Saint Pio a patron of our family. I also ask for the intercession of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Hildegard of Bingen, and St. Cecilia (because I'm a musician), St. James (I am a James, after all), and St. John the Apostle (for my vocation as a theologian). Of course, I also pray to our Mother Mary and, when I'm reading a particular Church Father, I sometimes pray to him as well. Sometimes I even pray to my grandfather, Papa Lou. Because of the intercession of the saints, my devotional life is now deeper and richer than it ever could have been before.

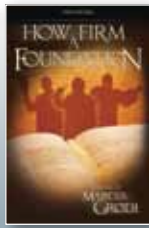
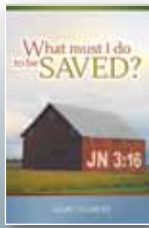
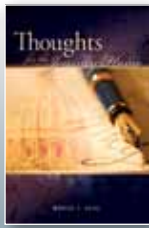
I eventually came to understand that I was really a Catholic at heart all along. When the time came for me to be received into the Church, I sent a letter to the United Methodist bishop explaining why I was leaving the denomination. The envelope included my certificate of ordination (returning it results in the denomination's version of an honorable discharge). Turning in my credentials like that was very liberating. Now, I am very happy to be a Roman Catholic layperson, recognizing what my calling is and what it is not.

Glad to be home

When I finally came back to the Catholic Church, my first reaction was, “So this is where all the Italians are!”

One of the first things that my wife and I did after I was received into the Church was to have a convalidation ceremony so that our marriage would be a sacrament (so, I've married the same woman three times — and I'd do it again in an instant). Now, as I think about being Catholic and as people ask me about my conversion, there are a few things I will always tell people; the reasons why I'm glad I'm Catholic:

Walk into a traditional Protestant worship space and what holds the place of prominence at the front? The pulpit. That's because the preaching of the word is the center of worship. Preaching is good, *“Journeys Home” is continued on page 5* ▶



Visit www.chresources.com or call 740-450-1175 for these and other great resources to learn more about the Catholic Faith.

SUPPORT CHNETWORK

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

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

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

Your information

Name _____

Signature _____

Address line 1 _____

Address line 2 _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

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

Checking account or **Savings account**

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

Credit card

Card number _____

Expiration date _____

Visa

MasterCard

Discover

AmericanExpress

FEATURED RESOURCES

Authority Through the Trinity — Msgr. Frank Lane

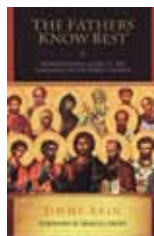


CD from the 2009 *Deep in History* conference.

Msgr. Frank Lane, an insightful Catholic theologian, discusses the balance that is necessary between the individual and the community and how this balance is an ordered reflection of the Trinity in our own humanity. Msgr. Lane touches on issues of individuality, relationships, proper authority, obedience, and fractures within the community.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive the *Authority Through the Trinity* CD.



The Fathers Know Best: Your Essential Guide to the Teachings of the Early Church

— Jimmy Akin, Forward by Marcus Grodi

The Fathers Know Best is a unique resource that introduces you to the teachings of the first Christians in a way no other work can. Amazing features in this fact-packed book include:

- More than 900 quotations from the writings of the early Church Fathers.
- Mini-biographies of nearly 100 Fathers, as well as descriptions of dozens of key early councils and writings.
- A concise history of the dramatic spread of Christianity after Jesus told His disciples to evangelize all nations.
- A guide to nearly 30 ancient heresies, many of which have returned to haunt the modern world.
- The Fathers' teaching on nearly 50 topics, including modern hot-button issues like abortion, homosexuality, and divorce.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *The Fathers Know Best*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive the *Authority Through the Trinity* CD and *The Fathers Know Best*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

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 © 2013 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved. Back issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at www.chnetwork.org/newsletter-archive.



Prayer List



Clergy

- For an independent Baptist minister in Virginia, that God would guide his meeting with a Catholic priest and bring him rejoicing into full-communion with the Church.
- For a Charismatic Episcopal priest in the Southwest, that he may find the right path as he transitions out of his former ministry and journeys to the fulness of the Catholic faith.
- For a couple who serve as Assembly of God youth ministers in Texas, that the Holy Spirit would give them a burning desire for the Holy Eucharist and the grace to act on that desire.
- For a former Baptist pastor in Florida, that our Lord Jesus would call him home to the sacraments and the Church of his youth.
- For Scott, an Assembly of God pastor on the east coast, that his journey home to the Catholic Church would enable his wife and family to become Catholic Christians as well.

■ For Tom, a Church of Christ minister in Texas, that, as he opens his heart and mind to the truth, our Lord would fill him with wonder and call him to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Laitiy

- For Joe and Ruth's children and grandchildren to embrace the Catholic Faith.
- For Joselyn, that God make her faith journey smooth so she will be able to continue progressing towards full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For Brandon, that he find answers to his questions about Catholic teaching and come to understand that many of his misconceptions against the Catholic Church are unfounded.
- For Diane, that she receive clarity and come to a proper understanding of the role of Mary in her life.
- For Allison, that she finds open doors and welcoming arms in the Catholic Church.

■ For Gina, that she comes to accept Catholic teaching and recognize the Church's authority as she looks to return to the fullness of the truth.

■ For Reid, who wants to become Catholic and receive the Eucharist but struggles with affirming that he believes all that the Catholic Church teaches.

■ For Kim, who believes in the truth of the Catholic faith, but hesitates taking the final step to becoming Catholic.

■ For George, that he continue seeking the Lord's will and deepening his spiritual life as he looks towards becoming Catholic.

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

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

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

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

President/Founder, Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor)

Chaplain, Fr. Ray Ryland (former Anglican priest)

Chief Operating Officer, Kevin Lowry (former Presbyterian)

Director of Pastoral Care and Resident Theologian, Dr. Kenneth Howell (former Presbyterian pastor)

Senior Advisor: History & Theology, Jim Anderson (former Lutheran)

Director of Studio/Media, Scott Scholten (former Presbyterian)

Financial Coordinator, Ann Moore

IT/Facilities Coordinator, Bill Bateson (former Mormon)

Publications and Laitiy Coordinator, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Communications Coordinator, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart (former United Methodist)

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

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 4

but of course preachers are only human. Now, walk into a Roman Catholic Church and what is front and center? The altar. That’s because we are a sacramental Church. We are a Church that embraces the mystery of the living Word, the Lamb of God. Every time we celebrate Mass we proclaim the gospel most perfectly (1 Corinthians 11:26).

While my personality doesn’t normally tolerate mystery very well (I want to answer all the questions), the truth is that the more you try to get to the bottom of the mystery, what you really find is a deeper mystery. The mystery is not explained away, as it is in some other traditions. On the contrary, the mystery is embraced. In a very real sense, my conversion (or return) to the Roman Catholic Church had to wait until I was ready to embrace mystery, to let go of having to have concrete answers to all the questions, and to trust in a God who is a mystery. Don’t get me wrong, I still write books explaining the Trinity and things like that, but I have learned to be content with submitting to something greater than myself, without having to understand it all. It may seem counter-intuitive, but submission is liberating.

I also appreciate the way the Roman Catholic Church is (at least potentially) the “middle way” between the extremes: neither fundamentalist, nor extreme liberal, but a “center” that embraces the best of both sides; neither all devotional, nor all social justice, but both faith and works; and so on.

Finally, I guess I just came to the point in my life when I longed to be part of the one Church that is connected by an unbroken chain going all the way back to Jesus and the Apostles. I became convinced of the truth of Apostolic Succession, a principle used in the early Church. It means that what is taught by the Church goes back to the Apostles, because they taught their successors, and they taught the next generation of Church leaders, and so on. The institution of the Roman Catholic Church may not be perfect, but I came to believe that it is the closest thing we have to what Jesus and the Apostles intended it to be, in large part because of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. I just had to be a part of that.

To add blessing on top of blessing, a year after joining our parish, I was offered a full time job as Director of Adult Faith Formation and I got to live my faith as my day job, a dream I had all but given up on.

Called to the classroom

Four years later, I left my parish job for a full time teaching position. Ironically, I now teach early and medieval Church history at the same United Methodist seminary where I studied for my Ph.D. After ten years of waiting (and praying) for a full time teaching job, I was hired by the seminary, even though they knew that I had become Catholic. I am now

the one Catholic on a very ecumenical faculty, all of whom I respect very much and value as colleagues, even though we don’t all agree on everything. I have found that I can love and appreciate the Methodists much better from the outside, as a Catholic, and I have plenty of opportunities to engage one of my passions: ecumenical dialogue. I also get to spend my days in the classroom and in the library, teaching and studying the history of Christianity and doctrine. The best part is, I get to take a group of students to Rome every year to see (and touch) the evidence of early and medieval Christianity first hand and to meet people on both sides of the Tiber.

There is a bridge in Rome over the river Tiber, the *Ponte Sant’ Angelo*, the bridge of the Holy Angel. It is lined with sculptures of angels designed by the great master Bernini. Right at the end of the bridge on one side of the river is the Methodist congregation of Rome. On the other side of the bridge is the Vatican. That bridge is symbolic for me, so much so that I used a picture of it as the cover art for my latest musical recording. The bridge is a symbol of both the separation and the connection between the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodists. It is a symbol of the ecumenical dialogue which I value and also a symbol of whatever shared ministry we are able to do as we work together to care for the poor in this world. We all know that people walk that bridge (metaphorically speaking) in both directions. Somewhere, right now, there is a person writing about his conversion *from* Catholicism to a Protestant denomination. This is why the dialogue is so important — to increase communication and mutual understanding, to dispel the myths about Catholicism, and to figure out what we can learn from each other. I still consider myself “bilingual,” because I can “speak” Protestant as well as Catholic. It is a gift I use in the service of the universal Church. Nevertheless, I know where my roots are and where my home is, and I thank God for leading me back to the ancient Church of the Apostles and the Fathers. ■



JAMES L. PAPANDREA is Associate Professor of Church History at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *Reading the Early Church Fathers*, *Trinity 101*, and *ROME: A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Eternal City*. His latest CD is called, *Still Quiet Voice*. Visit his website at: www.JimPapandrea.com. See James on *The Journey Home* July 29 on EWTN.

BLOG

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



“Once saved, always saved” and the perseverance of the saints is a theological topic that not only separates Catholics and Protestants, but Protestants from Protestants. I recently visited a conservative Baptist Church and, frankly, was not surprised to find that the entire worship service was focused on celebrating the “once saved, always saved” conversion experience in Jesus and inviting anyone there who had not yet found that assurance to come forward and do so.

Because this is such an important topic for those on the journey, which touches every one of us, as well as those in our care, I’m presenting below a classic discussion of this topic by Joseph Sollier in his article for the 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia. The article is pithy and meaty, covering a lot of theological ground, and may need a couple close readings, but it is intended to give a clear explanation of where the Catholic Church stands on this important issue. May we each pray for one another for the graces necessary.

—Marcus Grodi

“HE THAT
PERSEVERE
UNTO THE END,
HE SHALL BE
SAVED.”

—Matthew 10:22

Final Perseverance

By Joseph Sollier

Final Perseverance (Perseverantia finalis)

Final perseverance is the preservation of the state of grace till the end of life. The expression is taken from Matthew 10:22, “He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved.”

A temporary continuance in grace, be it ever so long, evidently falls short of the obvious meaning of the above phrase, if it fails to reach the hour of death. On the other hand, the saying of St. Matthew does not necessarily imply a life-long and unbroken continuance in grace, since it is of faith that lost grace can be recovered.

Between the temporary continuance or imperfect perseverance, and the life-long continuance or most perfect perseverance, there is room for final perseverance as commonly understood, i.e., the preservation of grace from the last conversion till death. It may be viewed as a power or as an actual fact. As a power it means the ensemble of spiritual means whereby the human will is enabled to persevere unto the end if it duly co-operates. As an actual fact it means the de facto preservation of grace and implies two factors, one internal, i.e., the steadfast use of the various means of salvation, the other external, i.e., the timely coming of death while the soul is at peace with God. Theologians, aptly or not, call the former active and the latter passive perseverance. There may be passive perseverance without active, as when an infant dies immediately after Baptism, but the normal case, which alone is considered here, is that of a good death crowning a greater or lesser duration of well-doing.

By what agency the combined stability in holiness and timeliness of death are brought about is a problem long debated among Christian writers. The Semi-pelagians of the fifth century, while forsaking the sweeping ethical naturalism of Pelagius and admitting on principle the graces of the will, contended nevertheless, that the final perseverance of the justified was sufficiently accounted for by the natural power of our free will; if sometimes, in order to tally with conciliar definitions, they called it a grace, it was but a misnomer, as that grace could be merited by man’s natural exertions.

Oppositely, the Reformers of the sixteenth century, partly followed by the Baianist and Jansenist school, so minimized the native power and moral value of our free will as to make final perseverance depend on God alone, while their pretended fiducial faith and inadmissibility of grace led to the conclusion that we can, in this world, have absolute certainty of our final perseverance.

The Catholic doctrine, outlined by St. Augustine, chiefly in *De dono perseverantiae* (On the Gift of Perseverance) and *De correptione et gratia* (On Corruption and Grace), and the Council of Orange in Southern Gaul, received its full expression in the Council of Trent, sess. VI, c. xiii, can. 16 and 22.

The power of persevering

Canon 22 (Si quis dixerit justificatum vel sine speciali auxilio Dei in accepta justitia perseverare posse, vel cum eo non posse, anathema sit¹), by teaching that the justified cannot persevere without a special help of God, but with it can persevere, not only condemns both the naturalism of the Semipelagians and the false supernaturalism of the Reformers but also clearly implies that the power of perseverance is neither in the human will alone nor in God’s grace solely, but in the combination of both, i.e., Divine grace aiding human will, and

1 If anyone says that the just man can persevere in the righteousness he received without the special help of God, or that with it he cannot persevere, let him be anathema. (Translated by CHNetwork.)



The Council of Trent,
by Pasquale Cati Da lesi, 1558

Sources

ST. THOMAS, *Summa theologica*, I-II, Q. exiv. A. 9; WILHELM AND SCANNELL, *A Manual of Catholic Theology*, II (London, 1901), 242; HUNTER, *Outlines of Dogmatic Theology*, III (New York, 1894), 47; NEWMAN, *Perseverance in Grace in Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (London and New York), 1906; LABAUCHE, *L'homme dans l'état de grace in Leçons de théologie dogmatique* (Paris, 1908); BAREILLES, *Le catéchisme romain* (Montrejeau, 1906-10), III, 417, and VI, 434. See also current theological treatises *De gratia*.

About this page

APA citation. Sollier, J. (1911). Final Perseverance. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved May 24, 2013 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11711a.htm>

MLA citation. Sollier, Joseph. "Final Perseverance." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 24 May 2013 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11711a.htm>>.

Transcription. This article was transcribed for New Advent by Thomas M. Barrett. Dedicated to all of us who struggle in day to day life.

Ecclesiastical approbation. *Nihil Obstat*. February 1, 1911. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. *Imprimatur*. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York.

Contact information. The editor of New Advent is Kevin Knight. My email address is feedback732@newadvent.org. (To help fight spam, this address might change occasionally.) Regrettably, I can't reply to every letter, but I greatly appreciate your feedback — especially notifications about typographical errors and inappropriate ads.

human will co-operating with Divine grace. The grace in question is called by the Council "a special help of God", apparently to distinguish it both from the concurrence of God in the natural order and habitual grace, neither of which were denied by the Semipelagians. Theologians, with a few exceptions, identify this special help with the sum total of actual graces vouchsafed to man.

Actual perseverance

The Council of Trent, using an expression coined by St. Augustine, calls it (*magnum usque in finem perseverantiae donum*) the great gift of final perseverance. "It consists", says Newman, "In an ever watchful superintendence of us on the part of our All-Merciful Lord, removing temptations which He sees will be fatal to us, succouring us at those times when we are in particular peril, whether from our negligence or other cause, and ordering the course of our life so that we may die at a time when He sees that we are in the state of grace."

The supernatural character of such a gift is clearly asserted by Christ: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou has given" (John 17:11); by St. Paul: "he, who hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6); and by St. Peter: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you" (1 Peter., v,10). The extreme preciousness of that supernatural gift places it alike beyond our certain knowledge and meriting power.

That we can never in this life be certain of our final perseverance is defined by the Council of Trent (Sess. VI, can. xvi): "Si quis magnum illud usque in finem perseverantiae donum se certo habiturum, absoluta et infallibili certitudine dixerit, nisi hoc ex speciali revelatione dediderit, anathema sit".² What places it beyond our meriting power is the obvious fact that revelation nowhere offers final perseverance, with its retinue of efficacious graces and its crown of a good death, as a reward for our actions, but, on the contrary, constantly reminds us that, as the Council of Trent puts it, "the gift of perseverance can come only from Him who has the power to confirm the standing and to raise the fallen".

However, from our incapacity to certainly know and to strictly merit the great gift, we should not infer that nothing can be done towards it. Theologians unite in saying that final perseverance comes under the impetrative power of prayer and St. Liguori (Prayer, the great means of Salvation) would make it the dominant note and burden of our daily petitions.

The sometimes distressing presentation of the present matter in the pulpit is due to the many sides of the problem, the impossibility of viewing them all in one sermon, and the idiosyncrasies of the speakers. Nor should the timorousness of the saints, graphically described by Newman, be so construed as to contradict the admonition of the Council of Trent, that "all should place the firmest hope in the succour of God". Singularly comforting is the teaching of such saints as St. Francis de Sales (Camus, "The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales", III, xiii) and St. Catherine of Genoa (Treatise of Purgatory, iv). They dwell on God's great mercy in granting final perseverance, and even in the case of notorious sinners they do not lose hope: God suffuses the sinners' dying hour with an extraordinary light and, showing them the hideousness of sin contrasting with His own infinite beauty, He makes a final appeal to them. For those only who, even then, obstinately cling to their sin does the saying of Sirach 5:7, assume a sombre meaning "mercy and wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looketh upon sinners". (See GRACE). ■

2 "If anyone says that he will certainly have the great gift of perseverance leading to the end with an absolute and infallible certitude, unless he had learned it through an special act of revelation, let him be anathema." (Translated by CHNetwork.)

The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

STAY CONNECTED!

Do you love conversion stories? Do you want to learn more about the Catholic Faith? Do you want to keep up-to-date with the latest happenings of the CHNetwork? Then please consider joining our Facebook page and following us on Twitter. We publish additional conversion stories, share informative articles on the Catholic Church, and post exclusive resource specials through our social media presence. You can find easy ways to keep updated with our work on our homepage, www.chnetwork.org, under the "stay connected" sidebar.

