

The Coming Home NEWSLETTER



The Coming Home Network International
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June 22: St. Thomas More

June 2004

A Twentieth-Century Centurion Swears Allegiance to Christ

Msgr. Stuart Swetland

From my Navy days fighting terrorism in the Middle East through my years debating politics at Oxford, Christ called me ever closer to His Church and finally into His priesthood.

June 14, 1985 began as a routine day at sea for me and the crew of the *U.S.S. Kidd*. Having just completed some joint naval exercises, we were in the Aegean Sea, en route to a port visit in Haifa, Israel. I was standing watch as the duty officer.

Suddenly the calm of the day was interrupted by reports that an American passenger plane, TWA Flight 847 out of Athens to Rome, had been hijacked to Beirut by two members of the radical terrorist group Islamic Jihad. On board were more than 150 passengers, mostly Americans – including five Navy divers. Petty Officer Second Class Robert Stethem would soon be tortured and shot in the head.

President Reagan planned to take decisive action. In less than forty-eight hours, we were off the coast of Beirut. Before long, other ships and special forces – including the then secret Delta Force – began to join our growing flotilla.

My role was initially to serve as landing officer for the helicopters using our flight deck. But two hours before we were to launch, the captain summoned me into his cabin. He told me that a team of Navy SEALs was going to create a diversion ashore, drawing the enemy's fire before swimming out to sea. I was to command a small boat to pluck them from the water at high speed. The captain told me we would probably



come under heavy fire and that the chance of casualties was greater than 50/50.

I chose the best unmarried men I could find for my three-man crew; then I prepared. I had been briefed on events in Beirut. I knew what the terrorists had done to Petty Officer Stethem. As I blackened my face with pitch and inspected the weapons we would load onto the boat, a great anger began to take hold of me. My anger gave way to hatred: hatred toward the cowardly thugs who had killed my shipmate. I was glad I had

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been chosen for this mission, even though it put my life in danger. I wanted to kill the terrorists who had killed Stethem.

We launched our operation at midnight, but almost immediately everything was put on hold. I found out later that President Reagan was waiting for further intelligence on the location of the hostages. He didn't want to leave any American behind. For the next two hours, we sat in the water, circling at our launch positions, waiting for the "go" command.

I pray the hate out of my heart

Then I did what I think every soldier, sailor, marine, or airman has done throughout history:

I prayed. There are no atheists in foxholes. A recent convert to Catholicism, I had learned to pray the Rosary by reading the works of St. Louis Marie de Montfort,¹ and it had been the one form of prayer I had always been able to use under any circumstances. It did not fail me that evening.

As I prayed, the words of the *Our Father* struck me as never before: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." "Forgive?" How could God possibly ask me to forgive the bastards who had tortured and killed a brave American sailor?

My mind drifted to the sorrowful mysteries. Jesus being crucified: "Father, forgive them,"² He exclaimed as the nails pierced His sacred flesh. I thought of His admonition from the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies."³ How could God demand this? Surely this teaching had exceptions. As we circled in the choppy ocean waters off Beirut, I rediscovered what I already had come

to know and believe: the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, and it does not admit of exceptions.

If I had died that night, my salvation would have been in jeopardy. I had hated those terrorists from my heart. I wanted them dead. I didn't just want to protect and free innocent hostages (a worthy effort where one can accept the death of an aggressor as an unintended consequence). I wanted to send the hijackers and their accomplices to Hell.

If I had died in that state, Hell is where I would have found myself.

I love to challenge such prejudices, because I, too, once held them.

But the "go" command never came. Before sunrise, President Reagan aborted the military operations, and negotiations eventually led to the release of the remaining hostages.

Thanks be to God! For that night, floating in the darkness off the coast of Beirut, I had another conversion: I learned the meaning of mercy, forgiveness, and love. In those hours, God gave me the actual grace – the supernatural power – to help me let go of my hatred and wrath.

But I relied on another grace that night: the grace I had received in becoming Catholic. This grace allowed me to know and to believe in the truth of the teaching of Christ and His Church. In those moments before battle, if I had for a moment doubted that the Word of God as revealed in Scripture and Tradition was true, I believe I would have resisted God's call to "love your enemies," probably the most difficult command in Scripture. Without the faith to believe that the

teaching of Christ and His Church are infallibly true, I would not have had the courage to change that evening.

God's grace not only saved me from myself that evening; this conversion from hatred to love – one of many in my life – brought me closer to discovering my call to the priesthood.

"Why did you become Catholic?"

The day that I was received into full communion with the Catholic Church was the most joyful day of my life. At the Easter Vigil in 1984, in the small chapel of Oxford University's Newman Center, I was confirmed and received the Eucharist for the first time. The moment I received the Host, I knew that I was being united with Jesus Christ in every possible way: physically, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. I knew that I was following the will of the Father more closely than I ever had before.

But becoming Catholic was about the last thing I had expected to do while at Oxford.

Often when someone asks, "Why did you become Catholic?" I answer with a clever line stolen from some famous convert. A favorite is G.K. Chesterton's quip, "To get my sins forgiven." Another favorite is the short affirmation, "Because it's true."

Sometimes it's more an accusation than a question. If the person asks, "Why did you become a *Catholic*?" with the emphasis on *Catholic*, he has a problem with the Church. If the emphasis is on *you*, he's usually an intellectual elitist who believes that no educated person would become

(or remain) Catholic. If the emphasis is on *become*, the questioner finds it possible that a person raised in the Church would remain in it, but inconceivable that someone with my background would choose to *become* Catholic.

I love to challenge such prejudices, because I, too, once held them. When I “went up” to Oxford, as the English say (the expression assumes that everyone is coming from London, thus going “up”, north, to Oxford) my religion could have best been described as a lapsed Protestant with strong anti-Catholic biases. In many ways, I was a functioning pagan steeped in all the fashionable ideas of modern American ideology. Politically and economically, I was a conservative with a libertarian tendency. I was a pretty typical product of my background.

A born-again conservative in revolutionary times

I was born on May 15, 1959 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the youngest of three children. My parents were and are devout Christians, and I was baptized a Lutheran soon after birth. When I was three, my parents moved to rural northeast Pennsylvania. There wasn’t always a Lutheran church close at hand in those parts, so for the next decade, I attended Methodist and Baptist churches as well – each Evangelical, with a strong sense that the Bible was literally and inerrantly true. My family attended church every Sunday morning, participated in Sunday school (where my parents often assisted or taught), frequently attended midweek services on Wednesday nights, and encouraged prayer and Bible study at home.

At the age of six or seven, I committed myself to a personal

relationship with Christ, as much as one can as a small child. I deepened this commitment at twelve, when, as a member of a Baptist community, I was “re-baptized.” A few years later, when a Lutheran community began in our small town, I again recommitted myself when I was “confirmed” as a member there.

On each of these occasions, I was truly converting in the sense of going deeper into my relationship with Christ. I was really “growing in the Lord,” a process that I believe parallels our Lord’s own growth in “age and grace and wisdom.”⁴ This



ongoing conversation is a necessary part of spiritual maturity.

But there was something missing. As I grew spiritually, I began to question many things. From my earliest memories, I have always been fascinated with moral questions, especially those that touch on economic and political issues. Perhaps this is because I grew up during the revolutionary times of the late 1960s and early 1970s in a house with a politically active conservative Republican Father. (My

earliest political memory is of my dad’s bumper sticker in 1966: “Don’t blame me. I voted for Goldwater.”) My elder siblings and my dad argued constantly about Vietnam, the draft, the voting age, women’s rights, civil rights, and a host of other issues.

Looking for the right answers

It was natural for me to search for answers to the questions that were being argued daily on television, in the newspaper, and at our dinner table. Having been taught to search for the truth in the Bible, I began to study it to find out the “right answers.”

Even in my late teenage years, I questioned what seemed to be contradictory answers to the most basic questions from people who all claimed that God loves us and had given us the truth in Scripture. My mother and sister were working hard for women’s rights because they saw the biblical truth that all people were created in the image and likeness of God and thus deserved equal respect. As an educator and administrator, my mother was a pioneer for women in leadership roles, although she never received the same pay as her (often less-qualified) male counterparts. But many Evangelicals condemned her and others like her for failing to be “submissive” according to their readings of St. Paul’s epistles. Devout Christians read the same texts and came up with opposite conclusions!

On many issues, from the subline (the meaning of Holy Communion) to the ridiculous (whether men could wear their hair long), I found believing Christians at odds, despite their reliance on the same Bible. Who was to decide among them? How could I decide what was right?

From the Naval Academy to a “peace church”

If I had stayed in my rural hamlet, these issues might never have been enough to cause me a crisis of faith. But the larger world beckoned. Partly because I wanted to get a free, high-quality education, partly because my parents had instilled in me the important notion of service, and partly for the prestige of it all, I entered the United States Naval Academy (USNA) as part of the class of 1981. Those in the admissions office informed my parents that they did not think I could handle the academy academically and not to expect much.

Born stubborn, I needed to hear no more. I threw myself into my studies (majoring in physics) and graduated first in my class, winning a Rhodes Scholarship in my senior year.

But my time at USNA was not good for my faith. During my plebe (freshman) year, I searched for a place of worship. The naval chaplaincy provided a generic Protestant service that I enjoyed but didn't find comforting or challenging. I began to look for a “civilian” church to attend. I was in for a shock. When I attended a Lutheran church in the Annapolis area, I was greeted coldly. After a couple of weeks, they told me I wasn't welcome back if I was in uniform – that they were a “peace church” that had taken an anti-war stance during the Vietnam conflict. Since plebes had to wear their uniforms, I couldn't attend this church.

This rejection left me reeling. My home community had celebrated my military scholarship and sent me forth with a blessing – and here were members of the same denomination, reading the same Bible, condemning

me for being in the service. Who was right? How could I know?

The crucible of doubt

Being a typical eighteen-year-old, this was all I needed to quit practicing my faith. For the next four years, I was, at best, an irregular churchgoer. I stopped praying, and instead I threw myself into my work and studies. I did not resolve these faith issues; I just bracketed them, dismissing Christianity as a religion that was hopelessly confused.

When I arrived in Oxford in October 1981, I had an opportunity to study beyond my technological background. Former Rhodes Scholars from the Navy, including Admiral Stansfield Turner and Secretary of the Navy James Woolsey, had convinced me to study P.P.E. (politics, philosophy, and economics) at Oxford. I decided that this was time to search for answers to the ethical and moral questions that had always interested me. In fact, my tutors at Oxford challenged me to do just that.

One of the first books they had me read was René Descartes' *A Discourse on Method* and his *Meditations on the First Philosophy* and *Principles of Philosophy*. Descartes challenges the reader to place all of his beliefs in the “crucible of doubt.” This methodological doubt means that one should question why he holds any and all beliefs, even belief in the existence of God, in creation, and in himself. Through this method, Descartes reaches his famous “*Cogito ergo sum*” – “I think, therefore I am” – as the basis for a philosophical argument for the existence of God and the universe. I set about applying this method in my life.

Radical doubt is dangerous. By rejecting all received wisdom and tradition, you place yourself in an intellectual void. Only later would I understand that we are not isolated atoms, but, rather, beings born for and in community. We need to remain connected to that communion with the living and the dead and with the wisdom of the ages. As Chesterton said, “Belief in tradition is just applying the principles of democracy to the dead.”

I confront Christianity's claims

Having begun to ask myself (and others) to justify all beliefs – moral, intellectual, and religious – I soon found myself face-to-face with the basic claims of Christianity. I could no longer simply bracket them.

There God's grace worked in me, especially through certain Christians He placed in my life. As I began my studies at New College in Oxford, a group of young men and women, several of them believing Catholics, befriended me. During our next three years together, their influence, patience, and especially the witness of their lives helped lead me into the Church.

Having inherited all the anti-Catholic prejudice of a typical Evangelical, I resisted what was becoming plain to me – that there is a wisdom in the teaching of the Catholic Church that is explainable only by its greater-than-human inspiration. As I searched for answers to the questions my tutors asked me, I kept finding that the best – the most reasonable, well-articulated, and convincing – responses came from the Catholic Tradition. The

continued on page 13...



Betwixt that Rock and Hardplace

As you receive this newsletter, Father's Day is looming, and I can think of no day that more touches the stresses that come when a clergyman considers converting to the Catholic Church. Certainly theological, vocational, and financial issues rank high amongst the barriers that hold men back from "forgetting what lies behind" and swimming over the Tiber, but I know from experience and our conversations with hundreds of clergy inquirers and converts that concerns over family matters rank highest.



Very emphatically Jesus said, "Have no anxiety about tomorrow...about what you will eat or what you will wear...the day's troubles are sufficient thereof... seek ye first the kingdom of God," and I know from these conversations that these clergy on the journey take these words seriously. But none of this is easy when your wife and children are not keen on what resignation and conversion might bring for the future as well as the present.

Now of course I realize that not all of the clergy we work with are men, but the vast majority are and most are married with families, so at the core of their decision lies their God-given roles and corresponding responsibilities as husband and a father.

In my own journey home, this concern was not as poignant as it is for others. My wife Marilyn was equally as convinced and convicted as I was, and we entered the Church side-by-side. And our children were young: Peter entered as an infant through baptism and Jon Marc at age six. His one adverse reaction, though, still touches my heart, for when he fully realized that I would no longer be a pastor he wept. He liked seeing his father up front and standing beside him in the receiving line.

I was concerned, though, about what a Catholic parish might have to offer for our children's religious education.

No Catholic parish I had known had anything to compare with the well oiled and seasoned Sunday school programs, youth groups, and summer Bible schools provided by our evangelical churches. But along with the words "have no concern about tomorrow," Jesus also promised, "all these things shall added unto you."

For other clergy converts, though, this concern is very real. We have worked with clergy who would convert in a minute except for the negative pressures being imposed by spouse, children, or extended family. Clergy have been threatened with divorce if they converted—and sometimes this threat was carried out. Clergy are bombarded with complaints from their teenagers who fear they will lose all their friends and have no youth programs—and this has often turned out to be true.

None of this makes it any easier when a pastor contemplates abandoning his pulpit and pastoral ministry without any guarantees for the future. And when that pastor sits alone—often very much alone—in his study praying desperately for guidance, with the angry voices of familial resistance and doubt echoing in his mind, that verse in 1 Peter screams loudly: "Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered."

In order that your prayers may not be hindered; how hard it is for a husband and father to lead his family when everyone around him is set against doing what he knows to be the best for them.

This is the reason for the *Coming Home Network*. We are not here to push, pull, or prod anyone, for we have been there—we know how difficult it is to turn away from everything you and your family have known and believed to lead them not only into the unknown but the unwanted. Our *raison d'être* is to stand beside, to encourage, to provide fellowship, resources, and assistance, and to always be there especially when everyone else seems set against you.

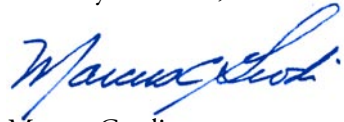
Most importantly, we are here to pray. We know how lonely it can sometimes feel on the other side of the Tiber, but we also know how blessed, true, and fulfilling it is on this side. Sure, it isn't perfect here—and yes, there is so much that needs to be done to improve the state of religious education: children, youth, young adult, and adult. But hey, why else is God calling so many well-educated, experienced, and committed Christian men and women home to the Church? To get involved and help! And again, that is why the *CHNetwork* exists: to help these very gifted converts find opportunities to continue serving their Lord and Savior.

continued on next page...

If I may, I'd like to end on a slightly different note, with a joke that really only makes sense from a Catholic perspective. One evening the Holy Family was sitting around the dinner table caught in a heated discussion. Something had gone wrong, and something needed to be done. Then suddenly, Joseph, head of the family, raised his hands demanding silence. He looked knowingly at the Son and the wife he had been called by an angel to love and protect, and knowing them, said: "I'm sorry; whatever it was, it must have been my fault."

As Father's Day approaches, I pray that under the intercession of Saint Joseph we fathers might grow more and more in the fullness of his humility.

Sincerely in Christ,



Marcus Grodi

The St. Joseph Litany - In remembrance of Fathers Day.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
Christ, hear us.
Christ, graciously hear us.
God, the Father of Heaven,
have mercy on us.
God the Son, Redeemer of the
world, *have mercy on us.*
God the Holy Spirit,
have mercy on us.
Holy Trinity, One God,
have mercy on us.
Holy Mary, *pray for us.*
St. Joseph, *pray for us.*
Renowned offspring of David,
pray for us.
Light of Patriarchs,
pray for us.
Spouse of the Mother of God,
pray for us.
Chaste guardian of the Virgin,
pray for us.
Foster father of the Son of God,
pray for us.
Diligent protector of Christ,
pray for us.
Head of the Holy Family,
pray for us.
Joseph most just, *pray for us.*
Joseph most chaste, *pray for us.*
Joseph most prudent, *pray for us.*

Joseph most strong, *pray for us.*
Joseph most obedient, *pray for us.*
Joseph most faithful, *pray for us.*
Mirror of patience, *pray for us.*
Lover of poverty, *pray for us.*
Model of artisans, *pray for us.*
Glory of home life, *pray for us.*
Guardian of virgins, *pray for us.*
Pillar of families, *pray for us.*
Solace of the wretched, *pray for us.*
Hope of the sick, *pray for us.*
Patron of the dying, *pray for us.*
Terror of demons, *pray for us.*
Protector of Holy Church,
pray for us.

*Lamb of God, who takes away the
sins of the world,
spare us, O Lord!
Lamb of God, who takes away the
sins of the world,
graciously hear us, O Lord!
Lamb of God, who takes away the
sins of the world,
have mercy on us.*

He made him the lord of His
household,
*and prince over all His
possessions.*



Let us pray. O God, in your ineffable providence you were pleased to choose Blessed Joseph to be the spouse of your most holy Mother; grant, we beg you, that we may be worthy to have him for our intercessor in heaven whom on earth we venerate as our Protector: You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Clergy on the Journey

The Clergy Convert/Inquirer Report for June 2004

Non-catholic ministers are being called home to the Catholic Church at an ever increasing rate. At the moment we are being contacted by a new member of the clergy at the rate of three a week. These people are in special need of your prayers. Reception into the Catholic Church often comes at a great sacrifice, including loss of employment, home, as well as the alienation of friends and family.

As you pray for all of our clergy members, please make special requests at the Throne of Grace for the following:

✦ A Charismatic Episcopal priest who greatly appreciates your prayers for him and his wife. They both want the perfect will and heart of the Father for their lives.

✦ A Lutheran pastor in Canada who has informed his congregation that he and his family are leaving. He says, "We must become Catholic and that means giving up my whole livelihood."

✦ A former United Methodist minister who works with an evangelical Protestant ministry to the poor. He writes, "I run the risk that I may not be employed if I convert."

✦ Rob, a convert from the Mennonite Brethren in Canada says learning the roots and spiritual depth of the Mass has helped him greatly. Rob asks for one specific prayer: His wife has not joined the Church with him. Please pray for peace and God's will.

✦ Prayers are also requested for two missionaries who were received into the Catholic Church at Easter—a Southern Baptist minister in France and a missionary for the Churches of Christ in Israel.

Yours in Christ,

Jim Anderson
Coordinator of Primaries

If you have any questions about our Primary Membership, or if you are a Protestant Minister with questions please contact Jim by email at jim@chnetwork.org

Helping 'em Home

The Laity Convert/Inquirer Report for June 2004

Might we decrease Lord that you might increase in our lives.

The Helpers Network thanks everyone for their "yes" in assisting those seeking the truth of the Catholic Church. At their respective Easter Vigils, ten contacts of the *Helpers Network* received two great sacraments, Confirmation and First Communion, aided by their Helpers' gift of fellowship. All of us at the *Network* offer our prayers and welcome home to these ten individuals.

Below are words shared by our contacts about their *Network Helper* and the *Network*. If you wish to volunteer your time as a *Network Helper* or know someone who would benefit from this fellowship please contact me at: rob@chnetwork.org

Beverly W. from *The Helpers Network* contacted me and has been very supportive and comforting as I am on my journey. It was particularly comforting to me that Beverly had been raised in the same religion as I had. CHN *Helpee*

Rob you helped me immensely on my Journey Home and I feel such a deep sense of peace and awe in regards to my return to Catholicism. From our talks I know we share the same kind of awe for the fullness of the Catholic Faith. *Helpee*

In desperation, I turned to the Coming Home Network. Rob Rodgers contacted me, and provided me with a helper, through the inter net. Victor (my CHN Helper) and Rob offered prayers, encouragement and words of wisdom in my darkest moments. I have been a Catholic for two years now and it's permanent! I am grateful to the Coming

Home Network for all their support.

I have been incredibly encouraged and helped by the Forum on the CHN web site. I consider a few of the people who post on there to be true friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. CHN *Helpee*

In Christ, His servant and yours,

Robert Rodgers
Coordinator, The Helpers Network
rob@chnetwork.org

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*June 7
Stephen K. Ray*

*June 14
Avery Cardinal Dulles
(Re-air)*

*June 21
Fr. Eric Nicoali
(Re-air)*

*June 28
Msgr. Stuart Swetland*

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Tuesdays 1 A.M.

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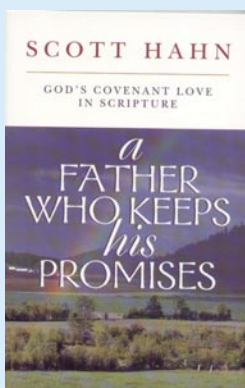
Best of Journey Home:

Wednesday 1 P.M.

Or listen on the Internet at
www.ewtn.com.

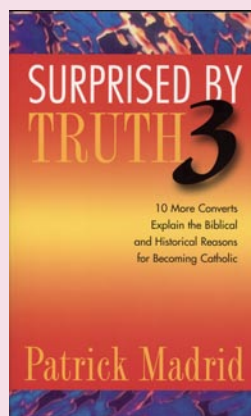
Featured *Coming Home* Resources

A Father Who Keeps His Promises By Scott Hahn



In *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, the popular Catholic apologist explores the “covenant love” God reveals to us through the Scriptures, and explains how God patiently reaches out to us—despite our faults and shortcomings—to restore us into a relationship with his divine Family.

Surprised By Truth 3 By Patrick Madrid



In these dramatic and thought-provoking conversion stories, ten men and women reveal why they changed their minds about Protestantism and entered the Catholic Church.

These tales will do for you what these converts had to do for themselves: answer the most common objections to the Catholic Faith—and answer them in terms that non-Catholics find familiar and easy to understand.

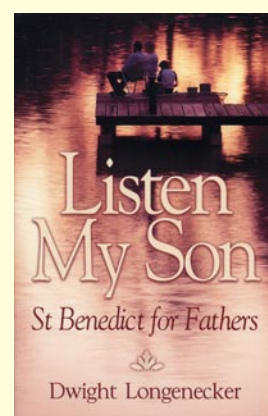
But these stories do more than make converts. If you’re already Catholic, they help you explain your Faith to non-Catholics and leave you prouder and more grateful than ever to be in Christ’s Church.

Listen My Son

St. Benedict for Fathers
By Dwight Longenecker

In *Listen, My Son*, author Dwight Longenecker takes St. Benedict one step further and uses the Rule to help men become better parents. Just as the abbot of a monastic community reads Benedict’s Rule for guidance, Longenecker says so, too, can men read the Rule to help them guide the family.

Listen, My Son (the opening lines of Benedict’s Rule) breaks the Rule into short daily readings and provides commentary to help strengthen men in their role as open-hearted, attentive, and intelligent fathers and husbands. Without underestimating the emotional, spiritual, and physical demands of fatherhood, Longenecker also holds up the joys of developing a strong bond with God—one that nurtures the individual man and that provides him with the ability to grow himself and his family in faithfulness, service, and love.



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Catholics And The Word, 'Father': Are We Disobeying Our Lord?

By Gregory Oatis



THE CHALLENGE: *Catholics often ignore the teachings of scripture. And nowhere is their disregard more evident than in their practice of addressing their priests as "Father." What can they be thinking? The words of our Lord could hardly be clearer: "Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven" (Mt. 23:9). Every time a Catholic says hello to a priest, he or she is violating Jesus' express command.*

Jesus' directive, quoted above, is not about vocabulary. If it were, the New Testament writers wouldn't have repeatedly used the word "father" to refer to human beings, for in doing so they would be disobeying the Lord. Yet again and again we see them applying the supposedly forbidden term to individuals – including themselves.

St. Paul often uses the term "father" to refer to himself and others: "...I became your father in Christ through the gospel..." (1 Cor. 4:15); "...We treated each one of you as a father treats his children..." (1 Thess. 2:11); "...to those who follow the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us..." (Rom. 4:16).

Likewise, the first martyr, St. Stephen, addressed the high priests and elders of the temple with the words: "My brothers and fathers, listen" (Acts 7: 2).

We even see Jesus apparently ignoring his own command and referring to a human being as "father." In the parable of Lazarus the beggar, we see Jesus saying: "And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me'" (Lk. 16:24).

So are we to conclude that the New Testament writers – and even Christ himself – are using terminology offensive to the Father? Hardly.

Instead, Jesus is warning us against putting our complete faith and trust in a human being rather than God. We

must never submit our innermost being to anyone other than God himself. No prophet, no guru, no teacher should garner our total trust, only the Lord our God.

Jesus' point – that we must not overly exalt our spiritual leaders – seems tragically apropos today. Whether you consider the fall of various televangelists, or the horrors of Jonestown and Waco, or even the recent abuse scandals within the Catholic Church, examples abound of spiritual leaders who have proven utterly untrustworthy.

When you examine the context of the Bible passage cited in the challenge above, you see that Jesus is criticizing the way the scribes and the Pharisees lord it over the people. Rather than leading the people to God, they try to call attention to themselves and their own supposed holiness:

"They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant" (Mt. 23:6-8).

So we see that Jesus is not giving us vocabulary lessons, but rather warning us to beware of the human tendency in our spiritual leaders to abuse their positions by seeking after their own glory rather than God's.

And note further that "father" is not the only word Jesus appears to be forbidding us to use. He also says, "As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher..."

We know that the word, "rabbi," means teacher. And yet virtually every Christian congregation – including, surely, the ones who point out the supposed fault of Catholics who address their priests as "father" – employs Sunday school "teachers" to instruct their children.

Are they disobeying Jesus' command not to refer to human beings as "teacher"? By no means.

And neither are Catholics who address their priests as "Father."

Mr. Oatis is author of the book, 'Catholic Doctrine in Scripture: A Guide To The Verses That Are Key To Affirming The Faith', published by CH Resources. It is available at your local Catholic bookseller, or by calling toll-free: 877-455-3208.

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CHN Construction Update

We would like to thank all the generous supporters for helping fund our renovation and expansion project. So far we have raised \$54,781.87 from our 2004 mid-year appeal! This amount almost covers the cost of Phase I and II.

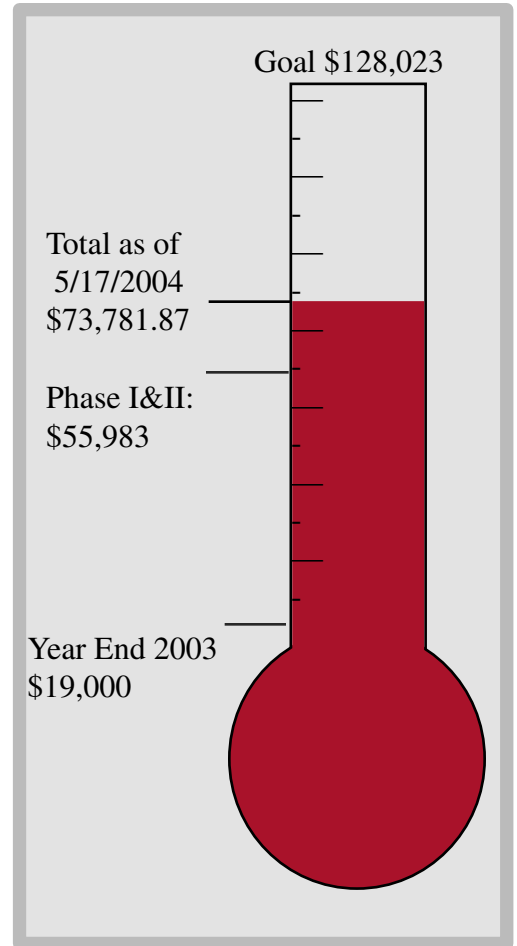
Construction is moving along, and all the CHN staff is anxiously awaiting the opportunity to serve our members and inquirers more efficiently. As the renovations progress, we will update you with the current funding amount and pictures of the revised office space.

Including the \$19,000 that we raised from the 2003 year-end appeal, we are at 57% of our goal. *CHNetwork* still needs to raise an additional \$54,241.13 to make the renovations a complete success. Unless we receive the total goal amount we will not be able to add the much need storage facility to the back of the building. Once the funding for Phase III is accomplished the CHN staff will no longer be traveling between three different storage facilities to fulfill orders and mailings.

We greatly appreciate all that the donors have already done in putting us half way to our goal!

Thank you for your continued support,

CHN Staff



The following pictures will give you an idea on the current conditions and future plans. The clutter in some areas is the tall tale sign that we are simply out of space.



Currently this area is used for processing mail and the storage of mailing resources. Some days we mail up to 100 pieces to members and inquirers. This area also serves as our kitchen and a work station for two employees.



Located in the mailroom, this will be the new work area for processing mail and storage. The work station can hold up to 3 staff members.

Construction photos



This is the current area used for video/audio processing. Due to lack of space, the video/audio library is mixed with various resources, and the back stock of blanks are located in two separate areas. This area also holds some mailing supplies.



The entire video/audio center will now be located in the mailroom. A workstation (desk) will be directly to the left and the mail processing workstation (previous page) is right behind the multimedia area.



The mailroom always seems cluttered with boxes and packing supplies. The boxes on the floor are resources waiting for a home, and behind the door stores all the packing supplies we recycle.



This work area is in a central location of the building and will house the copier and printer. It also includes a workstation and storage for office supplies.



This final picture shows one of the many extremely small work areas. This area is located in the upstairs of the building and shares space with the printer, supplies, and part of the CHN library. This staff member has to keep files in a cardboard box under the table/desk. There is barely any turning room for the chair, let alone serve as a productive work area.

continued from page 4...

writings of the saints (especially St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, and those influenced by them, such as John Henry Newman, Elizabeth Anscombe, and John Finnis⁵) were superior to those proposed by other sources. It seemed to me that Catholic thought about social questions – for example, the issues for war and peace (especially the just-war tradition) – was clearer and better thought-out than other arguments that I was studying. At first I thought this was a coincidence; as time went on, I could not deny that something different was behind the writings of these men and women.

On my own, I began to examine the basic assumptions of the Christian Faith. First, did Jesus exist? Yes, this is well documented. Next, is He who He says He is? I must admit that I agreed with C.S. Lewis' ideas that He was either "liar, lunatic, or Lord."⁶ But how could I judge the authority of His claims?



The key question: did Jesus really rise?

After much thought and study (and just a little prayer – at this stage I wasn't seriously praying), I decided that the central claim of Christianity is the claim of Jesus' bodily Resurrection. The truth of the biblical witness seemed to me to hinge on this claim. So how should one judge the authenticity of the Resurrection?

I tried to approach the biblical texts like other ancient texts. At this time, I was also reading Julius Caesar and Thucydides for their insights into military strategy and tactics. Most thinkers accepted these texts fairly straightforwardly. Was Scripture less trustworthy?

The text I first found most compelling was 1 Corinthians 15. Here St. Paul tells of all those who had seen and experienced the risen Lord: more than five hundred witnesses, many of whom were still alive when Paul wrote the letter (about twenty years after the events). This letter seems to be an authentic testimony to the truth of the bodily Resurrection of Jesus. The hundreds of witnesses lend credibility to Paul's own experience of the risen Lord. If these others had not really experienced the convincing proofs of Jesus' Resurrection,⁷ Paul would quickly have been seen as a fraud.

As I studied more, I was startled by the overwhelming evidence for the Resurrection, especially in the life of the early Church. Almost to a person, those first believers went to a martyr's death for their firm and certain belief in the Resurrection. No other explanation made sense of the data. That Jesus really had not died? No, the medical evidence in John's Gospel of "blood and water rushing from His

side"⁸ shows that He really died. Plus, even a cursory reading of Roman history shows that no Roman soldier would so botch a crucifixion as to allow a condemned man to survive.

No, for anyone "with eyes to see and ears to hear,"⁹ the accounts of the Resurrection and the lives of the men and women who had witnessed the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus were convincing evidence of the authenticity of the Resurrection.

The Church's teachings all ring true

In addition, there were existential, subjective reasons for me to believe. Throughout my sojourn away from practicing Christianity, I had never been comfortable in denying what I had experienced in prayer and worship as a child. On some level of my being, I knew that I had encountered the living God in my life. I could not "unhear" that Word that had spoken to my heart as a child. Now my mind was untied with what I knew connaturally in my heart all along: that Jesus is our risen Lord!

With this rediscovery, I began studying the Scriptures closely, looking for a community of believers in which to worship. I found one in an Evangelical Anglican Church in Oxford. But after a few months of worshipping there, I found I needed more than just that wonderful community's charismatic preaching and singing.

I now *really* knew, on an adult level, that the Scriptures were true. I wanted to find a community that also believed this and was trying to live it daily. I also wanted to answer the many ethical, moral, and political questions that still intrigued me.

As I studied and prayed more, I kept encountering the issues that divided Catholics and Evangelical Protestants. I read of how Jesus had commissioned His Apostles to forgive sin in John 20:22-23,¹⁰ but where and how was this power exercised today in the community? Scripture talked about anointing the sick in James 5:14-15,¹¹ yet only Catholics seemed to take this text seriously. What Jesus said about Holy Communion seemed very straightforward to me, especially in John 6, yet Evangelicals speak of the Lord's Supper as only symbolic. The scriptures talked about the transformative power of God's grace, so that one can speak like St. Paul of total transformation of oneself to become "another Christ,"¹² but Evangelicals believe that Christ's righteousness merely covers our sinful nature instead of transforming it. Sacred Scripture speaks of the intercession of the heavenly host on behalf of God's people on earth,¹³ but only Catholics prayed to the saints and angels as intercessors and friends.

Then there was the moral teachings of the Church, which seemed to make more sense to me each day. As I examined the alternatives, secular and religious, no other ethical system had the same internal consistency and tight argumentation that I found in the Catholic moral tradition of natural law. In addition, the Catholic moral tradition answered the question of how to decide moral issues – by appealing to the teaching authority given to the Apostles and to their successors (the Magisterium of the Church). This teaching authority made sense of God's love and desire to lead His children into all truth.

Still another influence was the example of the Catholics I knew as friends, who lived their Faith with a peace and joy about them that I didn't find elsewhere in the world. In fact, it was a peace and joy that "surpasses all understanding."¹⁴ I knew that I needed and desired that same peace and joy.

I sense the Real Presence

I began seeking private instruction in the Faith from Oxford's Catholic chaplain. For two and a half years, he patiently met with me each week as I struggled to learn what the Catholic Church teaches. I examined every aspect of the Faith that I could handle.

When I was five or six, if you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have said a minister. Of course, I had put away such "childish thoughts"¹⁵ as I grew, especially in light of my struggle with faith.

I attended lectures on questions of Faith and morals held around the university. I visited with Fr. Thomas More Mann, a saintly Franciscan who introduced me to a side of the Church entirely new to me: its outreach to the poor and vulnerable. I began to pray seriously and to attend Mass each day. I loved to pray before and after Mass in the chapel in front of the tabernacle.

Growing up, I had been exposed to different theologies of the Eucharist. To the Baptists and Methodists, it was only a symbolic remembrance. Lutherans believed in "consubstantiation": Jesus is present "with" (con) the substance of bread and wine, but only in its "use" as communion. The elements remained bread and wine at all times. In fact, I once watched my Lutheran pastor return extra communion hosts to the bag for a later use after they had

be consecrated. When I questioned him about this practice, he told me that they were no longer consecrated because Jesus was present only in the "use." When I pressed him for how this was possible and how this squared with Jesus' own words "This *is* my Body; this *is* my Blood," he told me that it was a mystery that we couldn't hope to understand.

As I prayed in the chapel day in and day out, I had a very real sense of Jesus' abiding presence in the place. When I finally got to the Church's teachings on the Eucharist, I grew excited: I had been experiencing the Real Presence in my own private prayer in the chapel.

The Church is a truth-teaching thing

Once I became conceptually aware of what I had connaturally experienced with the Eucharist, I began truly to hunger and thirst for our Eucharistic Lord. But before I could receive Him, I had to be able to say honestly that I believed what the Catholic Church believed. So I redoubled my efforts to study the teachings of the Church, trying to come to terms with them, particularly Her sexual ethic, which seemed so idealistic; it was beautiful but seemed impossibly demanding.

By this time, my friends knew I was examining questions of the Faith. I was trying to see whether I could accept every aspect of the Church's teaching. But my friend Dermot Quinn pointed out to me the futility of this approach. Even if I could study every detail of every teaching and come to say honestly that I agreed with the Church, this would not make my faith truly Catholic. What made a person Catholic, Dermot

insisted, was not just belief that the Church taught the truth in matters of Faith and morals, but the belief that the Church is a “truth-teaching thing.” In other words, the most important question I had to answer was “Is the Catholic Church who She says She is?” Is She the Church founded by Jesus Christ, containing all that Christ’s believers need for their instruction and sanctification?

If I believed this, I should be (had to be!) Catholic. If I did not, it really didn’t matter whether I happened to agree with particular Church teachings.

The choice before me was clear. I had come to believe that the Church was who She claimed to be. The fact that I still had difficulties with some of Her teachings didn’t really matter. As Newman said, “A thousand difficulties do not make for one doubt.” I didn’t doubt that the Church was the Mystical Body of Christ extended through space and time. I was confident that the Church’s teachings in Faith and morals were true even if I didn’t fully understand why they were true, because I believed that God had endowed His Church with a special charism of the Holy Spirit that ensured that her authentic teachings in matters of Faith and morals are, at least, not false. So I was ready to be received into full communion.

I knew then, as I know now, that my life as a Catholic would partly be spent in coming to a better understanding of my Faith. I would need to do theology (“faith seeking

understanding”) to know and live the truth better.

This point needs to be emphasized: If God truly loves us, then He must ensure that we have a way of knowing what He is like and how we are to live. A loving father wants to be known by his children and teaches his children how to live and how to love. Any father who didn’t would be negligent. I had come to know and



experience that our loving Abba is no “reclusive” father. He has provided us, His children, with a way to know how we should live. The teaching office of the Church ensures that in every age we have access to the fullness of truth that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who empowers the Church’s official teachers, the bishops in union with the Bishop of Rome, to teach with a greater-than-human authority in the areas of Faith and morals. He does this out of love for His children. But, like all children, we must attentively listen to our Father and seek to understand His teachings if we are to live them out.

It is also very important for us to have confidence and trust in this

function of the Magisterium of the Church. This is especially true when it comes to accepting *and living* the difficult and demanding teachings of the gospel. When faced with temptation, often coupled with intense emotions, we have a tendency toward rationalization. In such difficult times, we must have at least moral certitude about the teaching authority of the Church. One of the great injustices that dissenting theologians, pastors, and teachers have done to God’s people is to place uncertainty in people’s minds, doubts about Church teachings, and even about the very authority of the Church to teach. This makes it easier for us to use our difficulties and doubts as excuses not to live up to the demands of the gospel.

Answering the call planted in my heart

The June night in 1985 off the coast of Beirut, I needed certainty that God did in fact demand that I love my enemies. I needed confidence that God’s promises to me would be fulfilled. I needed to know that God’s grace was sufficient for me to follow the gospel’s call to love. Without this confidence, I could well have lost my soul.

Once received into the Church, I was soon back in the Navy, serving as a line officer aboard frigates and destroyers. I found it challenging to try to live as a devout Catholic in the military. It was particularly difficult not to be able to attend daily Mass. At sea, we would often go two months without seeing a Catholic chaplain or making a port visit. But I was determined to serve the Lord as I

served my country. It was the height of the Cold War, and it was easy to see that the Soviets and their empire needed to be contained. As I was soon to learn firsthand, innocents needed protection throughout the world, especially from the threat of terrorism that was (and is) affecting so many.

Throughout my time of service, but especially after the events of the summer of 1985, an old desire began to re-emerge in my soul. When I was five or six, if you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have said a minister. Of course, I had put away such “childish thoughts”¹⁵ as I grew, especially in light of my struggle with faith. But now they began to re-emerge. I discussed these feelings with spiritual advisers, who recommended that I wait three years after my conversion before acting on them. Converts often can be overly zealous when it comes to their desire to serve the Lord.

I loved the Navy. But over time, I became more and more convinced that God was calling me to a higher form of service: the priesthood. I wanted to share with others the joy I had experienced – the joy of knowing God’s forgiveness, the joy of receiving

Him in the Eucharist, and the joy of knowing the truth revealed to us in His Word. I resigned my commission in order to enter the seminary, was ordained a priest on May 25, 1991, and have had the honor to serve most of my priesthood as a Newman Center chaplain.

As a “Newman convert” myself, I feel right at home in this capacity. Each day God challenges me to go deeper into the mystery of His love. In hindsight, I see my life as a constant call to just such an ongoing conversion. At times I’m faithful to this call, and other times I fall far short of a proper response to His grace. What has been true all through my life is that the Lord continues to be “kind and merciful to me, a sinner.”¹⁶ My greatest joy as a priest is sharing that kindness and mercy with others – even with my enemies.

(Footnotes)

¹ St. Louis Marie de Montfort (1673 – 1716), secular priest who founded the Sisters of the Divine Wisdom and the Missionary

² Luke 23:34

³ Matthew 5:44

⁴ Cf. Luke 2:52

⁵ St. Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo; St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), Dominican philosopher, theologian, and Doctor; John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801

-1890), Catholic convert from the Anglican Church; Elizabeth Anscombe (1919-2001), English philosopher; John Finnis, Professor of Law and Legal Philosophy, University College, Oxford.

⁶ Jesus could have been only one of three things: a liar who deceived His followers; a lunatic who was deluded about His own identity; or who He said He was: the divine Lord and Messiah.

⁷ Cf. Acts 1:3

⁸ Cf. John 19:34

⁹ Cf. Matthew 13:16

¹⁰ “And when He had said this, 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.’”

¹¹ “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven.”

¹² Cf. Gal. 2:19-20

¹³ Cf. Rev. 8

¹⁴ Cf. Phil. 4:7

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:11

¹⁶ Cf. Luke 18:13

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