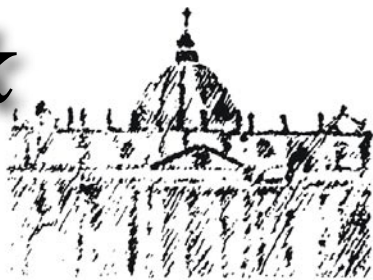


# The Coming Home Network NEWSLETTER



The Coming Home Network International  
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March 2005

## Journeys Home

### Being Right Does Not Make Right

A Continuing Conversion Story By Jeff Childers

*Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ uses many means to bring his children into the community of sinners-made-saints that he founded, his Holy and Catholic Church, “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”<sup>1</sup>*

Precisely because he so thoroughly fills everything in this world, his own good creation, with his sacred presence, all of that creation can be, in a way, a sacrament of his love, seeds planted by the Great Sower calling sinners to his divine mercy within the Great Oak of his kingdom. Some find his Church when blessed with a vocation to marriage within a Catholic family. Others are mesmerized by the rich beauty of the Church in the splendors of her artistic, musical, literary, or liturgical heritage. Still others are drawn into her sacred bosom by the witness of her ethical or moral tradition, through her philosophical and intellectual tradition, through the

majestic witness of her great saints, or the quiet witness of the millions of unknown holy men and women who call her their Holy Mother. No path is better than another. God, “who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,”<sup>2</sup> has uniquely designed each of us, and, in his abundant compassion, calls to each of us as we are and where we are.

For this sinner and, I would imagine, for many if not most members and friends of the *Coming Home Network*, it was discovering the truth of the doctrine of the Church that led us to answer God’s call and leave our personal Ur of the Chaldeans



for the unknown promised land. Like many who will read this, I was raised in a small Protestant congregation. Particularly through my grandfather’s influence, I attended services regularly as far back as I can remember. There I learned of God our Father, who made us in his image, of Jesus Christ his Son, who died to atone for our sin, and of the Holy Spirit, who inspired prophets, apostles, and evangelists to

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# Ever been asked the question?...

Ever been asked the question, "Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated"? Few people in Sri Lanka or the other tsunami affected islands in the Indian Ocean may understand, but most American adults know this question intimately. The same unemotional, uninvolved distance exists for most westerners towards the tsunami tragedy. And I must admit, even more so for my own children.

Someone close to me even asked, when overhearing us, "Sue Nammie who?"

Now he wasn't being flippant about the unfathomable, unbelievable tragedy that has taken so many countless lives and has irreconcilably changed so many others. No, this is just what he thought we were saying when he first heard this otherwise uncommon term to mid-Ohioan ears.

But when our children's children one day ask them where they were when the tsunami struck, my sons' first response may be, "What tsunami?" You see, we're without television right now, so other than what was reported in the local paper (which they don't read, except for the comics) and on radio news, their lives have remained untouched, unimpressed by the immensity of this tragedy.

But which of any of us here in America has truly awakened to the depth of this tragedy? In fact, I've heard few people on the radio, television, or from the pulpit address what I believe is the greater tragedy in this unfathomable loss of life, in the same way that I heard few commentators address the greater tragedy of 9/11. The tsunami took close to 200,000 lives; the 9/11 attacks more than 4,000. But loss of life is not the worse thing that can happen to us. What about the loss of eternal life?

We certainly are not in a position to pass judgment on the eternal destinies

of any of these people who died, yet the majority of the tsunami victims were unevangelized Muslims.

The final command Jesus gave to his hand-picked apostles, chosen to carry His words and the message of His death and resurrection, was "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you." His final mandate was not merely to divide the world into diocesan and parish enclaves, to train and assign diocesan and parish priests and managers, to build stone structures where believers can come one day a week (if they can make the time) to receive the sacraments and sit before Jesus in the tabernacle, nor to publish synodical reports that tactfully enculturate Jesus' words into the world's ever evolving cultures. Jesus was concerned about the salvation and perfection of souls. He died and rose for this; he sent the Holy Spirit to empower the Church for this; and he promised that he would always be with us for this.

So why are so many people in this world, after 2,000 years, still untouched by the Gospel message? What has happened to our hunger for souls?

I must admit that one of my disappointments in coming into the Church was encountering this apathy towards evangelism. For two semesters I taught catechetics at one of America's best Catholic seminaries, and my students reported unanimously that few of their professors, few of their classes had any emphasis on their call to evangelization—and these men were being trained to become priests!

A few of our CHNetwork staff members made the calculations that approximately 100 people die every minute in the world. That means that in the time it is taking you to read this short article, sev-

eral hundred people have died. What was the state of their souls? Or has today's hyper-ecumenism, infected with indifference and universalism, convinced you that it just doesn't matter? "Our loving and merciful God would never let anyone go to hell."

But why am I writing about this in the Coming Home Newsletter? Because I believe one of the many reasons God is calling Protestant clergy and laity home to the Catholic Church is because most of us come with a commitment to evangelization. We experienced the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ and many of us received the consequent call to help others experience this same conversion of heart and soul. He wants us to use our training and gifts to help the Church fulfill Her call to the New Evangelization.

What then have we learned from the sudden deaths of 9/11 and the tsunami? Many are focusing on increasing the security of our borders to protect us from any future terrorist invasion. Good. Others are focusing on improving tsunami and earthquake warning systems and communication networks. Good. But what are we doing to make sure that fewer and fewer people around the world die every minute without the saving grace of baptism and the message of eternal life

Sincerely in Christ,



President



*Certainly, every convert is a gift to the Church and represents a serious responsibility for her ... especially in the case of adults, such converts bring with them a kind of new energy, an enthusiasm for the faith, and a desire to see the Gospel lived out in the Church. They would be greatly disappointed if, having entered the ecclesial community, they were to find a life lacking fervor and without signs of renewal! We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day.*

— John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 47

# Chapter and Verse

## Catholics And The Worship Requirement: What If I 'Get Nothing' Out Of The Mass?

By Gregory Oatis

**THE CHALLENGE:** *The Mass doesn't do anything for me. I just sit there. I don't feel close to God, and I can't believe God wants me to just go through the motions. I feel closer to God when I take a walk through the park or listen to the waves at the beach.*

Many young people go through a period of restlessness in their faith. They may bridle at the expectations and obligations that all members of God's family are called to fulfill, just as they may object to the limitations placed on them in their earthly families.

If they do not work through this period of rebelliousness - but instead blandly and unthinkingly submit to every teaching and all requirements - they will never make the Christian faith truly their own. So, whatever a parent's or spouse's response might be to such a challenge, patience is required.

At the core of the challenger's attitude, of course, is a gravely misguided assumption: that the universe revolves around me; that for my worship to be valid, it must "feel" somehow fulfilling, or satisfying, or enlightening - to *me*.

Now, clearly, the times we spend with the Lord may - and often *do* - provide experiences that are wonderfully fulfilling, spiritually and emotionally. But nowhere does the Bible state that the purpose of worshiping or petitioning or thanking God is to satisfy our own appetite for the mystical.

On the contrary, the Bible tells us that the state of praising God is the natural order of all creation, animate and inanimate alike.

When the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for allowing the people to praise

him so lavishly during his messianic entrance to Jerusalem prior to his passion, he responded: "I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!" (Lk. 19:40). Which of us would choose to be less responsive or less grateful than a stone?

And in Psalm 148, the entire universe is urged to praise God, including the sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, animals and plants, and even the weather.

So why does the Church teach that we must do our praising and worshiping within the setting of the Mass? Not because God cannot be found in parks or beaches, certainly; spending time alone in nature is a wonderful way to contemplate the Lord. Indeed, our faith possesses a long tradition of committed believers exiling themselves to the wilderness in order to commune with the Lord.

But the saintly Christian hermits did not absent themselves from the Mass. For abandoning the Mass in order to search for God in a desert or a forest would be choosing creation over Creator.

When Moses encountered Yahweh in the burning bush, the Lord instructed him to remove his sandals because he was on "holy ground" (Ex. 3:5).

In the Mass, like Moses, we encounter the holy, the sacred, the ineffable - the Creator himself. This fact is attested to in scripture

many times - most dramatically in the glorious Bread of Life discourse which Jesus gives in John 6: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn. 6:51).

The shocking, presumptuous Eucharistic intimacy that Jesus offered his followers - which, tragically, so few of them embraced - is a reality, regardless of how we might "feel" about it. Then, as now, it made many of his followers uncomfortable: "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" (Jn. 6: 60).

But Jesus did not withdraw his promise, and nearly every one of his disciples turned and walked away from him - no doubt intending to search out a more comfortable, more emotionally satisfying messiah, someone they could "get more" out of following.

Let us pray for the grace not to abandon our Lord when he asks something of us that may be difficult or unfamiliar. And let us determine to learn more about the sacred mysteries presented in the liturgy, so that we may savor them anew in every Mass we celebrate.

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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# Clergy on the Journey

## God Writes Straight with Crooked Lines!

As we have informed you many times over the years, the *Coming Home Network* is contacted by non-catholic clergy on average two to three times a week. In fact, in January the *CHN* clergy membership passed the 1,000 mark! Please continue to pray that the Holy Spirit's guidance of these, your brothers and sisters, continues to deepen their understanding of Christ and his Catholic Church and also graces to discern the Lord's will for their future.

It is true that *normally* pastors contact us who through their reading and praying have come to the conclusion that God is calling them into full-communion with the Catholic Church. Recently, though, our office received a phone call from Eric

Bergman, a former Episcopal priest who had come to the conclusion that God was leading him and his family into the Church. The story, though, does not end here. Coming with Mr. Bergman into the Catholic Church are more than fifty members of his former Episcopal congregation! The Blessed Mother Therese of Calcutta was famous for saying, "God writes straight with crooked lines." The congregation of Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in the Green Ridge section of Scranton, Pennsylvania has discovered the truth of this saying. The recent negative events in the Episcopal communion prompted Eric's congregation to investigate more deeply the teachings and authority of the Catholic Church. After many months of prayer and discernment Eric and his people were given shelter by the pastor and people of the Catholic

parish of St. Clare, in Green Ridge. The group is now known as the St. Thomas More Society. Over the next months, please pray that God continues to bless and guide Mr. Bergman and his people as they continue the process of coming home to the Catholic Church. To learn more about the St. Thomas More Society visit them at [www.stthomasmoresociety.org](http://www.stthomasmoresociety.org).

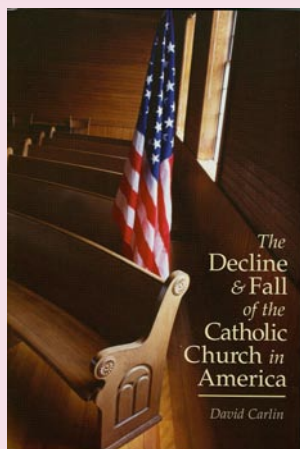
Sincerely in Christ,



Jim Anderson  
Primary Coordinator



## Featured Coming Home Resources



The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America takes you past the lurid headlines to reveal the fundamental reasons for the collapse of Catholicism in America. It's essential reading for anyone who hopes to rebuild the Church.



Do you have a friend or family member that will be "Coming Home" this Easter season?

Here's the perfect "Welcome Home Package" for them:

- *The Catholic Answer Bible*
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *Catechism Indexing Tabs*
- *Bible Indexing Tabs*
- *Catholic Doctrine in Scripture* by Gregory Oatis
- *Read the Bible & Catechism in 1 year Guide*

Receive the book with a donation of \$35 or more!

Receive the Welcome Home Package with any donation of \$75 or more!

## Helping 'em Home

My sisters and brothers of His Holy Catholic Church: may this Lenten time be that of revival and rebirth into the greatest journey life holds, in our walk to the arms of Christ our Lord. As we prepare our souls to meet one of the greatest mystery of our faith, the resurrection of Christ our Lord, may we keep in our prayers not only those being received this Easter, but those still fighting their crossing of the Tiber.

Such joy fills my heart each Lent, as I am privileged to be a part of the journey of so many searching that road home. Every email I receive fills me with joy that God would chose one so unworthy to sit in the seat I now call home.

Though each road is unique to each person on the journey, each gives a glimpse into the personal roads that I, and so many others have walked on our journey toward the Catholic Church. Each testimony takes me back to my early days wondering how I could not only live as a Christian, but accept myself as a Roman Catholic.

This Easter; to my knowledge, as some contacted me after the joy filled event, ten contacts shall be fed as never before in their first reception of the Holy Eucharist. Might we again walk to our Lord, as if for the first time in our reception, finding our lives changed and our faith renewed.

My thanks to the committed service of every Helper and to those of you still

searching. The prayers of the Network are with you in a special way.

“Through the guidance of the Coming



Home Network (my Helper) I was brought to the absolute truth found in the Holy Catholic Church.”

—Lay Inquirer from AL

“I am eagerly awaiting what my heart tells me will be one of the greatest days of my life, my entering into full communion with the Church founded by Christ our Lord.”

—Lay Inquirer from WI

“In working with my first contact through the CHN, I found my faith not only challenged, but revitalized as I had to search into areas of Church history I previously knew very little about, thank-you CHN.”

—Helper from TX

“It has been like having my own dream team at my side as I looked into the Catholic Church.”

—Lay Inquirer from MI

“I have found my home in the last place I ever thought I would sit, the pews of the Catholic Church”

—Lay Inquirer from SC

Please remember in your prayers Julie and her family, Jeff, as well as, Carol and their family as they strive to embrace Christ in all areas of their lives, and let us not forget all others who are struggling in their acceptance of His Church.

*Better that only a few Catholics should be left, staunch and sincere in their religion, than that they should, remaining many, desire as it were, to be in collusion with the Church's enemies and in conformity with the open foes of our faith.*

—St. Peter Canisius (+1521-1597)

In Christ, His servant and yours,

Robert Rodgers  
Coordinator, The Helpers Network



## Quo Vadis

Toward the end of summer 2004, Rob Rodgers and I informed you that we had begun work on CHN's youth network called “*Quo Vadis?*” Since then, it has been a roller-coaster ride of the compilation of ideas, the assembly of materials, and for me, at least, the development of the skills needed to run a youth network. Thus far, we have experienced a certain measure of success in a variety of ways. We maintain a growing website as well as an active bi-weekly chat room

discussion and a newly implemented forum. We also publish a weekly e-newsletter to all members that provides news and updates on the network as well as scriptural reflections. Most importantly however, is that we are currently helping five teens in their respective journeys to the Catholic Church.

I now ask for your support in spreading the word about *Quo Vadis*. Please visit the website and tell your friends and family about it! There are

teens out there that God has sent on their own journeys to the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church, but they need fellowship. Don't let them down! For more information please visit our website at [www.chnquovadis.org](http://www.chnquovadis.org) or write me at [jonmarc@chnetwork.org](mailto:jonmarc@chnetwork.org).

May God bless and keep you all!

Jon Marc Grodi





# 2005 Conference Schedule November 4-6, 2005

## Friday

4:00 Travelers Mass  
5:00 - 6:30 Dinner break  
6:30 - 7:00 Conference Opening  
7:00 - 9:00 Evening Session 2 talks  
9:00 CHN social

## Registration Rates

## Saturday

8:00 - 8:30 Morning Prayer  
8:30 - 9:30 Mass  
9:30 - 11:00 Breakfast  
11:00 - 1:00 Morning Session 2 talks  
1:00 - 2:30 Lunch  
2:30 - 4:30 Afternoon Session: 2 Talks  
4:30 - 5:00 Concert - Marcus Grodi  
5:00 - 6:30 Dinner  
6:30 - 8:30 Evening session 2 talks  
8:30 - 9:30 Holy Hour & Exposition

## Sunday

7:30 - 8:00 Morning Prayer  
8:00 - 9:30 Mass  
9:30 - 11:00 Breakfast  
11:00 - 12:00 Morning Session 1 Talk  
12:00 - 1:30 Panel Discussion  
1:30 Marcus Close

### EARLY BIRD

10% discount if reg.by August 5, 2005

(only available on single/married couple registration rates.)

### SINGLE

\$89.00 per person

### MARRIED COUPLE

\$149.00 per couple

### RELIGIOUS GROUP RATE

\$60.00 per person

(10 or more registrants\*)

### CLERGY

\$50.00 per person

### SINGLE DAY RATE

\$50.00 per person

### TWO DAY RATE

\$89.00 per person

*\*All registrants, including full name and addresses, must be given at the time of registration. No additions will be made after initial registration.*

**\*\*No refunds given after October 28, 2005**

\*\*\*\* Sacrament of Reconciliation Saturday  
1:00 - 2:30 & 4:30 - 6:00 \*\*\*\*

## Speakers

Bishop Fredrick Campbell  
Dr. Kenneth Howell  
Dr. Paul Thigpen  
Fr. William Casey  
Scott & Kimberly Hahn  
Marcus Grodi

## CHN Bulletin Board

### JOIN CHN FOR A DEEP IN HISTORY PILGRIMAGE

#### New Mexico

May 15-20, 2005

Single Rate: \$860.<sup>99</sup>

Double Rate: \$1299.<sup>99</sup>

For more information please contact:

Rob Rodgers at 740-450-1175 or  
rob@chnetwork.org.

For reservations please contact:

Margaret Brennan at Rio Rancho Travel  
505-891-2772

Would you like to be a monthly donor, but don't  
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We now offer **Check-by-Phone** services.

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Please help us to be better stewards of your donations.  
740-450-1175 or e-mail us at info@chnetwork.org.

Thank You for your help.

*Sept. - Dec. we had \$515.94 in returned postage!*

### Attention Members!

If you have joined the Church, or will be doing so soon,  
please notify us so we can update our records.

Call us at 740-450-1175 or e-mail info@chnetwork.org.

Thank you.



*Upcoming guests on the  
Journey Home Program  
on EWTN, Mondays live at  
8 P.M. EST*

*March 7  
David Moss  
Jewish Convert*

*March 14  
Dr. Douglas Grandon  
Former Episcopal Priest*

*March 21  
Easter Pretape*

*March 28  
Pete & Charlene Anderson  
Former Lutherans*

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*Wednesday 1 P.M.*

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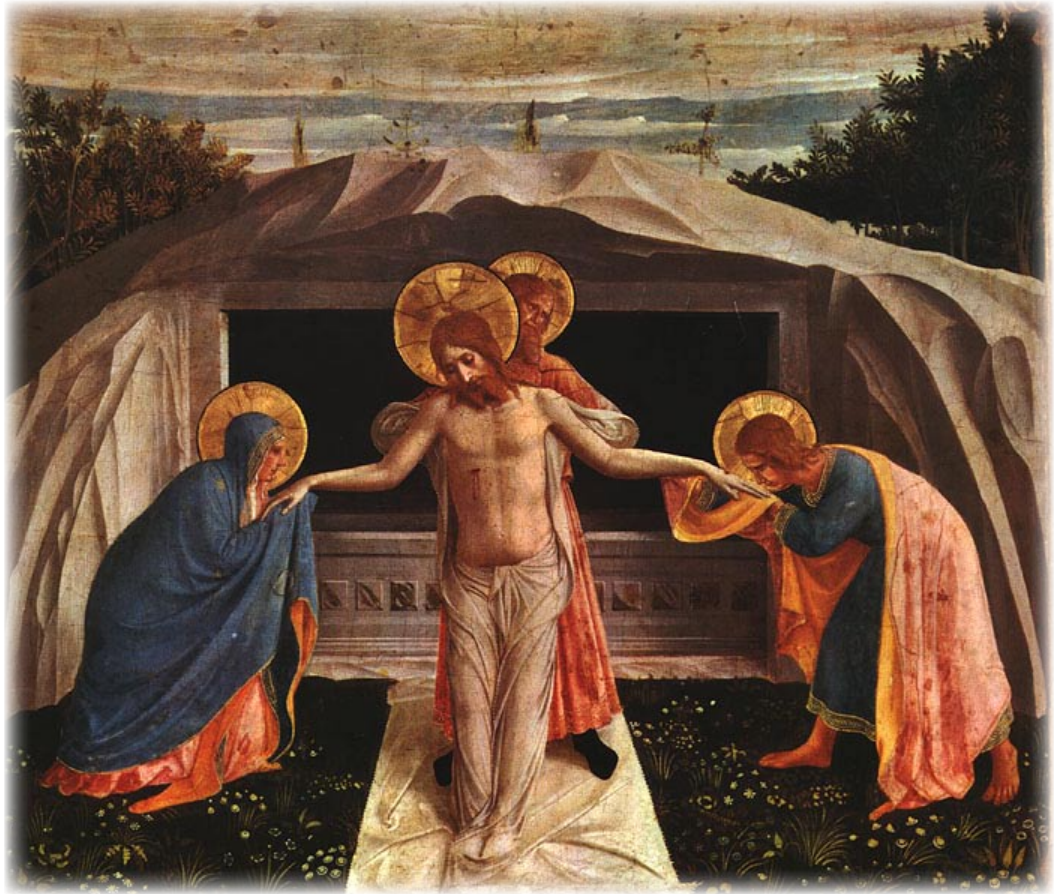


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write the sacred scriptures. As a child in Sunday school I learned the great importance of studying the scriptures, of learning from their holy pages the truth about Jesus Christ. At the age of 9, I decided to become a Christian, confessing my faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and being baptized for the remission of my sins.

I continued to love learning about Jesus Christ and the truths of his word, and even as a child desired to share that knowledge, to teach the truth of the gospel as a preacher. Eleven years old, I preached my first sermon—about God's wrathful judgment on sinful nations in the Old Testament—during our Sunday evening worship services. By the time I was 16, our congregation hired me as an assistant minister. At 17, when our preacher left to serve another congregation, I was, for a short time, the church's full time minister. Being an aggressively anti-Catholic congregation—made up of many former Catholics—part of my ministry involved, not only denouncing the supposed errors of Catholic teaching and practice from the Sunday pulpit, but conducting evangelistic Bible studies with Catholic friends, aimed at leading them out of Christ's Church and into ours.

In what seemed like a chance occurrence, I happened in 1996, while working as the assistant minister of our congregation, to notice a book with an unmissable hot pink cover and the compelling title *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*<sup>3</sup> on our preacher's shelf. This book, my first introduction to the Church Fathers,



argued that, while the Fathers are not an infallible authority, controversies dividing Christians—by which was meant *Protestant* Christians—should be settled by examining what those Christians who lived closest to the time of Christ and studied, very often, at the feet of the Twelve, thought about the issues. While in hindsight a very selective presentation of the early Church—confirming me, at first, more than ever in my anti-Catholic, Protestant version of Christianity—the book inspired me to go beyond its pages and study for myself what the early Church believed and practiced. It's argument that the early Christians' understanding of the Bible, the sole and exclusively sufficient compendium of what was true, was more likely to right than our own modern opinions made sense to me. Above all, I desired that what I thought to be true and taught to be true be, in fact, true. Above all,

*I wanted to be right.*

My notion of a pure early Church teaching and practicing exactly what we taught and practiced in our "true New Testament church," quickly crumbled upon studying the Fathers. To my horror, the early Christians were quite Catholic, and taught things as true—with no appearance of novelty—that the Catholic Church today teaches. Unsettled by what I learned from studying those who came after Christ, I turned my attention to those who came before—the inspired prophets of the Hebrew Bible. There, in the pages of the God's Word itself, I found a picture of the then-coming Messiah and his Church which also failed to prove my beliefs right. Instead, I found that the prophets foretold the coming of a spiritual Messianic kingdom here on earth that would encompass people of all nations, would last and grow for all ages, would choose men from



all nations to serve as priests offering daily an acceptable sacrifice to the Most High. Most compelling to me, the prophets foretold a Church that would never cease to teach to truth—a Church that would, by the grace of God, always *be right*. So said God through the Prophet Isaiah: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children’s children, says the LORD, from now on and forever.”<sup>4</sup>

Learning from the Christian Fathers that the early Church was Catholic, and from the Hebrew Prophets that the Church was to remain faithful—indefectible—from her Messianic foundation until the culmination of history,

I then nervously set out to study my church’s objections to Catholicism. One by one, I discovered that my objections were unfounded. *Sola scriptura* was a novel doctrine and a logical fallacy; the Catholic teaching that God’s infallible Word comes to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, as interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church was *right*. Congregational autonomy was unbiblical; apostolic succession was *right*. A symbolic Lord’s Supper was a partial truth; the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament was *right*. It was right to be obedient to an infallible pope, right that the angels and saints intercede for us before the throne of God, right that the priest can absolve sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, right that the faithful departed are given an opportunity to be made fully holy after death and, therefore, should be prayed for, and on and on down the list. The Catholic Church was right, and I

was ministering in an anti-Catholic church. A change had to be made, *because I wasn’t right*. In July, 1997, I resigned my position as a 17 year old minister, and entered the RCIA program at a local Catholic parish. By the grace of God, I was received into full communion with the Catholic Church on Holy Saturday, 1998.

Friends, brothers and sisters, I wish that was the happy ending of my story.<sup>5</sup> I’m not proud of the rest of this testimony—but that’s a good thing. Sinful, selfish pride has for years been my fatal flaw. What happened in the years that followed my discovery that the Catholic Church was *right* will, I hope, be a necessary warning

*Pride is, perhaps, the worst of all sins, as it is the doorway to more noticeable, scandalous sins.*

to people who are blessed to discern God’s call into his Church through doctrinal, intellectual means.

My faith had always been primarily an assent of will—an acknowledgement that what the Bible or the Church proclaims as true is, in fact, true. This is, of course, an important and necessary aspect of the Christian life.<sup>6</sup> “For this I came into the world,” said our Lord, “to testify to the truth.”<sup>7</sup> For me, this was the essence of the Christian life: to conform my opinions to objectively true reality. In other words, it was all about being right.

The denomination in which I was raised, the Church of Christ, puts a particular emphasis on the objectivity of truth. It’s a “just the facts, ma’am” approach to the gospel. Emotions are downplayed as irrelevant and distracting to the pursuit of truth—a religion of the head rather than of the heart. That’s not to say that the good people in the Church of Christ

do not love Jesus—they certainly do, and deeply at that—but cold, hard facts are all that matter. Just as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Great Awakening was an emotional, charismatic, heart-centered reaction to Enlightenment secularism and liberalism, to too was the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Restoration Movement, the origin of the Church of Christ, an intellectual, doctrinal, head-centered over-correction to Great Awakening.

I brought this intellectualist, dogma-centered approach to the faith with me into the Catholic Church. For me, it was not the love of God, prayer, or a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that was the center of my faith, but the simple fact of being right—of having found the truth. It would have made more sense to me to be devoted to the Sacred Brain than the Sacred Heart.

The great danger of a head-centered Christianity, especially when it is not properly balanced with a truly heart-centered life of prayer and love, is that it is a constant occasion for pride. *I studied God’s Word, I dealt with difficult issues, I discovered the truth, I’m right*. Sure, I would pay lip service to thanking God for allowing me to accomplish these things, but in my heart, I was proud of the work that I had put in and the results that I had seen. Just as Moses had erred grievously when he took credit for discovering the rock with life-giving water, so too did I err in taking credit for discovering the rock on whom Christ built his Church.

Pride is, perhaps, the worst of all sins, as it is the doorway to more noticeable, scandalous sins. One who, like myself, allows himself to be carried away by pride and self-righteousness—that is, the love of being *right*—can scarcely, at least with

any real sincerity, truly rely on God's grace to aid him on his continuing journey toward his heavenly home, of which the Catholic Church is the earthly sacrament. Self-satisfaction in one's intellectual discoveries, as true and real as those discoveries are, can not long sustain someone in his life of faith.

This, over the last few years, became painfully obvious to me. In 1999, at age 19, I entered the seminary to study for the priesthood in my diocese. While the "head part" of my faith remained in tact—I neither fell

atrophied with disuse. Gradually over the year, my prayer life became an empty shell and, eventually, nonexistent. Imagine the folly: a wannabe priest who doesn't pray! Cutting off the direct line with our best friend Jesus, my love for him grew colder, and my attachment to the things of the world grew more disordered. Vividly I recall the advice of a confessor—later martyred—warning me that such disordered

*I turned shamefully further away from God, chasing after the fleeting, empty pleasures of this world.*

into heresy or received many poor grades—my heart, shamefully, grew

attachments would destroy my vocation. Sadly, he was right. This

sinful, unprayerful seminarian—so proud that he knew all the right answers—would not return to seminary the next year.

Out of the seminary—and still intellectually Catholic, still theologically orthodox, still the "go-to guy" for Bible questions—my lack of private prayer led to a gradual decline in mass attendance, which led to an abandonment of the sacrament of reconciliation. "You have made us

for yourself, O Lord," said St. Augustine, "and our hearts are restless until they rest in you!"<sup>8</sup> My heart grew more restless,

my soul more conscious of the emptiness inside. I turned shamefully further away from God, chasing after the fleeting, empty pleasures of this world. Booze, and parties, and worthless trinkets, and frivolous romances—foolishly, I sought after peace in all of these. I won't scandalize you with a complete and detailed list of my sins, but instead make my own the words of the man in black: "I've been frisky on sippin' whiskey, and I've done a few other things that I'll never tell."<sup>9</sup>

Second only to the offense against the heart of my God, the saddest thing about my fall into degradation is that, the entire time, I was always in the middle of this or another doctrinal Catholic book. I never stopped learning about the Catholic faith, but this knowledge alone was of no use. St. Paul tells us that "love surpasses knowledge,"<sup>10</sup> and St. James tells us that knowing the right facts is something we have in common with the hordes of hell.<sup>11</sup> Surely, the truth does set us free, but it doesn't set us loose. That would be no freedom at all. Rather, the truth sets us free to love Jesus Christ, and to have life and





life more abundantly—that is, to be more alive than alive!

It is to this that Jesus calls us—to live in his love, to bask in his divine mercy, to know him as our friend. We are to proclaim to the masses Jesus, Savior of the World—the Jesus who truly lives in the doctrines of the Church—and to adore in our hearts Jesus, our personal savior.

Through no merit of my own, but rather through the prayers, I am certain, of my Blessed Mother, Jesus took pity on this sinner and called him to his love. Sometimes, when we have fallen quite far, God must work through great hardship to humble us. The Angelic Doctor tells us that “in order to overcome their pride, God punishes men by allowing them to fall into the sins of the flesh, which though they be less grievous are more evidently shameful.”<sup>12</sup> Then, humbled by our often public shame, God uses tragedies—a house fire, the death of a loved one, a serious injury, or, for someone as bullheaded as me, all three at once—to show us our need for his love. And what a great love it is!

I thank God for calling me back to his love. I’m not sure what the future will hold for me, if I’ll ever again have a place in the public ministry of the Church. That will be up to God and the Church. For now, however, it’s day by day, loving God and growing in faith, letting the Savior work through me to make up for the last few years, and to share his love and divine mercy with my fellow sinners

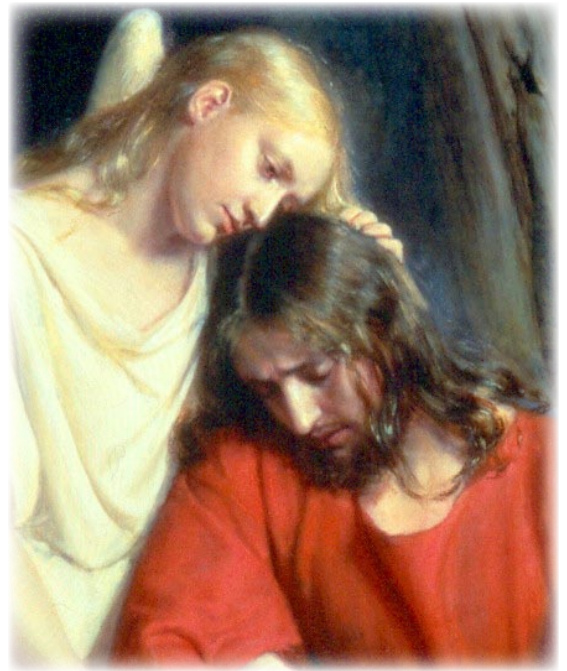
Why have I shared all of this? It’s not to be sure, to make sure you all know that I can be pretty crummy. Rather, my hope is to help by my testimony anyone who may be tempted to a similar fall. Satan’s been at this game a lot longer than us, and he knows what works. He knows how

to, in a sick, black parody of the ways of God, appeal to us as we are and where we are. For those of us who are blessed—and it is a true blessing, a sacred calling—with a love of knowledge about God, and who will, through that knowledge, be put into the heart of his Holy and Catholic Church, Satan is just chomping at the bit to make us so proud of our learning, so addicted to knowledge that we lose our balance, and do not attend to affairs of the heart.

For those of you studying the Catholic Church, considering her doctrines and your objections, wondering if the Church just might be *right*, by all means, continue to study. Continue to dig deeply, to search for the truth. But every so often, close the book, cast your eyes up to heaven, and tell Jesus that, no matter where your study leads you, you love him, and ask him to increase your love for him.

With that kind of request, he just can’t say no—and you just might find that here in the bosom of Holy Mother Church, not only can you be *right*, but you can love Jesus all the more! And what can be more *right* than that?

Jeff Childers is a freelance author whose essays have appeared in *Envoy*, *Hands On Apologetics*, the *Joliet Herald News* and others. He is a contributor to *Surprised By Truth II* and co-author of the forthcoming *We’re Just Searching For the Truth*. A former preacher in the Church of Christ, Jeff was received into the Catholic Church on Holy Saturday, 1998. A native of Joliet, IL, he recently started an internet and audio-tape ministry, *Divine Mercy Multimedia Mission*, [www.divinemercymission.faithweb.com](http://www.divinemercymission.faithweb.com).



#### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:23. All biblical citations are from *The New Revised Standard Version*, 1993 and 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>3</sup> David W. Bercot. Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 59:21

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed account of my conversion to the Catholic faith see *Surprised By Truth 2* (Sophia Institute Press, 2000) and the January 9, 2001 episode of *The Journey Home* at [www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com).

<sup>6</sup> See CCC 891, 892.

<sup>7</sup> John 18:37

<sup>8</sup> *Confessions*

<sup>9</sup> Johnny Cash. *I’m Alright Now*. Cash continues: “But I’m alright now. Gabriel, let your trumpet blow, I’m alright now.”

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:19

<sup>11</sup> cf. James 2:19

<sup>12</sup> *Summa* II-II, 162, 6 ad 3



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