



March 2010 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

The Quest for Truth by Brad Smith

My childhood's Christian experience

My journey to the Catholic Church spans my lifetime. As a child, I had a blessing that many people do not. I was raised in a Christian household with parents who taught their children the Christian faith to the best of their ability, and lived it out in front of us as well. My parents did everything in their power to make sure their children were raised with a strong foundation in the Christian faith. They were Sunday school teachers at our Baptist church and took my sisters and me to church every Sunday. They made sure all their children were baptized at a young age, told us stories from the Bible, taught us to pray, and made sure that we went to Vacation Bible School every summer. This foundation birthed in me the desire to be a minister at a very young age. At the age of 9, I publically confessed in front of the congregation that I wanted to follow Christ and be a minister. My dad publically vowed to support me in this decision.

As I entered adolescence, my Christian foundation began to slip away. I was an outsider

at school and not part of the "in crowd." To prove myself and not to be labeled, I indulged in some forms of typical teenage rebellion. Meanwhile, my parents saw the direction my life was headed. They urged me to become involved again with church. At the same time, my sister Kelley began to invite me to the youth group where she was serving as a youth leader at a local Assemblies of God church. After several denials, I finally caved and went. I immediately felt welcomed and found people who were strong in their faith. It amazed me to see you could be a cool teenager and a Christian at the same time. After attending for several weeks, I decided to go forward on an altar call and accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I still remember praying the sinner's prayer on March 16, 1998, and the feelings of peace that came with it.

The friendships I made at the youth group solidified, and I became an active part of the youth group's drama team and discipleship program, which emphasized Bible reading and scripture memorization. I ...continued on page 2

Journeys Home

FEATURED RESOURCES

Jesus, Peter and the Keys

By Scott Butler, Norman Dahlgren, and
Rev. Mr. David Hess



This book is an excellent resource for anyone who wants to explain the Catholic doctrine regarding St. Peter and the Papacy. This study examines the Papacy in a theological, biblical, and historical

context with an impressive collection of data and commentary. The author's arguments for the Papacy are especially excellent aids in ecumenical dialogue.

Rome Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism

By Dr. Scott and Kimberly Hahn



Scott and Kimberly Hahn tell the incredible spiritual journey that led them to embrace Catholicism. Scott Hahn was a Presbyterian minister, the top student in his seminary class, a brilliant Scripture scholar, and

militantly anti-Catholic ... until he reluctantly began to discover that his "enemy" had all the right answers. Kimberly, also an excellent theology student in the seminary, is the daughter of a well-known Protestant minister, and went through a tremendous "dark night of the soul" after Scott converted to Catholicism.

Their conversion story and love for the Church has captured the hearts and minds of thousands of lukewarm Catholics and brought them back into an active participation in the Church. They have also influenced countless conversions to Catholicism among those who have heard their powerful testimony.

...Journeys Home Continued...

followed the curriculum and, armed with a highlighter, I devoured the pages of the Holy Scriptures. The truths of Scripture came at me one by one and each one seemed revolutionary. Shortly thereafter, our youth group took a pilgrimage down to Pensacola, Florida to attend a youth camp at Brownsville Assembly of God/Brownsville revival. There I felt like the Lord was telling me to cancel my plans to attend Virginia Military Institute and pursue a Navy ROTC scholarship, and instead stay behind and serve the youth group as a youth leader.

Wrestling with the truth of the Bible

I decided to enroll as a Religious Studies major at Virginia Commonwealth University. It was at this secular school that I was first introduced to liberal study of the Bible—which involves studying the Bible as if it were just another piece of ancient literature like the *Iliad* or the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and is skeptical of the Bible's claims and divine origin. The teachings of liberal scholarship, especially related to the nature of the Bible and history of the Christian religion, really made me question my faith. I did have one professor, who taught in a manner that was affirming of traditionally conservative views of Scripture and affirmed the basic teachings of Christianity. He introduced me to the scholarship of a man named Luke Timothy Johnson. I was floored by Johnson's scholarship, and read his book, *The Real Jesus*. The book *The Real Jesus* was faith affirming and exposed liberal scholarship for its extremes. There was one thing that stuck out about Johnson. He was Catholic. We Pentecostals held stereotypes of Catholics that they did not read or understand their Bibles. Since if they did, we believed, they would cease to be Catholic.

I was impressed with Johnson's knowledge of Christianity and the Scriptures. Slowly, I began to realize that liberal scholarship did not have to destroy my faith, but at the same time, I did not have to embrace the overly conservative and fundamentalist views of Scripture I held as a Baptist and Pentecostal. I cited Johnson in several papers I wrote at VCU and the seminary. I found myself agreeing with his views more and more, despite the fact that he was, well, Catholic. He showed me that many Catholics have just as good a grasp of the Bible as Protestant Christians.

Growing up, I was never really exposed to any anti-Catholic prejudice. Many of our family friends were Catholic. As a Baptist and Pentecostal, I did believe that the Reformation recovered many truths that were lost during the medieval period because of the errors of the Catholic Church. I accepted Catholics as Christians, but thought they were off base in many of their beliefs. I believed Martin Luther and the other reformers had recovered lost truths, including that all one needs to understand the

Christian faith is the Bible alone, not sacred Tradition or the teachings of the Church, and that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. I did consider Catholicism as a religion of convenience and as a hypocritical faith. Many of the Catholics I knew did not live a devoutly religious life, and in some cases there was little telling them apart from non-Christians based on how they lived their lives. Some of the Catholics seemed to think it was ok to sin as much as you want as long as you went to confession and then received communion afterwards, sort of using the Eucharist as a spiritual morning-after pill. Little did I know they were misrepresenting the teachings of the Catholic Church.

One night at youth group, a youth came to me with a list of doctrines held by the Catholic Church, such as the Eucharist, teachings about the Pope, why the Bible alone was not a sufficient guide for certainty in the areas of faith and morals, etc.... The youth told me that she had a friend whom she wanted to invite to youth group but he wouldn't come because he would only go to a Catholic church. I dove into my Bible to refute these lies and convince him that the Catholic Church was in error. I thought it was going to be a piece of cake, but it wasn't. After several hours in the Bible, I came up with only a few token refutations—and none of them were really that original. I basically repeated arguments used by anti-Catholics already. I pointed out that Christ, not the Pope, was head of the church, for example, and gave Scripture references. It was only later, in reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that I learned that Catholics also believe Christ is the head of the church, and that I, and most Protestants, misrepresent the Catholic position on this issue. If I misunderstood the Catholic Church's position on this issue, what other issues did I wrongly misunderstand the Catholic position on?

I began to question “the Bible alone” doctrine when I would discuss my Christian beliefs with Christians of other traditions who did not embrace what I believed as a Pentecostal.

Sola Scripture didn't cut it, but it was going to take more than that.

I began to question “the Bible alone” doctrine when I would discuss my Christian beliefs with Christians of other traditions who did not embrace what I believed as a Pentecostal. At that time, I believed that the New Testament taught that speaking in other tongues was a ...continued on page 4



DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

Wednesdays **LIVE** at 2:00 PM ET
Encore: Wednesdays @ 9:00 PM ET
Sundays @ 7:00 AM ET

Join Marcus and his weekly guest as they discuss “the verse(s) I never saw.”

For more information and a link to watch the program LIVE online go to www.deepinscripture.com

Deep in Scripture Guests for March:

March 3
Richard Lane*

March 24
Guy Doud*

March 10
Scott McDermott*

March 31
Curtis Martin*

March 17
Mark McNeil*

**This schedule is subject to change*

SHARE YOUR STORY!

The Coming Home Network International always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story please feel free to e-mail a written conversion story of either around 1700 or 4000 words, along with your name and contact information to Mary Clare Piecynski maryp@chnetwork.org.



EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

on television and radio, hosted by
Marcus Grodi, president of CHNI.

TELEVISION

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET

Encores: Tuesdays 1:00 & 10:00 AM ET

Thursdays 2:00 PM ET

Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET

Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET

March 1

Tim Staples*

Former Assemblies of God minister

March 8

Msgr. Michael Magee*

Former Methodist

March 15

*The Journey Home in Scandinavia**

March 22

Fr Calloway*

Former Episcopalian

March 29

Becky Mayhew*

Former Southern Baptist

**This schedule is subject to change*



...Journeys Home Continued...

clear initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. After all, I had experienced it at youth camp. But yet, I encountered Christians who did not believe in speaking in tongues and we both used the Bible to justify our beliefs. I also came across people such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians who questioned the deity of Christ. We both appealed to the Scriptures for our beliefs, my interpretation against theirs. I blew this off because I knew that Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, always had believed in the deity of Christ (looking back, it seems I was already appealing to Sacred Tradition, though I didn't know it at the time). To me the Bible alone doctrine was the other side of the same coin as theological liberalism. It solved nothing, leaving everything in question, and nothing certain. It left all matters of Christian faith and practice up to that individual or individual church's interpretation of the Bible. It was one thing to question speaking in tongues, another to question the deity of Christ and the Trinity, which are central to the Christian faith. If the Bible alone was sufficient for us to know the truth, it would be much clearer and many of these doctrinal disputes would not exist I thought.

Shortly thereafter, sometime in 2003, I heard that my aunt was converting to Catholicism. I thought, "Why would anyone convert to Catholicism... that makes no sense what so ever."

Yet I was intrigued. I picked up a book called *Letters between a Catholic and Evangelical* to study what was similar and different about Protestantism and Catholicism. I wanted to know what Catholics really believed. After reading the book, I found myself in agreement with many aspects of Catholicism. Most

appealing to me was the Catholic understanding of Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium's role in teaching Christian truths to the faithful. I thought back to all the doctrinal disputes that the Bible alone was not able to solve. Perhaps this provided a better way to solve disputes on matters of faith and morals. I was not convinced of the Catholic position in other areas, such as the role of Mary and the saints. I was not sure what to make of the Eucharist either. The book was not enough to totally get me to convert, yet. The Evangelical author, James McCarthy, did a good job keeping me Protestant, though I gained a greater respect for Catholicism thanks to the Catholic author of the book, Father Weiss.

“...I really wanted to know what Catholics really believed.”



Off to Seminary I go

Working as a youth leader changed my life so strongly that I began to contemplate a call to the full-time ministry. With the affirmation of those close to me, I enrolled in the Church of God Theological seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee upon graduation from VCU to earn my Master of Divinity degree. I did not know it at the time, but my seminary experience would bring several crisis experiences my way that would finally get me moving towards becoming Catholic. While in the seminary, I genuinely believed I was called, but called to do what? I considered youth ministry, chaplaincy (military and hospital), and the pastorate. I decided to obtain ministerial credentials through the Assemblies of God. I had to pass a written test and a screening by some local pastors. On my application I mentioned my personal disagreements with the denomination on a couple of issues that were rather (in my opinion) minor. None of the areas of disagreement were part of our 16 Fundamental Truths (the central and essential beliefs of the Assemblies of God). I was told that if I did not change my views on these issues to agree with the Assemblies of God position, I would not receive my credentials.

In defending my views, I appealed to the Bible. While opposing me one of the pastors appealed to Scriptures as well. When I refuted him, he had no choice but to appeal to the traditions of the Assemblies of God, not simply to the Bible alone. It later occurred to me that I was required to hold the views of the Assemblies of God, regardless of what my personal views were, even if I had arrived at my personal views by in-depth study of the Bible. I finally decided to publicly change my views on the issues, though privately I did not, and received my ministerial credentials early in 2005. This incident made me ask myself, what authority did the Assemblies of God really possess? After all, they were founded in 1914. Were there Christians before 1914? Certainly there were. They were in other denominations. If I left the Assemblies of God because I disagreed with them, they no longer would possess any authority over me whatsoever. I could always find another denomination to support me in my ministry. They had no authority over me except what I gave them; so ultimately, the authority rested with me and my personal interpretation of the Bible, which the dispute told me was not enough!

As graduation approached, I knew that I needed to find a place to do ministry. I did not put many stipulations on where I was willing to go. I sought placement in full-time ministry and was willing to accept a part-time position provided I was assisted in finding full-time employment. On more than one occasion, when I heard responses back ...continued on page 6



MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

March 27, 2010**Sr. Elise Benefit**

Holy Angels Academy
12201 Old Henry Rd
Louisville, KY 40223
502-254-9440

April 8, 2010**Catholic Radio Indy Annual Dinner**

Indianapolis, IN
317-870-8400
jim@catholicradioindy.org

April 10, 2010**Divine Mercy Conference 2010**

Cajundome Convention Center
444 Cajundome Blvd
Lafayette, LA 70506
337-654-8682
mbergeron@gmail.com

April 24, 2010**Lift Jesus Higher Rally**

Catholic Renewal Ministries
Toronto, ON CANADA
763-662-1730
jmasherwood@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER COPIES



CHNI encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to friends, family, church groups, etc. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. CHNI and the authors reserve all rights and permissions.

DEEP IN HISTORY MP3s

The *Coming Home Network International* is pleased to announce that MP3s of our 2003-2009 *Deep in History* conference talks are now available for download online. Go to www.chresources.com to download the MP3s. Each talk costs \$5.



SPOUSES NETWORK

Are you the spouse of a clergy interested in becoming Catholic?

The *Spouses Network* exists to aid and provide fellowship for the spouses of clergy on the journey to the Catholic Church as well as those who are new Catholics. The mission of the *Spouses Network* is that through one-on-one assistance given by spouses of clergy who have embraced the Catholic faith, clergy spouses who are on the journey to Catholicism or have recently become Catholic will find a source of friendship, support, and increased love of Jesus Christ and His Church.

If the *Spouses Network* is something you feel called to, whether you are a spouse of a clergy who has made the journey home and would like to assist someone, or if you are a spouse of a minister and are either on the journey or a new Catholic, we would like to invite you to contact *CHNI* to assist us in the development of this network.

If you would like more information or if you feel called to become a part of this apostolate please contact Mary Clare Pieczynski by e-mail at marycp@chnetwork.org or by phone at 740-450-1175 ext 105.

We do ask all *The Coming Home Network International's* members to please keep the *Spouses Network* in your prayers as we seek to answer the needs of those spouses of clergy on the journey home and those who are new converts.

...Journeys Home Continued...

from Church of God churches, I would be asked if I was married. When I told them no, I never heard back and my follow-ups were not returned. My seminary did not do much to help find a place for me in ministry. I was left to my own devices. I decided to expand my wings across denominational lines, sending out resumes to Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Non-denominational churches across the United States and even into Canada. When I was lucky enough to get an interview, the churches told me I had a great resume but no experience in ministry. I easily sent out 300 resumes over a four-month period after my graduation in June 2006 and with the lack of response I began to question if I was really called to the ministry. I had felt the affirmation of my close friends and family and myself, but what about the church? Shouldn't a call to ministry include the affirmation of the church (not just the local church, but the denomination as a whole?) I now see this as part of God's plan to bring me home into the Catholic Church. Had I found a position in ministry, I may never have been Catholic.

My dad was diagnosed with cancer in May 2005. After a short battle, the cancer quickly spread, and he passed away in December 2005. After graduation, I decided to move back home to be of support to my mother. Reflecting back, I believe that this was my calling for this period of time in my life, and is why I had been unable to obtain a place in ministry. After all, God is the one who opens and closes doors. I then started to look outside of Pentecostalism for a church home. I no longer fit well within Pentecostalism for a number of reasons, including my understanding of divine healing. If there was a family who had faith and prayed for God's healing, it was my family who prayed for my father's recovery. Previously, I watched my church in Richmond pray for our pastor's wife to be healed from cancer, and watched another prominent man in our church die from cancer. If there was a church who prayed, it was our church. We had faith, but God did not heal. This made me question the idea of divine healing: if God said we asked with faith, then he would heal if it was his will. Was it really his will that all these people drop like flies to cancer all around me? Maybe healing was all a lie, or worse, perhaps Christianity was a lie and God was powerless. After all, not only did God not heal, but he did little to open the doors for me in ministry. I still was looking for answers. I found them soon enough.

My Catholic Epiphany

Prior to moving home, I obtained a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in a used bookstore. I read it because I wanted to see what Catholics really believed. I also became interested in Catholic-Pentecostal

dialogue while at seminary. Many of my seminary Professors were engaged in Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, and I wanted in on the fun. This was probably due to the study of Catholicism that I already had done. I wanted to prove them wrong in a way, but hear what they believed right from their own mouths, instead of buying into misrepresentations of their beliefs often given by some non-Catholics. I wanted to be able to engage Catholics with a clear understanding of their faith. As I read through the *Catechism*, I recalled learning about the Early Church in historical theology class in seminary. I found so many parallels between what the Early Church believed in the first few centuries of its existence. I thought about how “Catholic” their beliefs sounded. I saw each part of the Apostles Creed, which is one of the oldest statements of Christian belief, tied to beliefs held by the Catholic Church. It was clear; the Catholic Church was truly “Apostolic”, representing the teachings trusted to the Apostles and handed

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...the Catholic Church’s way of appealing to Sacred Scripture, Tradition, the guidance of the Magisterium, and the Pope made more sense to me than simply following my own interpretation of the Bible, and being my own authority.”

down from one generation to the next. I knew that Christ had prayed for his Church to remain as one, as he and the Father are one. Why all the division since the Reformation around petty differences in doctrines and practices? Christ said that the Holy Spirit would guide his church to all truth, not just part of the truth. He also said that the gates of hell would not overtake his Church. Did I really believe that Christ allowed his Church to go astray after the time of the Early Church until the Protestant Reformation? Did he fail to guide his Church into all truth until just over 500 years ago? What about the previous 1500? This reminds me of the movie *Bruce Almighty*, where Bruce (Jim Carey) asks God (Morgan Freeman) “do you even take a vacation?” to which God responds “sure, ever heard of the dark ages?” The Catholic Church does not believe God ever took a vacation. By implication the early Protestant reformers must have thought so if they really believed they had recovered “lost truths” that were lost due to the errors of the Catholic Church. I finally admitted to myself that the Catholic Church’s way of appealing ...continued on page 8

2010 DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCE

Marcus Grodi and *The Coming Home Network International* invite you to join us next fall in Columbus OH for our 8th annual *Deep in History* conference.



How Firm A Foundation: Authority Through the Scriptures Oct 22-24, 2010

With the *Deep in History* conferences standing on the *Pillar and Bulwark of Truth*, in October 2010, we will turn the focus to the Word of God, as we look to the authority and history of the Sacred Writ.

Join us in the fall of 2010 as we bring together another exciting group of speakers to discuss the authority of the Scriptures. We will look at the inspired Word of God, from the penning of its books, to its binding into the Bible we hold today, so as Catholics, we might better profess our faith through His inspired Word.

The Sacred Writ is inerrant; however, through man’s individual interpretation of God’s inspired Word, division tears through Christianity like a jagged edge. As we look to answer, “How firm is your foundation?” we will respond to the errors of today and yesterday as we continue our journey into the teachings of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

We invite you to come and be a part of another inspiring weekend, with an aim to end ignorance, and enlighten the heart, mind, and soul, as we dive into the history of the Sacred Word of God, that we might with confidence ask and respond to each other, “How firm is your foundation?”

Confirmed speakers include:

- Marcus Grodi
- Dr. Paul Thigpen
- Dr. Scott Hahn
- Richard Lane
- Patrick Madrid
- Kimberly Hahn
- Dr. Kenneth Howell
- Bruce Sullivan
- Fr. Mitch Pacwa
- Msgr. Frank Lane

For more information go to www.hfaf2010.com or to register call 740-450-1175.

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTL'

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Zanesville, OH 43702
740-450-1175
www.chnetwork.org

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Dr. Kenneth Howell (*former Presbyterian Pastor*)

...Journeys Home Continued...

to Sacred Scripture, Tradition, the guidance of the Magisterium, and the Pope made more sense to me than simply following my own interpretation of the Bible, and being my own authority. The Catholic Church's claim to be infallible in teaching of faith and morals, based on Biblical promises made by Christ to his apostles, especially Peter, all made logical sense to me. For example, Christ taught his disciples while here on earth in person, but after his ascension who would fulfill his place as teacher and leader of the Church? Of course, one could say the Holy Spirit, but the question remains, how and through whom, does the Holy Spirit guide the Church to all truth? All the popes, from Saint Peter to Benedict XVI have served the same role to the Church as leader that Christ did, in the structural sense, and the bishops of the church are the successors of the Apostles, serving the same role to the present church as the Apostles of the New Testament did. I began to see the Pope as a visible symbol of the Church's unity in Christ and unity in truth.

I also was able to finally settle the question about truth and authority, namely, why should I submit myself to any church authority that cannot claim to be infallible in its teachings? As a Pentecostal, I believed the Bible itself was without error (as does the Catholic Church), but what good is having a book without error in its teachings if we cannot understand it without error? In examining the *Catechism*, I saw each doctrine laid out with multitudes of references to the Bible and to the teachings of Church Fathers. I examined the references to Scripture in the *Catechism* and I saw that the beliefs of the Catholic Church were very biblical. My love of the Bible and for its truths was leading me to the Catholic Church.

I decided to attend my first Mass in May 2007, which, ironically, turned out to be Pentecost Sunday. My aunt was in town and I took her to Mass under the guise that I was going because she needed someone to take her. After taking her to Mass for the first time, I had the courage to go back and tell my family that I felt that the Lord was guiding me into the Catholic Church. I enrolled in RCIA in August, 2007 and was accepted into full communion with the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil on March 22, 2008. ■



Brad Smith is currently attending the Church of the Epiphany in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia. He continues learning more about his Catholic faith and is exploring what opportunities exist to minister in the Church as he discerns his vocation. Brad is studying to be a registered nurse and is open to wherever the Lord is leading him next.

Prayer List



Clergy

- For Joseph, a Pentecostal minister in Canada, that his journey toward the sacrament of Confirmation would bear the fruit of deep conversion and sanctification.
- For Philip, a United Methodist minister, that the Holy Spirit of God would draw him back Home to the faith of his youth.
- For a Salvation Army officer in Europe, that each and every difficulty baring the way from joyfully coming into full communion with the Catholic Church would be speedily rectified.
- For Keith, a Non-denominational missionary in Missouri, that he find an orthodox and challenging RCIA program soon.
- For an Episcopal priest in California, that he be granted the grace to enter into full and complete communion with the Catholic Church of the ancient saints and fathers.
- For Dick and Katy, that the Lord Jesus would open and shut every door needed to guide them into the Church and at the same time enable them to continue to employ their special gifts and talents to further the Kingdom of God.
- For Jorge, an Evangelical minister in Peru, that he may return Home to the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
- For Jeff, a United Methodist minister in Tennessee, that he be given clear direction on the path he needs to take and that he may find peace and joy as a Catholic Christian.
- For Bishop Gainer and his health.

- For Kale, a Non-denominational seminarian, that as he studies theology and continues to seek more deeply for the Truth, God may grant him the gift of the fullness of the truth of Jesus in his holy Church.

Laitie

- For Connie's husband, may the Holy Spirit guide his heart in understanding of Connie's new Catholic faith and that their marriage will be strengthened through God's grace.
- For Michelle, Michael, and Meghan that Almighty God surround them with his power and draw them ever closer to him.
- For Bonnie and her intentions.
- For Alan, that Jesus makes his path smooth as he seeks to learn more about the Catholic Church and that he and his wife experience an even deeper love of Christ the Savior.
- For Irene, that the Divine Physician grant her good health.
- For the repose of Marie's soul.
- For Vivian, may the Lord give her healing as she recovers from an operation and two strokes.
- For Maribel and her family, may God bless them abundantly.
- For Gordon, that he has a successful operation and experiences full recovery.
- For Bernard and his wife, that the Lord give them assistance in their financial difficulty and grant them good health.
- For the repose of George's soul.
- For Michelle, that she may re-embrace the fullness of truth and that she profoundly experience the love of God in her life.
- For Cecilia and her financial situation.
- For Thomas' children and grandchildren to return to the Catholic Church.
- For Sam and Ken, that God give them health and gainful employment.
- For Ralph, Jerry, and their intentions.
- For a married couple who have recently left the Catholic Church, may Jesus bring them lovingly back Home.
- For Lane and Wanda, that the Holy Spirit help them discover the beauty of the Catholic Church.
- For the conversion of Raeanne and Karl.
- For Brother Damien and his prayer intentions.
- For Brandon, that the Holy Spirit guide his search for truth and that he finds employment.
- For Raymond and his family.
- For Howard, may his love for truth bring him ever closer to the Source of all wisdom.
- For Tom, that he experience God's love and grace during his illness.

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 in general and specific of the CHNetwork, its members, and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests & answers to:
CHN Prayer List P.O. Box 8290 Zanesville, OH 43702
or you may also email your prayer requests to:
prayers@chnetwork.org

We use only first names to preserve anonymity.

The Ecumenism of the Catholic Church

by the Reverend Ray Ryland, Ph.D., J.D.

On the Sunday designated as “Unity Sunday,” I had the privilege of hearing Father Ray Ryland preach the following homily from the pulpit of Saint Peter’s Parish, Steubenville, Ohio. I decided immediately to include Father’s homily in this addition of the CHNewsletter. Father Ryland clearly expressed what the Church truly teaches about ecumenism and dialogue with our separated brethren, and authentic efforts towards restoring full unity amongst Christians. Also, much of what he said reiterates the primary reason the Coming Home Network International exists: to help our separated brethren, clergy and laity, come home to the fullness of the Catholic faith. — *Marcus Grodi*



Each year the Catholic Church joins many of the non-Catholic traditions in observing an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Octave began January 18, and concluded on January 25, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul.

We tend to take Christian disunity for granted. Too seldom do we think about its deeply harmful effects.

The truth is, division among Christians, as the Second Vatican Council told us, has tragic consequences. As the Council declared, division among Christians “openly contradicts the will of Christ.” It “scandalizes the world.” And it “damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 1).

The ecumenical movement involving many non-Catholic traditions, has long endeavored to work at this problem, but with little success

The words “ecumenical” and “ecumenism” come from the Greek word *oikoumenikos* which means “universal.” The words are used to refer to any and all activities designed to foster unity among separated Christians. The ecumenical movement is an attempt to respond to a divine imperative.

The first thing we must say about ecumenism is that our Lord Jesus Christ intends that all his people should be one.

In the gospel of John, 17:20-23, four times in four verses our Lord prays that all his followers will be one in him. Not one simply in an organizational sense – not one only in one ecclesiastical structure. No, one *in him*;

one in him who is the Truth. He wills that all his people shall be one as he and the Father are one.

The Catholic Church is totally committed to ecumenism. Vatican II had four stated goals, two of which focused on unity (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 1).

One is to foster unity among Christians. The other is to work to call *all mankind* into the Church’s fold. Indeed, says the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1), the Church is “a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of *unity among all men...*”

In his great encyclical on Christian unity (*Ut unum sint*, 20), John Paul II declared that ecumenism “is not just some sort of appendix to the Church’s activity.” The work of ecumenism must “pervade all that she is and does....” The subtitle of *Ut unum sint* itself is “On Commitment to Ecumenism.” In its introduction, the encyclical tells us that at Vatican II, “the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably” to the work of ecumenism. Our *Code of Canon Law*, in canon 755 (1) states that the Catholic Church “is bound by the will of Christ” to promote “the restoration of unity among all Christians....”

No other Christian tradition has so explicitly and firmly committed itself to the cause of Christian unity as has the Catholic Church. No other Christian tradition expends anything like the efforts of the Catholic Church to advance the cause of Christian unity.

So the question is, *how* are we Christians to be united in our Lord Jesus?

Not only does Jesus *will* that all his people be one—he has provided the means by which they can be one—indeed, the *only* means.

In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (18), we read, “Jesus Christ ... set up the holy Church by entrusting the apostles with their mission as he himself had been sent by the Father He willed that their successors, the bishops ..., should be the shepherds in the Church until the end of the world.

“In order that the episcopate itself ... might be one and undivided he put Peter at the head of the other apostles, and in him he set up a lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and of communion.” And so, as successor of Peter, the Roman Pontiff is “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity ... of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.”

So we can say, and must say, that the papacy is the sacrament of unity of the Church. That is to say, not only

is the papacy the *sign* or *symbol* of the Church's unity, it is also the *means* whereby that unity is created and maintained.

Apart from the papacy, there is no possibility of real unity of Christians. You see this fact very clearly in Christian history. As soon as someone breaks with the papacy and starts his own denomination (like Martin Luther or John Calvin), that denomination starts to break apart. And from that original break with the papacy flows a continual proliferation of new denominations.

There is no end to that proliferation. There are at least 39,000 separate denominations in the world today. And several hundred new ones are being created every year.

The goal of all the Catholic Church's ecumenical endeavor is quite clear. As the *Decree on Ecumenism* (24) states, " ...this holy objective" [that is, the objective of all the Church's ecumenical efforts] is "the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ." Repeatedly in her magisterial statements, the Church makes it plain that the Roman Catholic Church is "the one and only Church of Christ."

The Catholic approach to overcoming Christian disunity is unique. The Church declares that Christian unity is not something to be *achieved*, but something to be *accepted*. The Catholic Church offers to all separated Christians and Christian ecclesial groups the "unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity ... [exists] in the Catholic Church as *something she can never lose*" (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 4).

Tragically, there are many Christians *outside* the Church's visible unity, but the Church herself is *not* and *will never be divided*. Non-Catholics are not blessed with that unity Christ wished to bestow on his people (*Ibid*, 3).

What must you and I do about our Lord Jesus' command of unity among his people?

The Church teaches us that every Catholic must be somehow involved in ecumenical activity. "The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each" (*Ibid*, 5).

"The sacred council exhorts...all the Catholic faithful ...to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism" (*Ibid*, 4).

In *Ut Unum Sint* 15, John Paul II told us the primary need for each one of us to engage in ecumenism is to deepen the conversion of our lives to Christ.

Vatican II's *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* (36) declares each one of us must work to spread the Gospel. Then it explains that the "primary and most

important contribution...[each person] can make to the spread of the faith is to lead a profound Christian life."

In carrying out our ecumenical responsibilities, says the *Decree on Ecumenism* (4), the "primary duty" of each Catholic "is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic household itself."

Beyond that, "In ecumenical work, Catholics must assuredly be concerned for their separated brethren, praying for them, keeping them informed about the Church, making the first approaches toward them" (*Ibid*, 4). During the Octave of Prayer For Christian Unity, Pope Benedict XVI told the world in his regular weekly audience that the unity of Christians is "first and foremost a gift from God" for which all Christians should pray.

We Catholics *need* what many Protestants can offer us. Not more of the Faith. The whole truth of Jesus Christ exists only in the Catholic Church. No, what they can do for us is to help us learn to use more effectively the riches we already have as Catholics.

Some Protestant denominations have much to teach us about personal witness and evangelization. They can help inspire in us a devotion to regular meditation on the sacred Scripture. And they can certainly teach us a great deal about stewardship. The level of giving in many Protestant denominations far exceeds what we Catholics give to our Church.

Certainly, Protestants need what the Catholic Church can offer to them.

So long as they remain apart from the Catholic Church's communion, they will always be hopelessly divided. (This applies to the separated Eastern Orthodox churches as well.) By leaving the Catholic Church, Protestants have deprived themselves of the fullness of the truth and of the sacraments. Above all, they cannot receive Christ as he intends himself to be received: body and blood, soul and divinity, in the Blessed Sacrament.

Finally, no matter how deep their faith in Christ—and many Protestants put many of us Catholics to shame with the depth of their faith—they can never know Christ *on his terms* until they allow themselves to be drawn into the communion of Christ's one true Church until they listen to and obey Jesus Christ speaking to them directly through his Church.

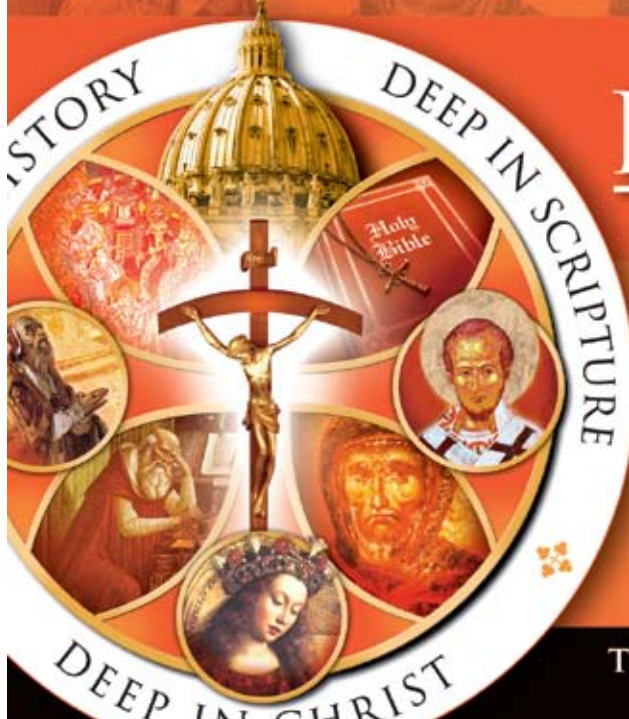
We must all pray that God will hasten the day when all who bear the name and baptismal mark of Jesus Christ can come together at one altar in his one true Church.

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