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The Coming Home Network International

Membership Newsletter

May 2003

A THANKFUL VICTIM OF THE DICTUM

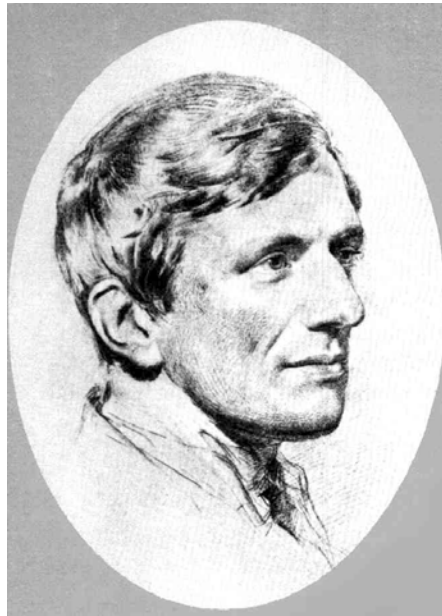
“TO BE DEEP IN HISTORY IS TO CEASE TO BE PROTESTANT.”

During the French Revolution, the skill of a certain man in operating the guillotine became legendary. The claim was made that with his machine he could cut off a man's head so deftly that the man would not know it until he tried to sneeze.

Many of us converts lost our non-Catholic heads, so to speak, long before we realized what had happened.

From the beginning of my seminary days at Harvard Divinity School I yearned for continuity with the church of Jesus and the apostles. My denomination assured me I already had continuity. Our founder had “restored” the “primitive church.” The motto of the denomination is “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” *Scriptura sola* with a vengeance!

I knew the Bible had to be interpreted by someone. And there were thousands of differing interpretations available. After transferring to Union Theological Seminary in New York I was introduced to Anglicanism by one of my professors. I learned that scripture has to be interpreted by tradition. And the tradition must be that of the church when she was at her best, namely, the first five centuries. I embraced Anglicanism, and gradually became an ardent Anglo-Catholic. I was assured that I was in continuity with the early church because as an Episcopal priest I stood in the line of the apostolic succession. So now I was part of a second “restoration,” this time the restoration of the church of the first five centuries. (Later I learned that the Anglican appeal to the first four councils is highly selective. It does not accept much of what the councils actually decreed about the Blessed Virgin and about universal



papal jurisdiction in matters of doctrine.)

Gradually it became clear that Anglicanism did not have the answer to the problem of doctrinal authority. Scripture has to be interpreted by tradition, but who will say which tradition, and who will say what that tradition really means? More and more it concerned me that both Rome and the Eastern Orthodox churches denied that the Anglican succession is valid.

All right, what then? We Anglo-Catholics used to say that there is always Eastern Orthodoxy, a non-papal Catholicism whose orders even Rome recognizes. (We did not know that in her most irenic moments Rome never refers to the separated Eastern churches as “Catholic.”) So my wife and I studied the faith of the Eastern Orthodox churches. We learned that they claim to have preserved the faith of the first eight centuries of the church's history. For them, the first seven ecumenical councils are authoritative. So we were looking

at another “restoration,” the restoration of the first eight centuries.

It became clear to us that the Eastern churches' “restoration” of the church of the first eight centuries is also a selective process. They reject the underlying theme in most of the councils, namely, the universal jurisdiction of the pope in doctrinal issues. We realized there is no such entity as “Eastern Orthodoxy”; that is an abstraction. There are only twelve or thirteen independent national ethnic churches, with no structural bond of unity among them. The Eastern Orthodox churches do not have a workable solution to the problem of doctrinal authority. Scripture, their theologians insist, must be interpreted by tradition. When one asks “Which traditions? And who is to say what those traditions *mean*?”, the answer is that tradition must be tested by Scripture. Tradition interprets Scripture interprets tradition: circular reasoning.

And so, extremely reluctantly, we had to turn to Rome to examine her claims more closely. By the grace of the Holy Spirit we recognized the truth of what she teaches. We had no alternative but to submit to her authority. Now we were truly “deep in history.”

Every single non-Catholic tradition (Protestant, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox) is an attempt to “reconstruct” the Church according to some person's or some group's criterion. The criteria are always subjective. Every single reconstruction omits some or much of Christ's truth. Only in the Roman Catholic Church can one find the fullness of that truth.

Fr. Ray Ryland, CHN Chaplain

COMING HOME CONFERENCE 2003

November 14-16

“Deep In His tory, †
Deep in scrip ture, †
Deep in Chris t...” †

The Coming Home Network will be hosting the first annual *Coming Home Conference*, this year commemorating our tenth anniversary. The conference will be held on November 14 - 16, 2003, in Columbus, Ohio. We are working diligently to bring together an event to remember; with speakers; Marcus Grodi, Dr. Scott Hahn, Fr. Benedict Groeschel, Dr. Kenneth Howell, Fr. C. John McClosky, Joseph Pearce, Fr. Ray Ryland, Fr. James Garneau, and Rev. Dr. James Keating. Mark your calendars now! Developing information will be available in future newsletters, or visit the conference website at www.chnetwork.org/deepinhistory.htm



In Celebration of My Ignorance

“I am a former protestant minister.” The words sounded as if someone else had spoken them. I was in the office of the pastor of the local Catholic parish. At that moment, I realized that my whole life was defined in terms of what I used to be. A silent wave washed over me: I used to be employed; I used to be a homeowner; I used to be confident and focused.

Let someone else figure out authenticity, I had given heart, soul, mind, and strength to trying to make *sola scriptura* work. That pivotal doctrine of the Reformation proved to be a cruel mistress, seducing me with the promise of a pure and spotless Bride that never materialized. The pursuit of this phantom had occupied the best years of my life and drained the life right out of my family.

My Fruitless Quest for Unity

No one had ever mentioned Catholic up to this time. The Catholic Church was the one thing that we always knew was *not* the true church—the only concept on which all Protestants agree. Though I had not voiced it but to two or three people, I had cancelled my quest at the point of acknowledging the immense success of the Catholic Church as an institution. History has an air of infallibility to it—what happened, happened. I had to admit that one church had been in existence for two thousand years, unlike ours. Fifty years would be an old church for us.

Ironically, it was this recognition of our lack of history that had launched my quest many years earlier. It disturbed me that the longer any Protestant denomination stayed in existence, the farther it strayed from my touchstone—the Scriptures. They would all begin at some point to deny the authority of the Bible, never offering anything better in

its place. So, filled with many admirable good works, but bereft of any moral authority, they all predictably failed to find moral grounds for opposing abortion, for example. Among the Protestant denominations that had not lost their bearings, I could find the same tendencies beginning to crop up in the largest ones. Plus we had turned worship into a circus. So I was consigned to the smaller denominations. There I was shipwrecked by the principle that if you want to stay pure, you have to keep splintering. But you can't sail a toothpick. I found denominations as small as six churches splitting.

Finding a true expression of the church was like a puzzle always before me. It bothered me that I couldn't piece it together. I am not really a cantankerous or divisive person, but at times in my life I have been both. Our Lord's prayer in John 17 fueled my frustration. The church Christ prayed for was a church of inclusion and unity founded on truth—the Word of God. I knew from this prayer that there was only one Church. But when I faced the multitude of churches around me, I had no way of identifying any one of them as more authentic than any other. That was because I had excluded Catholic and Orthodox from the list. And mixing them all together was both a practical and theological impossibility.



I was left with a masochist's delight—a puzzle that couldn't be solved. Oh, the misery I could have spared myself if I hadn't been so hardheaded! I concluded that the only way for Christians to unite was around the Word of God, which I took to mean the Bible, even though the New Testament wasn't written at the time Jesus prayed the words of John 17. I turned this into a principle that I followed scrupulously: the only reason for not worshipping with another church was deviation from the Bible. I never allowed personality, preferences, styles, or history to be the basis for division in my mind. We were dealing with the authority of the risen Christ and His infallible Word. Thus if there were different confessions of faith that kept churches apart, someone had to be wrong. If I could not clearly state where another church had denied the Word of God, it would be sin not to worship with them.

The Frustration of a Sincere Conscience

I can say this now, but at the time I could not see what a perfect recipe for frustration I had concocted for myself. On the one hand, I had to become an expert on other churches'

deviations from the Word of God; to avoid the sin of schism, I had to make them be the sinner. But on the other hand, I had to at least tacitly declare that my church did not deviate. Thus I became condemning and self-righteous, which I despised in others but could not see in me.

My frustration grew as I found no one else in ministry willing to face this dilemma. None of my colleagues seem to understand that if we were not the authentic church, then people's souls were at risk. I was haunted by a thought I kept locked in a closet in the back of my mind: *I was supposed to be telling people how to get to heaven.* If I didn't have the proper authority, or if I misdirected people, they would have every reason to blame me for their perdition (or their increased purgatory, I can say now). This was the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* rattling its chains in my soul. I was ministering in churches that constantly reassured their congregations that the one time they walked down the aisle of their church to "accept Jesus" was all they needed to be certain of heaven. Needless to say, those looking for that kind of consolation found other churches to attend. Mine never grew.

Born on the Wrong Side of the Ocean

Looking back, I see my life in a metaphor of a man born on the wrong side of the ocean. He senses a deep, unspoken longing in his soul for a safe harbor on the far side of the ocean. Some distant Irish ancestors had perhaps brought their children to be baptized by Saint Patrick with a prayer that their family might live forever in the blessings and comfort of Mother Church. My grandfather left Patrick's church and eventually became a colonel in the Salvation Army. But God's faithfulness extends to a thousand generations. In His providence, He had my parents baptize me in the Methodist Church. The liturgy of those early years left me with a profound God-consciousness. And the Father was faithful to His Word

when He sent the Spirit of God to stir my heart during my first years of college. The Baptists recognized this stirring and led me to an experience they called "getting saved". They baptized me again because—they said—my first one didn't count. Then they put a Scofield Bible in my hands, which I devoured.

The Scofield Reference Bible is the largest-selling study Bible in the history of the world. Its effects are deadening in three regards. First, it orients the Christian towards an expectation of Christ's return very, very soon, and thus there is no long-term outlook. Second, it relegates the Church to a temporary "parenthesis" in the plan of God. And third, it associates the antichrist with Catholicism. Perhaps for this reason, the one church in the world big enough to deal with its errors has chosen to be silent.

Here I must ask a very pointed question to all Catholics—in love and friendship. But the question needs to be asked: *Where were you?* I am not pointing fingers or blaming anyone. Forgive me this question; I mention this merely as a demonstration of the wounds I bear in following the path of Christ. It would be understandable if these wounds had come from Christ's enemies. But they came from His shepherds. The error of Scofield was taught to me by pastors and Bible scholars. *Where were you?* I could have been spared over thirty years of aimless tacking back and forth across the entire ocean, only to see my family swept away in the end. All kinds of evangelical Christians were there when heaven was awakening me to my need of salvation. Catholics were there too. But they were silent. The Spirit of God is ever at work; it is we who are asleep.

I even took a class on Church History at the state university I attended. A Catholic priest very well known on the campus taught it. I really thought I knew more than he did. The priest was oblivious to the spell I was under; we couldn't communicate. The introduction to the Scofield Bible says that C.I. Scofield studied arduously all the systems of theology present in

the world and verified that the system of thought contained in his notes was indeed the historic faith of the Church. That, of course, was a lie. I have taken comfort recently in Augustine's *Confessions* in which he chides himself for the foolish and ignorant doctrines of the Manicheans he followed so avidly.

Bishop Ambrose understood Augustine's errors, could communicate with him, and eventually won his heart and his intellect for the kingdom of Christ. I have found very few Catholics today who understand how extensive and damaging are the errors taught in the best-selling study Bible in the history of the world. Perhaps one of the reasons is that Scofield's doctrine has mutated into a thousand different forms, none of which use Scofield's name. Worse yet, I have found some Catholics who seek to imitate this and wish to incorporate some of this error as well. God help us.

Nobody Told Me

Listen to me! When God woke me up in college, and I began searching for Jesus and rest for my soul, all the Baptists could give me was a book. Thankfully, it was the New Testament. All the while, right across the street from my dormitory was a Catholic Church. I was desperately searching for Jesus, and He was present in the Tabernacle fifty yards away from me. **NOBODY TOLD ME!** I can't say that I would have listened, but I can say that nobody told me that Jesus was there. In fact, my anti-Catholic bias, picked up from the pages of the Scofield Bible, left me with the impression of Jesus sitting outside the Catholic Church on the curb, alone and forlorn, while the worshippers gathered inside.

I didn't have to launch out across the ocean in a leaky boat with no map. But I did. I left that unvisited tabernacle far behind, took a wife, went to seminary, took my first church, started our family, and began my restless wandering. I loved the Church, and I got that from the pages of Scripture. Surprisingly, the Baptist seminary I attended emphasized quite strongly the primacy of the local

church with Christ as its head. But already, in my first ministry, I began to realize that the authority of Christ was not present in that church.

We left that denomination and tried an independent work, mostly composed of Catholics who left their church in the charismatic renewal of the 70's. Those poor souls had never been instructed in their own faith. They left Jesus in the Tabernacle to go wander in the desert. We met in a picnic shelter in a state park every Sunday to sing new songs and learn the doctrines of C.I. Scofield under the guise of teaching "just the Bible." During that time, I had the opportunity to work full-time and minister part-time, but after five years I was restless and irritable again. Somewhere, there had to be a real church.

How could I find my way home when those who were already there didn't stay? How could I find the life-giving food my soul craved when those who had dined on it despised it?

Running Too Hard

I created a tumult by leaving that church in the park in the hands of the elders (I never was one) and attending a church that had just welcomed our oldest daughter into its inaugural first-grade class. No one understood what my soul needed. I certainly didn't. The new church was part of fellowship of churches with a statement of faith devoted to Scofield's teaching, so I was happy. I was even happier when, in a strange set of circumstances, that church called me to be its pastor. After five years of hard work, the school grew; the church did not. I was frustrated.

That kind of frustration multiplied, as did my listening for faint whispers of whatever was missing

in my ministry. Our denomination had an aggressive missionary ministry around the world, including France. We met some of the French missionaries, considered whether our gifts and talents would be better used over there, and even made a visit to explore the possibility. My Scofieldism was still intact and all the prophecy preachers I trusted agreed that the Church would surely, surely be whisked off the earth before the year 2000. What better place to spend our last years on earth than right in the heart of antichrist's ten-nation confederacy taking shape before our very eyes in Europe? That was at least one of my reasons for being interested. As silly as it sounds to say, I can assure you that this doctrine has many millions under its sway. It would be difficult to estimate how many zealous missionary endeavors are fueled by this kind of thinking.



We Cross an Ocean

Laura always had more common sense than did I, and so she always listened with a yawn when I began lining up the prophetic "signs of the times." But this time it was Laura who said yes; let's go to France. So we did. Trauma. Turmoil. Upset. Confusion. Uprooting my children and throwing them into a whole new world really hurt them, making it impossible for them to ever trust me again. We all eventually adapted, and all of us would go back

if we could. We all loved our six years in France. But we lost the Lord's face. When I saw my children thrown to the wolves in French-speaking schools, there was no amount of consolation or prayer that would touch them. They learned to turn their hearts to the same degree of stoniness they found in their classmates. Dad felt so guilty he couldn't even go in at night to tuck them in and pray with them.

That move cost too much. I couldn't pray any more. I studied and taught, but my private devotional life dried up. My hope was that the Rapture would come as predicted, and then my children would forgive me. But Jesus didn't come. I was lost. I really was. I initiated theological conflicts with my colleagues, thinking that fidelity to our statement of faith was the way to restore order to our lives. I could no longer live with authority that had deceived me.

What were we doing there anyway? France is a Catholic country, *n'est-ce pas*? Once again, I have to say that, though I met some very vocal Catholics who tried to defend their faith, they simply didn't know enough of what they believed to make an impression. And they certainly didn't know what I believed to be able to counter it. The closest I got

to understanding a Catholic was once in a conversation with a devout man lamenting the fact that some modern priest had not baptized his infant son because, the priest said, it is better to wait until he can profess faith. The baby fell sick and the priest did not arrive in time. The father was weeping as he told me his baby was not born of the spirit. I tried to console him by saying that the Bible does not teach that an infant is born again through baptism (for such we believed). In exasperation, he

replied, “Well, that may not be what the Bible teaches, but it is what my Church teaches!” He knew where authority lies. I did not. How sad that I spent six years in a land full of empty church buildings that are little more than museums. Woe to the shepherds who do not watch the flock!

Scofield Unmasked

While in France, I met the author of the only comprehensive biography ever written on C.I. Scofield. It seems Scofield was incapable of writing the notes that bear his name, and the origins of those notes remain shrouded in mystery. It is clear, however, that this system of thought was devised near the end of the nineteenth century. I say this to my immortal shame: Woe unto shepherds when they feed the sheep doctrine invented yesterday! As I shared my discoveries with my colleagues in ministry, I was stunned to find that they didn’t care. Our whole statement of faith was based on Scofield’s system. Perhaps they sensed the upheaval I would experience as I began to extract myself from its influences. They simply didn’t want to face it.

I needed time to sort it all out and discover just what I did believe, what—or whom—I could trust. Our work in France was done, and we were due for a year back home, after which we could report for a new mission elsewhere in France. Our oldest daughter was ready to enter college, and the others would follow shortly after her. We made the decision to return home permanently. I considered stepping out of the ministry, but knew that the theological questions would not go away from my mind. I hoped to find a small church in our denomination where I could devote time to extensive study and re-thinking. We found such a church, and began to face the same trauma we had faced in moving to France—reverse culture shock. Our girls were rootless and alone as they

faced the challenges of American life and culture. Dad was changing what he said all the time, and so they decided to tune me out. I kept my public preaching and teaching within the bounds of our statement of faith, but knew that a crisis was coming. I tried to develop a business on the side so that I might have something to support me when it hit.

This was change number four for my family, and the biggest trauma I had ever faced. My world was shaken. I felt betrayed by men I had trusted to teach me the Word of God. I didn’t know how to approach the Scriptures. The issue of authority was now a wide open question. I began reading everything and anyone, some of it quite novel and bizarre. But, of course, I read no Catholics. *They* were the enemy. The question spurring me on was, “who has the authority to speak for God?” I had to conclude from the very apparent evidence: *anyone, absolutely anyone*. Anybody can start a church; anyone can get on the radio or TV and speak in Jesus’ name.



My Wittenberg Door

I had painted myself into a corner. Our denomination was composed of autonomous churches voluntarily cooperating in a fellowship that we insisted was not a denomination. There was no hierarchy, no central authority, only voluntary organizations formed from the churches to accomplish various tasks such as foreign mission work, education, or new church planting. We had groups of pastors in a region meet in what we called a *ministerium*. This group had no authority over the

churches. We would examine a man for ordination, for example, but it was his own local church that ordained him. Each church owned its own property and incorporated independent of any other authority.

I raised certain questions in our *ministerium* in regard to our statement of faith, a woefully inadequate document that essentially said “we believe the Bible, and the Bible teaches this. . .” followed by fourteen headings (not explained) of what we believe. I had hoped to initiate a district-wide study of certain of these headings that I had become convinced were not taught in the Bible. Not even the terminology could be found in the Bible. I had realized that a study of these things could lead to my resignation, but I had hoped to at least provoke some others to re-think these things in order to avoid the damage they create when taught and believed.

I should have known better. I was too weary in mind and spirit, though. My mind was constantly racing in those days, as I studied some new aspect of my quest and had to make room for it in my theology. I was constantly shifting everything, because one new doctrine affects all the others. I felt like my mind was one of those puzzles with sliding tiles and one empty spot that allows you to shift everything around to get a picture or a message. I was shuttling those tiles frantically in my mind, night and day, trying to put it all together. I prepared a document for my colleagues, outlining my concerns. But it was too pointed, too critical, and too intimidating. I should have foreseen their reaction. They simply wanted to know if I believed our statement of faith. No study. Very little discussion. I said no. They said, “Then you must resign.”

I was imbued with the spirit of Martin Luther at this point. I said, “I do believe what our statement of faith affirms in its one opening statement, that the Bible alone is our source for all doctrine and practice. I do believe the

Bible. But I do not believe the Bible teaches some of the fourteen points listed, and I can demonstrate that to you.” They again asked me to resign. I was perverse enough at this point to realize that one reason they wanted me to resign is because they had no authority to take any action. I pressed my point. “No,” I said. “I will not resign, because I want you to go on record as saying that all fourteen articles of our faith are taught in the Bible.”

What I had hoped to accomplish is not at all clear in my mind. I suppose it was a bit of a martyr complex. It had taken me over 25 years to get to the point I was, and I wasn’t going to turn back. I had the full support of the leadership of my church, as I kept them posted on all the proceedings. I fasted for several days and went to face my sentence. The ministerium met and determined that they would have to remove me from the list of approved ministers in our denomination. I smiled inwardly because I knew that no such list existed. They could not, and in fact did not, revoke my ordination. But I got the point. They threw me out.

The House Collapses

As this incident was reported by others, I had been “defrocked”. That was not true, but had I known this was how it would be viewed, I would have simply resigned. I think. I cannot speak for my state of mind at that time.

The congregation of my church then had to decide to ask me to resign or leave the fellowship. I offered my resignation, arranged a business meeting of the congregation, invited officials from the ministerium to come address the meeting while I left town. The church overwhelmingly voted to leave the fellowship, which they were perfectly free to do in the voluntary association we had. Once again, the telling of the tale was worse than the act. Word was that I “stole” the church from our fellowship. It is difficult for a Catholic to understand the structure of independent, autonomous churches in denominations like ours. But the congregation owned

that church, and at the end of the ordeal, they still did.

Had I exercised better judgment, however, I would have resigned and moved on, if for no other reason than the rest I needed. I now found myself at the head of a congregation eager to learn what I had been unable to teach them up to that point. In addition, I wanted to find a new denomination for us to join. We finally settled on the Reformed camp of Protestants because they at least had historical roots back to the Reformation. This camp included all the various Presbyterian denominations. History was becoming important to us. Here I absolutely ran out of gas. Mainline reformed denominations were already straying far from the Bible as their authority, and that left me with the disgruntled, the divisive, the self-righteous, and the confused reformed and Presbyterian pastors, most of whom were trying to form new denominations. I finally settled on a medium-sized Presbyterian group that had its problems, but would give us some identity and sense of history.

It was about this time that I flipped the switch. I wanted to lead our church into this denomination and then resign. I didn’t know where I would go, but I was aware of a curiosity—how do those Catholics keep themselves together in one group and not lose their moral identity? For example, they are unquestionably, the most pro-life institution in the world, yet they also did more than anyone on earth to help those who had had an abortion. What was probably more amazing is that this church maintains the fervent loyalty and devotion of those who disagree with these positions.

Now I’ll Listen, Lord

I joined Toastmasters in an effort to open up new vistas. Someone there heard me speak and gave me a tape with a witness I would recommend to anyone. He said, “Tom, I think you will really appreciate this. I realize it could be offensive, and so I will never mention it again. However, if you like

it, I have several other similar ones.” It was Scott Hahn’s testimony, a man who went through every contortion I had gone through in Protestant theology. At any other point in my life, I would have thrown the tape away because it was Catholic, but the Lord’s school of discipline had finally softened my hard head enough to at least listen. I couldn’t refute anything he said. That meant I would have to study more. I asked for the rest of the tapes and was stunned to hear the testimonies of several former protestant ministers who had converted to Catholicism.

The tapes and my accompanying reading addressed what had been gnawing at my sanity for a couple of years—the issue of authority. I had upset the comfort zone of everyone around me by simply going through every aspect of our church life and asking, “Who authorized this?” The typical reply of “The Bible” was beginning to be unmasked for the ruse it was. An open Bible on a pulpit authorizes nothing. It takes a person to read it and then authorize some form of action. I was beginning to see that we probably had a thousand different voices in the Protestant world authorizing various doctrines and practices in the church, all from the same Bible. What we did was pick the voice we thought best expressed the intent of the Scriptures. I was haunted by the conclusion that was forming in the back of my mind—everything we did was *self*-authorized. In the end it was *my* individual decision that said, “The Bible says we must do this.”

Scott Hahn addressed this issue head-on. The Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* says that the Bible is the sole source of authority for faith and practice. The only problem with that idea is that it is not taught in the one place it should be taught—the Bible. Hahn made that very clear, and I was ready to hear it. But what was left? Could it possibly be the unbroken tradition of apostolic authority established by Christ Himself? That authority loomed before me now. I knew that I could not do what Scott Hahn had done. He studied every

last doctrine and document, consulted with the best anti-Catholic scholars he could find, and finally concluded that the Roman Catholic Church was the one true Church. That approach seemed me to be more of the self-authorizing route I was trying to abandon.

I saw myself more in the role of the Roman centurion asking for a healing in his household (Luke 7:1-10). His doctrine and understanding were probably woefully inadequate. All he needed was the source of authority. Jesus commended his faith as greater than all the scribes in the land. My white flag had already been hoisted. I wanted to surrender to an authority greater than myself. I would conform my belief to this authority, and not the other way around. To my great surprise, when I first attended a mass, I found the words of that centurion forever memorialized in the liturgy of the Eucharist, as the congregation responds to the invitation to come to the Lord's Supper: *Lord, I am not worthy to receive You; only say the word and I shall be healed.* Thus before I ever attended my first mass, I was emotionally converted. But emotional conversion is not adequate. I needed to actually meet with Catholics and attend mass and study and pray. For the first time in my life, I was willing to do it.

A Strange Welcome

In my metaphor of the man born on the wrong side of the sea, I could now see that I had often sailed past the harbor I was looking for because the harbor was Rome. At times in my journey, I would hear the distant call of her voice, but as I sailed our ship in that direction, I would recognize it was Rome and pass it by, only to wonder why the voice faded. Other times, I would see the light of the blessed port I sought and head in its direction, only to overpass it and see its light fade. What I didn't know was that I was tacking across the ocean, zigzagging ever nearer to my sought-after harbor. Each time I passed it by, I was actually closer. Finally, I could smell her sweet fragrances, and wondered why

they faded as I passed by the one place I knew was *not* my destination.

Scott Hahn's tape brought me to the shore. Shoals and crashing surf had beaten my ship to splinters, but I was like a mad Captain Ahab, determined to meet my destiny. I finally understood that all I sought for was present in the nearest Catholic Church. Jesus was there in the Blessed Sacrament, watched over by a successor to the Apostles with authority to absolve my sin. Overwhelmed, weary, beaten, guilty, forsaken, and hungry, I drove to the nearest Catholic parish. I made an appointment to see the pastor. There I met a man who, in an attempt to encourage me, said all the wrong things. He scoffed at the idea that he was in the line of succession from the apostles and told me other things I pray he has since reconsidered. I forgave him. I told him that he could be a drunken, homosexual pedophile and I didn't care, because I knew he had the authority I was seeking.

Once again, my greatest deterrent to finding my way home came from within the Church, not without. God forgive us. I had found the pearl of great price, and it has cost me everything. This priest's confusion wasn't going to deter me. I started attending mass at his parish. But I sought out other help from someone who could understand why I had crossed the ocean to come home.

Tangible, Visible Authority

I was at a mass once where a deacon was going to read the Gospel. Before he was permitted this responsibility, he bowed his head before the priest who blessed him and authorized him to carry out this task which tens of thousands of Protestants do without batting an eye. To me the image was clearly speaking of authority. The deacon had to be authorized by the priest to even read the Gospel. The priest is authorized by the Bishop, to serve in his place, so to speak. Bishops are appointed by the Pope as successors to the Apostles. *There* was the authority I was seeking.

Another incident I observed

will further illustrate this. I had begun the practice of visiting as many different Catholic services as I could, even though I could not partake of the Communion. One Sunday, I took a seat in a church and watched the usual reverence of worshippers arriving early to kneel in private prayer before the service began. I saw a young mother come in with a babe in arms and a three-year-old son trailing behind. The boy seemed to be watching everything but his mother as she found a seat a few rows ahead of me. She knelt at the end of the pew, in reverence of the presence of Christ in the Tabernacle. As she rose to make way down the aisle, her son arrived, and not knowing any different, he knelt as he had seen his mother do. I was genuinely moved. Where, in this world, does anyone learn respect and reverence for *anything*? The authority present in a Catholic church brought a toddler to his knee, even though he didn't know why. All he knew was that there was some reason to kneel in a Catholic Church. I thought about the hundreds of evangelical churches I had been in. There was nothing in any of them worthy of such respect.

I knew I was coming home. I knew I was seeing something I had longed for all my life. Sometimes I could smell the bouquet of the communion wine. How had I lived all my life without it? How could I live any more without it? I was already beginning to lose the ability to communicate with old friends. As an evangelical Protestant, you define home as a place without repetitious prayer, without images and statues, without prayers to saints, without devotion to Mary, without priests, without an altar, without purgatory, penance, and confession. When you break free of that and begin searching for a home with all those things, you are left with almost nothing but arguments. I didn't want to argue. Neither did anyone who knew me before. They simply didn't want to encourage me to go down this path. And so they didn't. I had to go alone.

A Warm Welcome

I felt like the prodigal son who

grew tired of eating with the pigs. I was going home. I called Monsignor Laurence Higgins and explained that I was a Protestant minister seriously considering converting. He cleared a space for me on his busy schedule, and met me with a broad smile and arms wide open as I walked into his office. Earlier I had met with Father Philip Scott who had his whole religious order pray for me. And through Monsignor Higgins I was introduced to Bishop Thomas Larkin. It took all three of these men of God to keep me in one piece while taking classes, working at nights, and trying to find a new vocational direction for my life. During this time, I found great solace in the mass, even though I could not partake of the elements. I learned to pray the rosary. And I frequently went to sit before the Blessed Sacrament in any church I happened to pass.

When most of the dust had settled, Bishop Thomas Larkin took me through a condensed RCIA program and arranged a private mass for me to be received into the Church. On May 14, 2002, on the Feast of St. Matthias, I was welcomed into the one holy catholic and apostolic church. When this seventh change came—into the Catholic Church—I was all alone. Except I wasn't. Monsignor Higgins sponsored me and Father Philip Scott concelebrated with them this holy feast where I first tasted what my soul had ever longed for—the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. I had earlier attended an Easer Vigil. It was the first time I had ever heard the Litany of the Saints. That tune is ever in my head. I am not alone. I never was. And I never will be. I am home.

Home

Home. It is what drives the Pacific salmon to turn away from the vast waters of the ocean to head inland. Sensing a call to spawn where she was

spawned, she will brave peril, danger, difficulty, and exhaustion to answer that call. Once she starts her journey, she will never know the help of her natural element. Upstream, always upstream, she will struggle mile after mile against swift currents that at times become raging torrents. She will brave them all and then somehow summon the strength to jump time after time up spills of water, defying the waterfalls. She is driven by something unseen to arrive at all costs at her destination, the place of her origin, that place on Earth that nurtured and sustained her first days of life.



The call of home is that powerful. On the day I was received into the Church, I stood with my hand surgically pinned together after a recent fall. I had a mountain of medical bills as a result and no steady employment. I had no title, position, or honor. I was a divorcé, prevented by Church law from marrying again. I was still emotionally bruised, still weary from my journey, still confused about my future, still hurting from my ordeal. The timing couldn't be worse. It was that dreadful time after the Holy Father's urgent meeting with the American Cardinals and before the

Conference of Bishops in June. The news was full of stories about abuse, corruption, cover-up, and scandal in the Church I was joining. As her flaws were uncovered, I was transfixed by her beauty. There was not a happier man on earth.

Our Lord told a parable about a man who found a treasure hidden in a field. He sold everything he owned to buy the field. He was a wise man. I was a fool. He willingly sold all he had. I had to have everything stripped from me to realize the value of the treasure in that field. Any who read this, please understand. I have not lost anything. I have only gained. What the world sees as a little round wafer I see as a treasure worth more than all I have. And as long as I live, I will ever praise my God for loving me enough to chase me into His kingdom.

A Final Plea

I do not share this story to magnify any heroic effort on my part, for there is no heroism here except for the man of Calvary, God in human flesh, willing to taste death for our redemption. I relate my journey for the purpose of instructing others on the vast and treacherous distance that separates those who freely dine at the Lord's Table from those who seek to satisfy themselves on something less. I hope to encourage others to make the same journey I made, only more willingly. And I hope to assist good Catholics everywhere to never cease in their labors to invite all men everywhere to this wonderful feast of love. There is no price too high, no sacrifice too precious, and no demand too great for the privilege of dining at the table where Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist.

Thomas Hickey
Palm Harbor, Florida

“How Then Shall We Serve?”

The Coming Home Network will be hosting our annual gathering during this year's *Defending the Faith* Conference, July 18-20, at the *Franciscan University* in Stuebenville, Ohio. If you would like to attend the Friday night mixer or the Sunday luncheon, please call us at 740-450-1175 or e-mail info@chnetwork.org. We look forward to seeing you there!

To find out more about the conference please call Franciscan University at 1-800-437-8368.

Upcoming Speaking Events.

June 21

Diocese of Lubbock, Texas
Catholic Renewal Center

June 28

Fullness of Truth Conference
Dallas, Texas

July 18-20

Defending the Faith Conference
Stuebenville, Ohio

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Attention Members!

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

Call us at 740 450-1175 or e-mail jim@chnetwork.org.
Thank you.



*Upcoming guests on the
Journey Home Program
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P.M. EST*

*May 12
Shawn Reeves*

*May 19
England Pre-tape*

*May 26
Fr. Richard Neuhaus*

*June 2
David Currie*

*June 9
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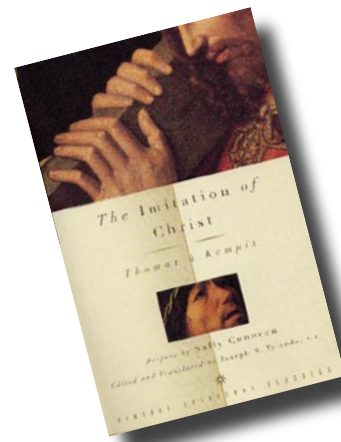
*Best of Journey Home:
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The Imitation of Christby *Thomas A. Kempis*,*Joseph N. Tylenda (translator); Random House*

Thomas a Kempis was medieval monk and priest (1380-1471) who served as chronicler of the monastery at Mt. St. Agnes. The “Imitation of Christ” remains his most famous work and the one that has best stood the test of time. Reflecting its vibrant insight into the human condition, the “Imitation of Christ” remains influential on both sides of the Reformation divide. It reportedly was, for example, one of John Wesley’s favorite devotionals.

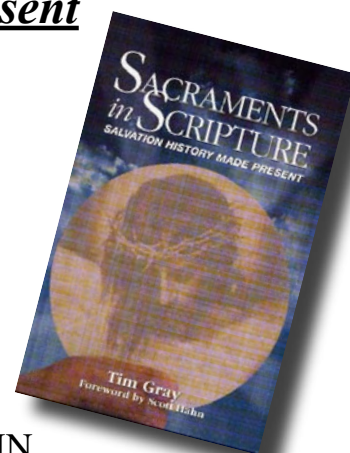
The “Imitation of Christ” is divided into 4 books, each undertaking a basic theme for development. They are, respectively, the Spiritual Life, the Inner Life, Inward Consolation, and the Blessed Sacrament (i.e., the Eucharist). In turn, each book is sub-divided into numerous chapters, each a page or two long. All of which makes the “Imitation of Christ” a useful book for daily devotionals.



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Sacraments in Scripture: Salvation History Made Presentby *Tim Gray; Emmaus Road*

Sacraments in Scripture delves into the biblical origin for each of these masterpieces of God’s love. Gray guides readers through the Gospels, showing Christ’s deliberate acts to inaugurate these sacred signs as the foundation of the New Covenant. With review questions at the end of each chapter, this study is ideal for both group and individual study, and is perfect for learning how to answer contemporary objections to the sacraments.

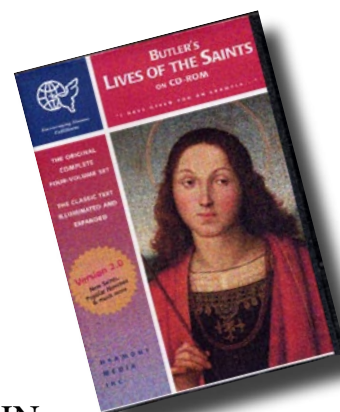


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