

The

Coming Home Network International

MAY 2008 NEWSLETTER

JOURNEYS HOME

RECEIVING CHRIST

BY JOSHUA D. JOHNSON

A FORMER METHODIST MINISTER

Tenderly, yet with all the seriousness of eternity in view, my mother asked: "Josh, do you want to ask Jesus to come into your heart?" I pondered shortly and answered "five more days."



"Sure," I thought, "Asking Jesus into my heart would get me into heaven and save me from hell, but why rush it?" After all, I was only five years old, (thus my fascination with the number five) and felt no urgency in the matter.

Eventually, after a few cycles of "five more days," I entered my parent's bedroom and told them I was ready to ask Jesus to come into my heart. About a year later, I found myself in a room telling the deacons what my Baptist Sunday School teachers and parents had taught me: "I am saved because I asked Jesus to forgive my sins and come into my heart." Apparently I was rather convincing, because just a few weeks later I stood in front of a about a hundred faith-filled people, told them what I had told my parents, and was baptized "In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

I was told that by being baptized I was obeying Christ. That was true, but it would be nearly a decade and a half before I realized my Baptism was much more: it was the sealing of my conversion, the re-birth by "water and the Spirit" that Jesus told Nicodemus about in the Gospel of John. What happened during the ensuing years was a profound struggle with what St. Augustine called "concupiscence." My sins were washed and I had received the Holy Spirit, but eventually I responded less and less to that Spirit. Inevitably, the fire within my heart slowly dissipated. It was not that I wanted Jesus out of my heart, I wanted him in, but I also wanted to have fun like my friends.

Good Intentions without the Will and Sacramental Grace

I attended a Christian school most of my life, but as I neared high school I felt lonely. I wanted to be liked, and discovered

acceptance with my peers in our mutual rebellion. I got into a great deal of trouble and constantly pushed the boundaries. I prayed the "prayer of salvation" hundreds of times and "re-dedicated" my life at least a dozen times. I recall one such time when I prostrated myself on the ground and re-dedicated my life to God. A revival preacher had come into town to preach at my high school. That week I decided to change my ways. By the end of the week, I found myself standing with a microphone in front of the entire high school sharing my decision with my friends in a chapel service and I did so with much fervor. I said, "Let's imagine that the space of this gymnasium represents the time of eternity. If all these thousands of cubic feet represent eternity, then the tip of the point of this pen, which is less than a square millimeter, would still be too large to represent the time of our lives here on earth. You see, in view of eternity, it makes no sense for us to live for ourselves; that is why I am dedicating my life to Christ." This was my first experience preaching, and I delivered the message with every ounce of my being. My friends mockingly predicted it was "just a phase." Sadly, they

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>From the desk of Marcus Grodi</i>	page A
<i>Featured Resources & Conference Schedule</i>	page B
<i>Bulletin Board</i>	page C
<i>Prayer List</i>	page D

were right. In spite of my good intentions, I lacked the will and sacramental grace to practice what I had preached. As I edged closer to adulthood, success in the realm of politics inflated my ego and helped me erect a façade of who I really was. I began to see people as objects that could be used for an end. I became rather talented at getting what I wanted. In the back of my mind, I thought, “Well, it’s once saved, always saved, so why not just do what I want?” Yet there was something in my heart that told me this reasoning was lacking in truth.

Becoming Methodist

I went to college at Liberty University and in my second semester, I began dating a beautiful girl named Katie. Two and half years later, we were married. The school attempted to enforce sexual purity, but my inquisitive mind was unimpressed by the ‘because the Bible says so’ justification. It failed to delve deeper into the transformative biblical truths that we eventually found in Pope John Paul’s *Theology of the Body*. We discovered this gold mine of truth later, but at the time we sought answers by turning to a more progressive and intellectual Christianity than what we had grown up knowing.

Through a friend, we were introduced to a local United Methodist Church. It was there we began to experience a love we had never felt in church. The people took us in as their own children. Before long we discovered God’s love in something they called the “sacraments.” Here it was not just “Communion,” it was “Holy Communion.” This was something we never experienced growing up. Here Holy Communion was something to be treasured: where all came forth to kneel and receive the bread and juice. I was instantly hooked and wanted more. We didn’t completely understand it, but we believed somehow Christ was present in this “means of grace.”

Catholics Really are Christians

After two years of college, I ambitiously accepted an offer to work for an upstart political fundraising firm in Washington, D.C.. The firm’s work in the pro-life movement allowed me to meet several faithful Catholics, including one priest. Through their witness, I began to develop an interest in the Catholic faith and soon found myself entering a Catholic Church for the first time. It was surreal, with art depicting the Christian story as far as the eye could see. I looked above me and saw the words painted on the dome: “I am the way the Truth and the Life.” It finally hit me: “These people really do believe. They really are Christians!” After this visit I discovered Catholic churches to be shelters of peace where I could find relief from my own sin and the sin that pervaded the political world in which I was so entrenched.

Called to Ministry

After Katie finished her degree at Liberty, we were married and set out on our new life together. I soon became dissatisfied with my Washington career and resolved to find another career. One night I felt a voice asking me: “What about ministry?” After much tossing, turning, and internal arguing I said “yes” and spent the next few months trying to figure out what that would mean for our future. I decided that my gifts were well suited for pastoral ministry, and began to pursue this new goal with much eagerness; eagerness my new bride did not share. Despite this, she was graciously supportive and at the age of 22, I became a student pastor, serving two rural churches while attending Duke Divinity School.

Discovering the Historic Church

When I entered seminary at Duke, I was immersed in Scripture and Church History. I discovered the early Church from the letters of St. Ignatius (early 2nd century), St. Justin Martyr (mid 2nd century) and St. Irenaeus (late 2nd century). I discovered that this early Church staunchly believed in One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. That is, they proclaimed a visible and tangible unity with the Apostles and their successors, especially the Successor of Peter. I discovered that the sacraments were the center point of life for this early Church. From its earliest times they believed that the bread and wine of the Eucharist were truly Christ’s Body and Blood that brought life to those who partook. They understood the consecrated bread and wine to be the once offered Flesh and Blood of the resurrected Lord that was perpetually re-presented in the Eucharist. From a very early time, it was understood as a Holy Sacrifice that was offered for the whole Church. I was so excited about my discoveries that I wanted to bring Christ’s Eucharistic life to my own parishes.

Trouble on the Home Front

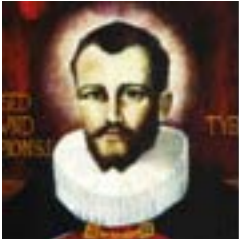
During this time, I served two parishes; one quickly embraced my enthusiasm, but the other parish quietly suspected I was trying to bring Roman Catholicism into their small country church. One evening, I was asked, “How can the bread and juice be Jesus’ body and blood?” I replied using an example our professor had given: “When I get older, my hair will turn grey. My hair is an “appearance” and as I get older, my appearances will change but I will still be Josh Johnson: that is, who I *really* am will be the same even though my appearance has changed. But just the opposite happens in the Eucharist, the bread and juice retain their appearances, still tasting and smelling like bread and juice, but what they really are has been changed into the body and blood of Christ.”

In my brief pastorate, I had taught and preached that Jesus meant it when he said: “this is my body, which is given for

continued on page 3...

An Announcement from the Desk of Marcus Grodi

The Fellowship of Saint Edmund Campion



For years, I have wanted to start a fellowship specifically for clergy converts and their spouses. After discussions with several hundred fellow clergy converts, I have become increasingly impressed by the similarities we share that set us apart from other converts and life-long Catholics—not that these similarities make us in any way special, but rather they unite us in a unique way and give us a perspective that may be helpful to the Church.

Why the Fellowship of St. Edmund Campion?

The basic purpose of the **FSEC** is to help clergy converts evaluate, rediscover, and recommit themselves to the vows they made when they were ordained. Though some of us may be called to pursue priesthood, the majority of us are now called to live out these vows faithfully as lay men and women in the Catholic Church. Through our retreats, website, and other opportunities for fellowship, the **FSEC** hopes to provide opportunities for clergy converts and their spouses to meet one another to discuss their journeys, to discuss ways they can be actively involved in the new evangelization, to share ideas for parish renewal, and especially to help each other make the successful transition into Catholic spirituality. Together as we discuss the meanings of our shared journeys, we can better discern why God is calling so many Protestant clergy home from such diverse denominational backgrounds.

VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE AND BLOG

We're inaugurating FSEC with our new website and blog. Please visit <http://www.saintcampion.org>, where you will find more information about the FSEC as well as a blog where you can respond to articles relating to continuing journey's.

First Annual FSEC Retreat

We also are excited to announce our **First Annual FSEC Retreat** immediately following this fall's **Sixth Annual Deep In Scripture Conference**.

- Who:** Clergy converts and their spouses
- When:** Sunday evening through Wednesday morning, October 26-29, 2008
- Where:** St. Teresa's Retreat Center, Columbus, Ohio
- Tentative Schedule:**
 - Sunday afternoon/evening:** Check in, evening prayer, social
 - Monday & Tuesday:** Morning prayer, breakfast, sessions, Mass, lunch, sessions, Evening prayer, dinner, sessions, fellowship.
 - Wednesday morning:** Morning prayer, breakfast, sessions, Mass, lunch, checkout.
- Cost:** Room and board **FREE!** (Call or email me for details) Just get there (scholarships available for transportation costs).

For information: Call 1-740-450-1175 or email: fsec@chnetwork.org



Please join us again this
October 24th through 26th
at the Hilton Easton
Columbus, Ohio

as we continue our journey to
become Deep in History.

Battle for the Faith 1700 – 1800 The Denominalization of America

Friday

- 3:30 Travelers Mass
5:00 Dinner
6:30 Opening By Marcus Grodi
6:45 Fr Ray Ryland ~ Reconstructionism: A Look at Non-Catholic Traditions
7:45 Dr Rick Chacon ~ 19th Century North American Christian Fundamentalism
8:45 Rosalind Moss ~ Barren Harvest of Denominationalism
9:45 Social

Saturday

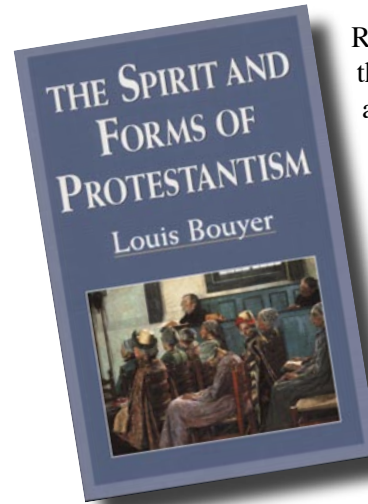
- 8:00 Morning Prayer
8:30 Mass
9:30 Breakfast
11:00 Bruce Sullivan ~ A Plea for Unity: The Stone – Campbell Movement
12:00 Msgr Frank Lane ~ Bardstown: The Catholic Faith West of the Alleghenies
1:00 Lunch
3:00 Patrick Madrid ~ Viva Christo Rey : Catholic Persecution in Mexico
4:00 Dr Paul Thigpen ~ The Road From Topeka to Rome: How the Pentecostal Movement has Brought Millions Closer to the Catholic Faith
5:00 Dinner
6:30 Marcus Grodi ~ Father John Thayer
7:30 Dr Ken Howell ~ Benedict XVI's Battle for History
8:30 Adoration

Sunday

- 7:30 Morning Prayer
8:00 Mass
9:30 Breakfast
11:00 Father Charles Connor ~ The Catholic Response
12:00 Panel Discussion
1:30 Finish
Morning Prayer each morning in the Main Room from the Magnificat (in registration package)
There is a ten-minute break between each talk
Confessions 1:30 – 3:30 & 5:30 – 7:30

Featured Resources

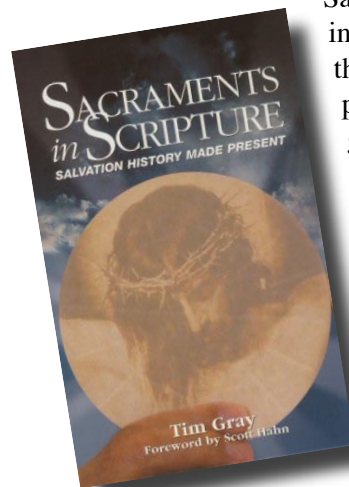
The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism by Louis Bouyer



Rev. Louis Bouyer shows the principles such as free and unmerited salvation, the sovereignty of God, justification by faith, and the sovereignty of Holy Scripture that inspired many 16th century Protestant reformers. He also discusses the weakening elements, such as denial of objective value of the sacraments, as well as and between Scripture and Church authority.

This book challenges Catholics and Protestants, alike, to understand essentials which both divide and unite them.

Sacraments *in* Scripture by Tim Gray



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

RECEIVE EITHER RESOURCE WITH ANY DONATION OF

\$35.00 OR MORE!

RECEIVE BOTH RESOURCES WITH ANY DONATION OF

\$50.00 OR MORE!

continued from page 2...

you” (Luke 22:19, RSV-CE) and that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). As I studied Church history, I was amazed to discover that through the first millennium of Christianity, the Church was consistent in its teaching of Christ’s sacrificial presence in the Eucharist. So why were these good people rejecting such a vital part of the Christian faith? One dear lady told me: “Preacher, we’ve always believed it’s just symbolic.” I discovered she was right. While the Holy Spirit’s presence was certainly in that church, I was not a priest, and no matter how much I desired, I was not able to give them the heavenly gifts of Christ’s body and blood.

The Music Drew Me...

While the theology of my parish was turning out to be rocky, our marriage was even rockier. I was failing miserably to love my wife as Christ loved the Church. In the midst of our struggles, I found comfort in the deep wisdom of the Church and its Scriptures. I spent countless hours reading the writings of the Church Fathers that we were assigned. One night, as I was studying in the basement of Duke Chapel, I heard the most beautiful music coming from above. It sounded like heaven. As I climbed the stairs, it was indeed heaven on earth: it was Holy Mass! That evening, the time-tested truth of Scripture and tradition unfolded right before my eyes. This evening was the Rite of Acceptance, and as the candidates went forward with their sponsors, I found myself thinking, “I want to be up there, I want to be Catholic!”

I saw no reason for abandoning the truth that was handed down by the apostles, but I thought that I might find something in my Reformation era Church History class that would show me where the truth had become corrupted. Think again! I spent long nights comparing Catholic beliefs to the beliefs of the Reformers and found that it was the Catholics whose doctrine was grounded in the teachings of the early Church and their interpretation of Scripture. It was the Reformers who relegated the wisdom of the early Church to second place, insisting on the new idea that salvation is by faith alone and the Bible alone is the sole rule of authority, despite the fact that the Scriptures themselves contradicted these two tenants. My heart grew heavier, but I put off seriously considering becoming Catholic because I knew it would cost me dearly.

Can We Really Do This?

Shortly after my second semester, my dear grandfather’s impending death brought me to Texas several times. In the midst of sorrowful circumstances, I got the opportunity to visit with some of my extended family, a few of whom were Catholic. During dinner one night, I became deeply immersed in a conversation on the seven sacraments with my cousin. At the end of the evening she gave me Scott and Kimberly Hahn’s *Rome Sweet Home* to read. Although I told

her I was going to put off reading it until “I read some other books,” I had scarcely left Texas before I gave in.

I was deeply touched by the Hahns’ story. As I was driving back from the airport, I felt an immense conviction to become Catholic. When I got home, I gave the book to my wife, who also read it in a day. It was then we began to ask the question, “If the Roman Catholic Church is the fullness of that one Church Jesus founded, why are we not a part of it?”

The Healing Power of Christ’s Presence

We soon began attending Saturday evening Mass together and it was there we discovered the love and presence of Jesus in a way we had never felt before. Together, we desired to receive Christ’s Flesh and Blood into our own bodies. We wanted Jesus to become a part of us and our marriage. When the Host was elevated, we stood in awe at the presence of our Lord. Here was the Holy Sacrifice, right in front of our eyes! Here was the victim and the eternal high priest! Here was the “Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Our eyes welled up with tears as goose bumps appeared on our arms. Deep inside, we felt something we had scarcely felt before. Deep inside, we knew this was where God wanted us. Deep inside, there was a peace that passes all understanding. We experienced this together, holding hands, as husband and wife. We had never been so spiritually bonded together.

Receiving Christ in His Fullness

The more we attended Mass, the more my heart ached. I didn’t want to leave the congregations I loved. I also knew I’d lose my job, the parsonage, and my Methodist scholarships to Duke. Yet every day God’s call grew stronger. Finally, I obeyed. A week later, Katie made the same decision. Although we faced opposition from some beloved family members, we were blessed with the loving pastoral guidance of our new spiritual father, Fr. Charles Breindel, the support of many friends, and even a response of love and understanding from the congregations I served. On December 9, 2007, I preached my last sermon as a Methodist minister. On December 15, 2007, the 3rd Sunday in Advent, our joy was made complete as we proclaimed our faith and received the sacred Flesh and precious Blood of our Lord at Sacred Heart Church in Danville, Virginia. Since deciding to enter the fullness of Christ’s Church, the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist has given us the power to melt away the concupiscence that so plagued our lives. Our lives together have become truly sacramental, for what we were missing, we are now receiving in abundance: the self giving love of the bridegroom which is perpetually offered in Christ’s “one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.”

Josh is completing his Master’s of Divinity Degree at Duke University and working part time at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Danville, Virginia.

The Coming Home Network
P.O. Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE
LIVE RADIO PROGRAM
HOSTED BY MARCUS GRODI
WITH JIM ANDERSON AND GUESTS

EVERY WEDNESDAY
2-3 PM EST

CHECK OUT OUR WEB SITE:
WWW.DEEPINSCRIPTURE.COM

AND JOIN THE DISCUSSION FORUM

May 2008

