



## May 2012 Newsletter

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Featured Resources .....	2
<i>Deep in Scripture</i> Schedule .....	3
EWTN's <i>The Journey Home</i> Schedule .....	4
<i>The Wisdom of Hindsight</i> by Marcus Grodi .....	9
Prayer List .....	15



# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## A “ConvolutEd” Pathway Home

By Peter Doane

Someone once pointed out to me that when one commits one's life to the Lord this journey seems to become “convoluted.” I would tend to agree. My journey back to the Catholic Church is one full of joy and pain, saints and sinners, angels and demons, and finally, a search for Jesus Christ and how to best serve Him. God's Chosen People wandered in the wilderness and took 40 years to get to the “Promised Land,” a journey that could have taken 40 days if there were no hindrances. Looking back I would also have to say that my “convoluted” journey has increased my faith and hope that the Lord, indeed, is in control.

### Falling Away From Catholicism

First of all, I was brought up in an “Irish-Catholic” home (oddly enough, my wife was brought up in an “Italian-Catholic” home). There were five children and I was the youngest. In the 1950s, I can still remember traveling around the neighborhood with my mother on Monday nights saying the rosary for the conversion of Russia. At that time my father was Protestant, but later became a Catholic during my early teens. My earliest memories include my parents leading us to pray on our knees as we started each day. I can remember “shooting baskets” in the neighborhood with friends. For

some reason, the discussion turned to what each of us wanted to be when, “we grew up.” I said to everyone: “I want to be a priest.”

After completing nine years in a Catholic grammar school, I went off to the local public high school in my hometown of Newark, New York. Over the next four years, my faith went through the normal changes that this period of individuation seems to bring. Unfortunately, I came through this period with an extreme distance from God that I had produced by my own thinking and actions. I went to college at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. There I chose a lifestyle that did not include the Faith that I had so cherished as a child. I was a part of the “60's Revolution” that rejected God, Church, and most of the traditional institutions that are a part of our national fabric. During this period of time, I found myself with a growing ache in my inner life, unsure of who I was and what constituted spiritual reality. I tried to fill that void to which St. Augustine so often referred in *The Confessions*. I found myself dealing with that emptiness through a lifestyle that totally rejected the Lord, whom I so loved in my early years. I was like Adam and Eve as they hid from God in the Garden, not wanting to face Him or their own sin and separation.

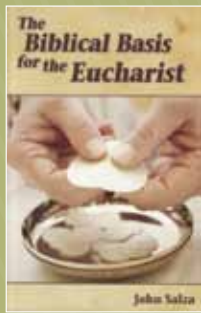
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Journeys Home

# FEATURED RESOURCES

## The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist

By John Salza



Whether you are defending, questioning, or exploring the role of the Eucharist in the Catholic Faith, you will come away from *The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist* with a crystal clear understanding of what the Church teaches and why, from a Scriptural perspective.

## Deep in Scripture Radio Program Special!



Matt Swaim, producer of the Son Rise Morning Show on EWTN, joins Marcus Grodi in this insightful *Deep in Scripture* radio program as they discuss the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Eucharist.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist*.

...Journeys Home Continued...

## The Lord's Saving Hand

At this point I was not only lost but also recoiling from my Lord and King. I was fully serving the Dark Side, taken in by a culture of drugs, sex, and rock 'n' roll—even attending Woodstock in the summer of 1969. I was living above a pizza parlor in the downtown district of this college town. I roomed with a guy from Long Island who shared the dark lifestyle that I had chosen. One night several of us were fraternizing on the street with other students. My roommate, Harold, came up to me and announced that his mother—who had never met me—had a dream that I was about to encounter personal destruction. When he shared that, a shutter coursed through my soul. Unknown to me, there was a battle being waged for my destiny and I was on the brink. A week later I took a psychedelic drug. During the experience, I became physically traumatized. My heart beat was erratic and I could neither stand up nor sit down. I knew I was in trouble and felt like I was losing it physically. To myself, I cried out to the Lord and told him I would change if He would help me. The Lord heard me and I immediately began to recover from whatever was happening to me physically. Several days later, I heard that there were bad drugs on the street. They had been laced with strychnine and two people had died from taking them. I soon forgot the incident and did not change as I had promised.

In January of 1971, some “Jesus Freaks” (as they were referred to then) came to our campus from Ohio State. Along with them was an acquaintance of mine that had “found the

Lord” and was giving a witness. One evening they came to the house I was living in with four others and shared with all of us about the Lord Jesus. As they shared, the Lord of my childhood came upon me. I knew He was calling me back. After the team of young evangelists left, I went upstairs and got on my knees. I called on the Lord Jesus and asked Him to forgive me. I could feel His presence clean me inside, and “something” tore out of me. As it left, it wreaked with darkness and stench. I felt like I could fly. Jesus had come and set me free. He had brought me “full circle” and I experienced a great deliverance and renewal. I was ready to serve God with abandon!

Immediately, I began to share the Gospel with any and all that I could. I went to my English class on Monday after my amazing weekend. Harriet, a close friend, said: “Peter, what happened to you? You look so healthy!” I was giving my testimony everywhere. Everyone I knew could see that something was very different with me. It even showed in my outward appearance.

## The Beginnings of Ministry

Over time, a group of young college students emerged who had similar encounters with Christ and a Bible study community began to form. I was seen as one of two leaders who would organize and lead this growing group of young Christians. Rather than attending an established church, we met at the chapel on campus and in dorm rooms and apartments.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

The fires of revival grew on the campus and young college students were turning to Jesus Christ as I had.

Our group continued to grow and transformed from a student organization to a college Christian community. There was a Protestant minister affiliated with the Congregational Church denomination (Plain Congregation) who began to offer guidance to our leadership team and through our relationship with him, our community became an affiliate with the Congregational Churches.

On the Feast of Pentecost, 1971, I found myself in a Pentecostal gathering in Columbus, Ohio. It was quite a meeting. The minister preached on the topic, "Have you had your personal Pentecost?" At the end of the gathering, one of the elders of the community invited anyone who wanted more of the Holy Spirit in their life to stay after for prayer. I, of course, volunteered. I wanted all of God; everything He offered. I went up and was prayed for. This marked the beginning of my involvement with the Charismatic Movement. This would become the second (the first being the Jesus Movement) of many *movements* that I would find myself involved with in my journey back to the Catholic Church. During this period, I, along with the other young people on campus, were relentless in sharing Christ everywhere we went. The results were dramatic. We saw non-Christian kids giving their life to Jesus, almost daily. As we met on campus, at Prout Chapel, there was standing room only at our gathering.

In the spring of 1973, I met Leslie Brooks, who became my wife one year later. She had grown up in an "Italian-Catholic" home with five children. She too had a deep renewal/encounter with the Lord in college while attending one of our campus meetings.

In 1974, I joined what became known as the Shepherding Movement. Interestingly enough, this was a very ecumenical group of leaders. The group included Catholic Charismatic leaders from Ann Arbor and South Bend. This period of focus and fellowship culminated in the summer of 1977 when 55,000 charismatics filled Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City. Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, and Non-denominational fellowships from all over the country gathered to lift up Jesus Christ. It was a deeply moving period. At this time, I saw the Catholic stream as one of many. I was glad they were a part of what I was a part of, yet there was still nothing in me that desired to return to the Catholic Church.

I was a young pastor, with a young wife and a young congregation. My wife was finishing her undergraduate program at Bowling Green and became pregnant a short time before she was to graduate. Our first child was born in December, 1975—7 weeks premature. She lived two days and then passed into God's arms. We were blessed that there was a Catholic doctor in the ambulance who providentially baptized her on the spot. Since then, God has blessed us with four healthy children, whom we raised to know and serve Him.

### Rediscovering the Church of my Youth

In 1977, we moved to San Jose, California where I pastored a new community that emphasized Christian community, relationships, ... *continued on page 4*



## DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

### On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

Airs: Wednesdays @ 2:00 PM ET

Encores: Thursdays @ 1:00 AM ET

Be sure to check out our *Deep in Scripture* website, [deepinscripture.com](http://deepinscripture.com), where you can:

- **Watch** the program online.
- **Join** in a live discussion during each show.
- **Find** more information about the guests and the Scriptures being discussed.
- **Access** archives from previous *Deep in Scripture* shows.

### Deep in Scripture Guests

#### May 2

Shane Kapler\*

#### May 9

Dr. George Harne\*

#### May 16

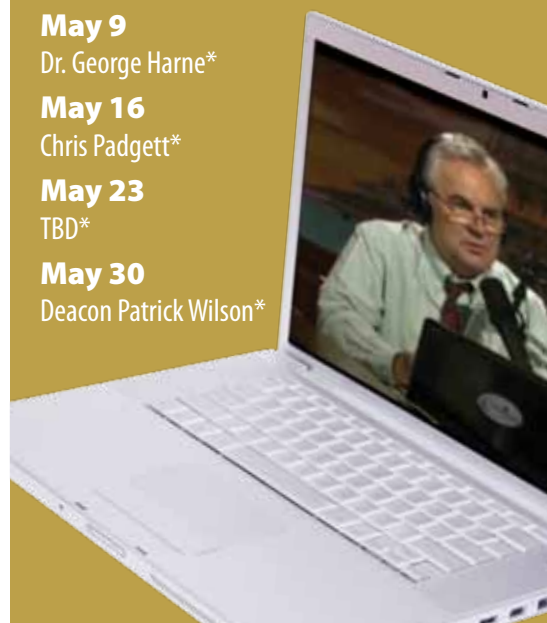
Chris Padgett\*

#### May 23

TBD\*

#### May 30

Deacon Patrick Wilson\*



\*This schedule is subject to change.



## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

on television and radio, hosted  
by Marcus Grodi, president of  
CHNetwork

### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET

Encores: Tuesdays 1:00 & 9:00 AM ET

Fridays 5:00 AM ET

Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET

Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET

Sundays 1:00 AM ET

### May 7

Dr. George Harné\*

*Former Anglican*

### May 14

Chris Padgett\*

*Former Baptist, Assembly of God, and Nazarene*

### May 21

The Journey Home International \*

### May 28

Deacon Patrick Wilson\*

*Former Methodist and Presbyterian*

*\*This schedule is subject to change.*



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

and accountability. Here we spent the next 13 years in pastoral ministry. We developed deep friendships, experienced joy and pain in family life (a tubal pregnancy and two miscarriages), and three more healthy children joined our son, James, who was born before our move. Also during this period of time, an important event in history took place: Pope John Paul II was chosen to lead the Catholic Church. From the beginning, I was attracted to the personality, teaching, and charisma of the new Pontiff. I found myself listening to his words and feeling a unique connection to him. I can remember exactly where I was when I heard the announcement that he had been shot and gravely wounded.

Coincidentally, around this time, I began to read the writings of the apostolic Fathers. These writings were those of the “disciples” of the Apostles. I became intrigued with their focus on topics like bishops, presbyters, deacons, the Eucharist, the Lord’s Day, and unity. There seemed to be a thread linking the ancient Faith to the present that I had been missing out on! It was like a new enzyme had been released into my system that catalyzed both a new quest for the ancient Church and a realization that I was not a part of it.

In the late 1980s, a decade where I traveled to Africa regularly to train Protestant pastors, two things happened that began to open my heart to my Catholic roots. First, my elderly dad came to live with us in San Jose. He was a committed Catholic Christian. I took him to Vigil Mass each Saturday. The Mass was attended by many involved with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Every time I attended that Mass, I found my heart lifted up and energized. I began to see a richness in the Mass that seemed to be absent in my own community of which I was the Senior Pastor. Secondly, as I discovered the Church Fathers in my theological readings, I began to realize the historical Church had an “ocean” full of writings that I was not aware of.

In August of 1989, while becoming increasingly attracted to the ancient Christian writings, we made a move from San Jose, California to Toledo, Ohio. I assumed the pastorate of a struggling evangelical community, with hopes of leading it to renewal and stabilization. In this community I began to put in place some of these ancient touchstones that I had studied and observed. We began to acknowledge the Christian calendar by honoring the Lord’s Day, practicing the disciplines within the seasons of Advent and Lent, and having special celebrations on Feast Days. In our worship service, I instituted Scripture readings, responsorials, intercessions, the sign of peace, and weekly communion and, at the end of our services, the exhortation “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” All of this was unheard of within the evangelical denomination, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, which I was now associated with. One of the college-age young men made the comment to me: “this community is becoming more like the Catholic Church every week!” Amazingly, with few exceptions, the community accepted and followed in this new way of worship. During this time I identified again with another movement, the convergent worship folks, led by Robert Webber, who called for the blending of the ancient and modern forms of worship.

From 1995 through 2002, my personal wrestling seemed to only increase. I had a growing sense that I was “playing church” while not really connecting with the ancient Faith. I read Cardinal John Henry Newman and even stud-

ied his sermons from *Plain and Parochial Sermons* to prepare for my own. In the summer of 1993, I highlighted a poignant sentence in Newman's classic, work the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*:

“and first, I will say, whatever comes of saying it, for I leave inferences to others, that for years I must have had something of an habitual notion, though it was latent, and had never led me to mistrust my own convictions, that my mind had not found its ultimate rest, and that in some sense or other I was on journey.”

The Lord was at work in me, slow, methodically, yet with persistence. At this time there was some kind of divine “hook” in my jaw. I looked at an opportunity offered me by the Reformed Episcopal Church, a group that separated from the American Episcopal Church in the 1800s. With the offer, I had the chance to move to Virginia and lead five of their churches. I turned the job down for family reasons but now I see that God was certainly keeping me from going in a wrong direction.

Because of the increased frustration with my context, along with pressures within my evangelical community, I decided to resign my evangelical pastorate in Toledo and move to Indianapolis in the summer of 2002. I had been leading Protestant communities for 29 years (since I was 23 years old) and I was “burned out,” confused, and seeking something that I was not sure what it would “look like.” Leslie and I had been a part of two denominations, and several major “movements” within Protestantism of the last 29 years: the Jesus Movement, the Charismatic Movement, the Faith Movement, the Shepherding Movement, the Christian School Movement, the Signs and Wonders Movement, the Promise Keeper's Movement, the Convergence Worship Movement, and the House Church Movement. Our journey is unique. Our destiny is not. Jesus was carefully guiding us to our destination: the Church of the Fathers.

## Making a Final Decision

When moving to Indianapolis, I had the impression that God was moving me not only geographically, but spiritually. I was still connected with and in good standing with my denomination, The Christian and Missionary Alliance. Leslie and I met with our district leaders several times, trying to put together this “new season” to which God had brought me. We considered “church planting” in several different areas of Indianapolis, including the inner city. At the time, I was teaching high school in the inner city at Indianapolis Public Schools. Leslie and I thought that we would move into the inner city in order to reach out to the hurting that I began to encounter in this neglected part of our society. As we looked toward initiating this kind of inner city ministry, my mother-in-law had taken a dramatic turn in her health, and Leslie, along with her siblings, needed to care for her on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. Therefore, we bought a house near her mom so that Leslie could be available to care for her. Coincidentally, the house was within a 3-minute walk of a Catholic parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Leslie's sister, herself a committed Catholic Christian, commented, “Maybe you all will end up at St. Elizabeth's.” We all had a quick laugh, ... continued on page 6



## SUPPORTING CHNETWORK JUST GOT EASIER!

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to [chnetwork.org/donate/](http://chnetwork.org/donate/) or complete the form below and mail to:

### CHNetwork

Attention: Ann Moore  
PO Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) if you have any questions or concerns.

Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ on auto-payment from my:

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Bank routing number (9-digit number) \_\_\_\_\_

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Account number \_\_\_\_\_

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Card number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration date \_\_\_\_\_

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Discover

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### Your information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_



## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**June 9, 2012**



Answer the Call Men's Conference  
Loretto, PA  
(814) 472-5903  
fellathedog@hotmail.com

**July 27-29, 2012**



Defending the Faith  
Steubenville, OH  
www.franciscanconferences.com  
(800) 437-8368

**August 3-5, 2012**



Midwest Catholic Family  
Conference  
Wichita, KS  
www.catholicfamilyconference.org  
(316) 618-9787



## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Please go to [chnetwork.org/resources](http://chnetwork.org/resources) to see current job listings. Or, if you know of an employment opportunity that you would like posted, please e-mail it to [maryp@chnetwork.org](mailto:maryp@chnetwork.org).

## NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to family, friends, and church groups. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are Copyright © 2012 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

but internally I was saying to myself, "I wonder how much of this is coincidence and how much is Divine Providence?" We attended Mass one Sunday and the celebrant was a Nigerian priest who was an associate at the parish. I previously had made several trips to Nigeria as well as hosted Nigerians in this country for the purpose of training in pastoral leadership. The Nigerian people had become very special to me. The "coincidence" continued to take shape in my thinking and meditations.

Leslie and I power-walked and prayed on a regular basis during this time. In the fall of 2007, we committed ourselves to pray, intensely, for one year, asking God if we should reenter the Catholic Church. Several divine appointments happened during that year that brought me to my final decision.

First of all, Leslie had steadfastly followed me all these years and had been a "faithful" pastor's wife. She knew the growing frustration I carried and sense of disconnect with our context. Since our move to Indianapolis she had been praying that God would lead us to the field of labor that He had ordained for us. Could the Catholic Church and the New Evangelization represent this field of labor where the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few?

Secondly, our youngest child, Abigail, who was a junior at Marian University, decided to begin the RCIA process at college. The words of Isaiah 11:6 rang in my head: "A child shall lead them." I looked at her materials every week and encouraged her with our full support and some "spiritual jealousy." Our entire family attended Easter Vigil that year as Abigail entered the Catholic Church. As a minister, I had baptized her several years before and now, here she was realizing the fullness of that Baptism. This was a powerful witness to Leslie and me.



Peter and Leslie with their family.

The third major event in that year of "seeking" was my connection with the Coming Home Network and a phone conversation with a staff member, Jim Anderson, in the summer of 2007. Jim and I knew several of the same people over the years of ministry. During our conversation he told me that Marcus Grodi had also attended Bowling Green State University and had been a member of Plain Congregational Church, the church that had sponsored our campus ministry and had given me spiritual guidance! Further,

Jim put my prayer needs in the next month's newsletter. A three-fold cord cannot easily be broken. These three events were answers to prayer and were catalytic to my final decision.

On my birthday in 2008 I announced to my family at my party that I was going "back" to the Catholic Church. Leslie was in full agreement. God had blessed us with a background and conviction that this was God's plan for us. He would use the years of experience and ministry, powerfully, as we "came home" to serve the Lord in the Faith of our upbringing. At 60 years old, I believed the Lord was renewing my calling, sharpening my vision, and connecting the "dots" that he had led me through the preceding years, movements and experiences.

### Back Home

We have been "back home" now since the Easter Vigil, 2009. Leslie and I feel as though we are postured to "apprehend that for which we have been apprehended" (Philippians 3:12). We are pressing on "toward the mark" (Phil.3 14). Just as we

gave ourselves to serve Jesus Christ over the past 37 years in various Protestant churches and movements, we now excitedly commit our lives in service to the Lord in the Catholic Church: our Mother, His Bride, the Body of Christ.

This is an interesting end to what began as excitement in discovering the Early Church Fathers in the late 1980s. However, it is not an end point to our journey but rather a fork in the road. I take my motto from Church Father St. Augustine in his

classic, *The Confessions*: "All the while, Lord, as I pondered these things you stood by me; I sighed and you heard me; I tossed to and fro and you steered me aright. I wandered down the wide road of the world, but you did not desert me." (Book VI.8)

Transitioning from being a non-Catholic minister to a Catholic layman has been a huge challenge in the "coming home process." My identity had been one of preacher and teacher, minister to the sick, conductor of marriages and funerals, and leader of councils. Nearly 30 years of "this is who I am" was now over. It was a crisis that I was not sure how to navigate. I sought the advice of the local parish priest, met with the leader of the diocesan deaconate program, spoke often with my dear wife, and prayed daily. The desire to understand my role as a lay Catholic brought us ... continued on page 8

“ All the while, Lord, as I pondered these things you stood by me; I sighed and you heard me; I tossed to and fro and you steered me aright. I wandered down the wide road of the world, but you did not desert me. ”

## UNSOLICITED MAIL

The CHNetwork would like to remind our members that we are unable to send unsolicited mail. Since our ministry exclusively responds to non-Catholic clergy and laity who initiate contact with us, we cannot add anyone to our mailing list or send materials unless they themselves first make a request. However, if you would like to have CHNetwork send materials with a gift card in your name, or if you have any questions about this policy, please contact our office at 740-450-1175.

## SHARE YOUR STORY

### SHARE YOUR STORY!

The CHNetwork always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to <http://chnetwork.org/converts> to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

## WWW.CHNETWORK.ORG

The CHNetwork invites you to visit our website where you can read the latest CHNetwork news, follow our blog, read conversion stories, watch videos, and join in discussions on our forum. Keep up to date with the CHNetwork and become more involved in our mission to assist men and women who are on the journey to the Catholic Church.



VISIT! SHARE! ENJOY!

## THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

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

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

to take several steps we believed the Lord led us towards. First of all, I enrolled into the Lay Degree Graduate program at St. Meinrad Seminary, Indiana. I thought this program would be one way to “sort out” my gifts and call in the context of the Catholic Church. I will hopefully complete this four-year program in the spring of 2013. Secondly, Leslie and I decided to get fully involved in our local parish, thinking that this would be the place, on a daily basis, where the Lord could begin to show us how we “fit.” So far this is working well. I have facilitated Bible studies, started a small church community movement within the church, joined the RCIA team, and have been chosen to serve on the Pastoral Council. We are meeting people, developing community, and having opportunities to teach within the Church. This has begun to give me hope that in the future God can use my experience in ministry in the Catholic Church.

Two years ago, Leslie and I sensed that God was calling us, in the long run, to serve the New Evangelization. We began to read, study, and talk to other Catholics who carried this focus as well. It seems that after that commitment was made, everywhere we turned the New Evangelization was before us. I founded a non-profit organization, the John Paul the Great Center for the New Evangelization, which would take the key ingredients that helped people come to Jesus Christ or come back to Him as I did, and successfully enter the Church.

Finally, I am coming to a new understanding of calling, vocation, and mission. The Church teaches us there are three states in this life: Lay, Clergy, and Religious. Each state has a God-shaped purpose that the other states cannot fulfill. Rather, each state stands to serve in its place while also serving the other states. We all carry the same foundational identity as members of the Body of Christ through our Baptism. So rather than looking to fulfill “my ministry,” which was our past focus, we now seek to discover the “work” that God has prepared for us and which lies within the vineyard of the Lord. Slowly, yet surly, Jesus is transforming me into a more complete “minister” as I seek to discharge the “fire of God” that burns within me. ■



Peter and his wife, Leslie, are actively involved with their local parish, leading Bible studies, developing small Christian communities, serving on the RCIA team, and, most importantly, celebrating Jesus Christ in the Eucharist on the Lord’s Day. In addition, they founded the John Paul the Great Center for the New Evangelization. Peter is currently taking classes at St. Meinrad Catholic Seminary in hopes of finishing his Master’s Degree in Theological Studies.

## BLOG

Please visit [www.chnetwork.org/blog](http://www.chnetwork.org/blog) to comment on and discuss this story!





Marcus Grodi

# The Wisdom of HINDSIGHT:

What we can learn from the experience of Father John Thayer

**F**or years, I've been fascinated with a little-known figure in American Church history: Father John Thayer (1758-1815). He served as chaplain to John Hancock during the American Revolution, was the first American born priest of Boston and missionary to Kentucky, and his 1798 Fourth of July sermon is included in the list of Great American Political Speeches. In my view, however, his most significant claim-to-fame is that he was the first American-born Protestant minister convert. He published the story of his conversion in 1787 (the first of its kind in American history) as *An Account of the Conversion of the Reverend John Thayer, Formerly a Protestant Minister of Boston Written by Himself* (which is available as a free download from our website).

His name appears in most history books covering the Catholic Church in America, but rarely with much detail, and often with a less than positive tone. One great American historian, Theodore Maynard, in his book *The Story of American Catholicism*, described Fr. Thayer as "A man of some ability, and no complaint could be brought about his morals. But he was 'difficult,' retaining much of the stern inflexibility of the Puritan minister."<sup>1</sup> Peter Guilday, in his *The Life and Times of John Carroll*, suggests that "Father Thayer was gifted with genius of no mediocre quality, and was a scholar as well as a wit; but, as one writer has expressed it [paraphrasing Maynard], 'not a little of the uncompromising Puritan spirit clung to him to the end.'"<sup>2</sup>

It is true that Fr. Thayer's bold, and apparently brash, convictions ruffled many feathers during the fourteen years he served as a Catholic priest in post-Revolutionary America. He particularly found himself embroiled in difficult conflicts during his final four years as a missionary in Kentucky, at a fledgling wilderness parish that has long had a reputation as a "troublesome parish."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the biggest cause of his troubles, though, was that, while most post-Revolutionary American Catholic leaders were focused on helping the newly liberated Catholics become fully incorporated Americans,

Thayer's primary "mission" was to help his countrymen become Catholic. In Thayer's published testimony, two years before he returned to America from Paris as an ordained Catholic priest, he expressed these convictions to the world:

*This is the prevailing wish, this is the only desire of my heart, to extend as much as lies in my power, the dominion of the true faith, which is now my joy and comfort. I am ambitious of nothing more; for this purpose I desire to return to my own country, in hopes, notwithstanding my unworthiness, to be the instrument of the conversion of my countrymen; and such is my conviction of the truth of the Roman Catholic Church, and my gratitude for the signal grace of being called to the true faith, that I would willingly seal it with my blood, if God would grant me the favor, and I doubt not but he would enable me to do it.*

Short of writing a lengthy biography, I would like to suggest for now that there is something very important we can learn from the experience of this first American-born Protestant clergy convert. I suggest this with the hindsight of 200 years, as well as the CHNetwork's eighteen years of working with other American Protestant clergy inquirers and converts. Certainly, there is a long list of blessings that accrued to American Catholicism due to Thayer's priestly ministry in post-Revolutionary America. He celebrated the first Masses in many New England towns, including Salem, MA, and his skillful and charitable apologetic publications in the Boston press were the first of their kind in American history. He also fought significant battles that eventually opened doors for successful Catholic ministries in Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, and Kentucky.

However, again with hindsight, is it possible that the biggest cause of his problems was not because of his "mercurial nature,"<sup>4</sup> or because he failed to leave his enthusiasm at the door, but rather simply because he became a priest rather than remaining a layman?

Now I generally do not think it appropriate for any of us to entertain the spurious question, "I wonder wheth-

... continued on page 10

<sup>1</sup> Page 176. <sup>2</sup> Page 425. <sup>3</sup> Ann Bolton Bevins, James R. O'Rourke. *That Troublesome Parish* (1985).

<sup>4</sup> C. Walker Gollar, "Father John Thayer: Catholic Antislavery Voice in the Kentucky Wilderness"

er my life would have been 'better' if I hadn't \_\_\_\_\_ or if I had \_\_\_\_\_?" Opening this unanswerable Pandora's Box is a subtle way of denying or questioning the constant yet invisible Hand of God in our lives. However, without denying this guiding plan of God, can we not pose the question whether his mission might have been more effectively accomplished if he had returned to America a Catholic layman?

Like so many today, most Protestants as well as Catholics in Thayer's time assumed that the only way to truly serve the Lord was in some kind of full-time, Church-supported, clerical ministry. Those around Thayer after his conversion assumed that the only way he could now serve the Church in America was as an ordained priest, not as a layman. What is interesting, though, is that it appears that this was not his assumption: rather, it seems that he was resolved to return to America, to fulfill his evangelistic convictions, as a lay missionary.

In 1781, with the American Revolution winding down, 23 year old John Thayer sailed to Europe to expand his education, with the apparent goal of returning to teach at Harvard College. There seems to be no evidence that his ambition was to continue as a Congregational minister. Then unexpectedly, after being greatly moved by the miracles associated with the death of the saint mendicant Benedict Joseph LaBré, Thayer was received into the Catholic Church in Rome in May, 1783. While in Rome, he met with Pope Pius VI and many cardinals and priests who received him with open arms and enthusiasm. With their encouragement, he returned to Paris where, with the pope's letter of introduction, he made contact with the Archbishop of Paris, the Papal Nuncio, and other Church hierarchy, as well as American Ambassador Benjamin Franklin.

The news of the conversion of this former Protestant minister spread throughout Europe. Since he appeared so chummy with the French, some of the Catholic clergy in England, still suffering under penal oppression, were a bit suspicious of his loyalties. A year after Thayer's conversion, Father Charles Plowden, a suppressed-Jesuit priest living at Weld castle in southern England,

wrote his long-time fellow ex-Jesuit friend John Carroll news about his fellow American:

*I am informed that Mr. Thayer the Bostonian convert mentioned in my last is highly commended by the French Archbishop at Paris, especially Pere Mat, whom you remember at Bologna by the name of Abbe Le Bon. Mr. Thayer is said to have no inclination to the Eccles. state, & to have extinguished his scheme of carrying missionaries to Boston...."<sup>5</sup>*

Fr. Plowden is not passing along first hand information, so the accuracy of his details may be slanted, possibly because he is convinced Thayer is in cahoots with the detested French, and therefore cannot be trusted (more evidence of this prejudice abounds in this and other letters). His mention of Thayer's "scheme of carrying missionaries to Boston," however, is an important admission, for it is the first recorded mention of what will remain Fr. Thayer's primary life-long ambition: to bring priests and nuns to America to promote the Catholic Faith to his countrymen.

It may be that after his meetings with Franklin and the Nuncio in January 1784, Thayer was feeling discouraged and impatient. His understanding of Catholic missions was only a few months old, while his life-long experience had been with independent missionaries, ordained, sent forth, and supported under the authority of local congregations. From childhood, Thayer certainly would have heard the stories of

John Eliot, the Puritan Apostle to the Indians, who had been instrumental in the conversion of the Massachusetts "praying" Indians a hundred years before Thayer's birth. The model of Eliot's bold independence to spread the Gospel may have planted the seed, possibly from childhood, of what a missionary was like.

It may have been out of his discouragement, therefore, that Thayer set aside as unnecessary any idea of seeking ordination to the priesthood as a qualification for returning to America as a missionary. Plowden alludes to this, but, more significantly, we catch a glimpse of this in an important letter Thayer himself wrote. The letter was written to the Vicar Apostolate of London, James Talbot, not long after Thayer's meetings with Franklin and the Papal Nuncio. This is the first known



St. Benedict Joseph LaBré

<sup>5</sup> April 4, 1784; Transcribed from copy of original, 6J1.

extant letter in Thayer's hand, and the first recorded instance of Thayer's own description of his conversion and dreams for his return to America, penned three years before the publication of his *Account*.

Prior to the American Revolution, all Catholics in the British Colonies were under the authority of the Vicar Apostolic of London. As a result of American independence, American Catholics were like orphans, without anyone to look to for leadership, other than directly to Rome. A similar problem arose for American members of the Anglican Church of England. They solved their dilemma, however, by forming their own new American-based church called the Episcopal Church of America, loyal to the Archbishop of Canterbury, yet independent. Faithful American Catholics, of course, could not nor would even consider such a notion. This would become a hotly debated issue amongst Ameri-

can Catholics, and even involved Benjamin Franklin and the American Congress.

For the new convert John Thayer, this would have been an issue to which he likely was oblivious. Before becoming a Catholic, as a life-long New Englander who had never met a Catholic or ever given the state of American Catholics the slightest thought, the issue most likely never crossed his mind. Now as a neophyte Catholic in Paris, he was mostly out of the loop of any of these discussions. Consequently, it is understandable that as he contemplated his future, he may have presumed that, until otherwise decided by Rome, the American mission was still under Vicar Apostolic Talbot.

Of all the archival primary source documents connected to the life of John Thayer, I believe that this letter to the Vicar Apostolic of London is the most important and revealing:

Most Rev'd Sir:

The writer of this letter is a native of Boston in America. After being a preacher in our heretical sect for more than two years, I came to Europe to gratify a strong thirst of useful knowledge. After a considerable time past in Paris & London, I went to Rome. Excited by a curiosity of being exactly informed of every thing in that city, I sought able persons to give me a full idea of the Catholic faith, which pleased me to such a degree, that touched by omnipotent grace, I've cheerfully embraced it at the cost of every apparent worldly interest. Burning with zeal to impart to others that felicity which I experience myself, I offered myself to the Chief Pontiff for missions in my country. The Pope sent me to his Nuncio at Paris, who thinks that the combination of my circumstances will cause too great eclat (In 17th c. French, this meant a splinter or fragment) tho' the greater part of my friends at Rome & in France think that this very combination would naturally open the mission. However, it is not for me to judge; I therefore submit myself to the Pope as to Christ.

As my desire of benefitting my countrymen is not extinguished by my incapacity of serving them in the manner that would appear the most efficacious, I think of going home in the Spring & of being missionary among my friends. The design of this letter, which I address you with Christian liberty, is to pray you'd with the faithful

...continued on page 12

of your acquaintance to furnish me with the most able controvertists & other books, such as short but faithful expositions of our doctrine, lives of the Saints, the best Catholic translations of the bible with what ever other books you may think adopted to remove prejudice & promote the great work. Surely you've a most ardent desire of enlightening that part of America (New England), which since it's establishment has been the most enamored enemy to the Catholic faith. Ignorance however has certainly been the cause, for the greatest sincerity & candour reigns among them. From such persons I hope great things, since they've all the dispositions preparatory for the operation of divine grace.

My confidence in God is great, tho' perhaps crosses are prepared for me; but crosses must precede the crown. I shall embark early in the Spring, for I've rested in Europe much longer than the time [fixed]. Considering the shortness of the time, you'll have the goodness to answer this by the first opportunity by the same channel by which you receive it.

I humbly [sp] recommend myself to your prayers & to those of your communion; particularly remember me in the holy Sacrifice. Whatever your zeal may excite you to do in this good cause, I must pray you to do at your expense, both for the books & freight, I being utterly unable to defray the smallest expense. Should you be disposed to correspond to my wishes, you'll have the goodness to mark the manner the most easy of receiving your favors, for I can't point out a place to receive them, not knowing yet where I shall embark.

I am, with all the respect due to your Sacred character,  
your most humble Servant, John Thayer.  
Paris, January 18, 1784.<sup>6</sup>

So much of what this new convert reveals in this letter connects with his future, as well as the struggles of hundreds of clergy converts of our own day. When he confesses to the Vicar Apostolic that "I've cheerfully embraced it at the cost of every apparent worldly interest," he is expressing in a nutshell what every clergy convert has always had to face when converting from the Protestant ministry to the Catholic Church: potential loss of vocation, abandonment of calling, and rejection by family, friends, and colleagues. It's likely that

Thayer had never met or even heard of another Protestant clergyman converting to Catholicism. Certainly there were some, primarily Anglican clergy. In fact, one of the Catholic priests arriving on the Ark and the Dove to establish the Maryland colony in 1654 was a former Anglican priest, but it's highly unlikely that Thayer ever heard of this. As far as we know, he was the first American-born Protestant clergyman to convert. All this to say that he had no previous models to follow, and though the Church hierarchy had dealt with Anglican

priest converts, they had never faced the conversion of an American Puritan minister.

Since John Thayer was not married, he would not have been barred from consideration for the priesthood. As a result of the modern Pastoral Provision granted in the 1980s and more recently the Anglican Ordinariate, today's married Anglican/Episcopalian clergy converts have the possibility of dispensation from the requirements of celibacy, but in Thayer's day this would not have been possible. Nonetheless, given all the other presumptions and prejudices of the time, it's understandable that Thayer assumed that his conversion could mean the loss of everything he knew or dreamt of doing.

When he states that he was offering himself "to the Chief Pontiff for missions in my country," we hear a clear and precise description of what he now believed God was calling him to do: not a call to the priesthood in general or to the diocesan/parish priesthood in particular, where his focus would be the sacramental ministry to Catholics, but rather to the missions where his focus would be the evangelistic outreach to his non-Catholic countrymen. This he states when he assures the Vicar Apostolic that "my desire of benefitting my countrymen is not extinguished by my incapacity of serving them in the manner that would appear the most efficacious." Since he essentially knew of no American community of needy Catholics, especially in New England, his primary vision was that of "being missionary among my friends," bringing to them for the first time the truth of the Catholic Faith. He believed that "Ignorance ... has certainly been the cause" of their life-long separation from the Church, not lack of faith or commitment, "for the greatest sincerity & candour reigns among them." As a result, he is anxious and fearlessly ready to start his mission, for from "such persons I hope great things, since they've all the dispositions preparatory for the operation of divine grace."

Nor was there the option of his willingness to present himself freely to an American bishop, to serve in

whatever capacity was needed, for there was not yet an American bishop. Father John Carroll would not be appointed by Rome as the Prefect Apostolic for another year, and frankly there would not have been reason for any mention of Carroll's name in any of Thayer's circles.

Consequently, there seems to have been no reason for Thayer to delay his return for further study or ordination to the priesthood. He was thinking "of going home in the Spring" to be essentially a lay "missioner among my friends." He does not seem to have been even thinking of starting a local Catholic church, or especially of being placed wherever needed at the

various scattered Catholic settlements in the south or west—which is what happened and proved to be outside his skills and temperament. No, he saw himself as a lay evangelist ready to "embark early in the Spring, for I've rested in Europe much longer than the time [fixed]."

There is also no indication that he was asking for or expecting any kind of financial support. He

was only asking for a donation of theological and devotional books that he could use and distribute in his missionary efforts (which Vicar Apostolic Talbot eventually did send to Boston for Thayer's use).

These are all key points to remember when anyone criticizes what happened to Fr. Thayer after he arrived in America in 1790, an ordained Catholic priest. What he will prove to be keenly effective at is exactly what, at this point, he believed God was calling him to do, while what he will be expected and commanded to do by the newly appointed Bishop Carroll will be the opposite—and as a parish priest, especially in rural or wilderness America, he will utterly and constantly fail, leading to discouragement, depression, and even a suspension of his faculties. Even when, in his letters to his Superior, he clearly admitted to his strengths and weaknesses, asking not to be placed in parish leadership, he, nonetheless, was given only parish assignments, for parish priests were essentially the only thing that Bishop Carroll needed given the needs of the American Catholic diaspora. Unfortunately, Fr. Thayer in many ways failed



Boston in the 1790s by Samuel Hill

... continued on page 14

as a parish priest, and to this day is remembered not for his successes, but for his failures.

And it was as if he already knew that this would happen, for to Vicar Apostolic Talbot of London he professed, "My confidence in God is great, tho' perhaps crosses are prepared for me; but crosses must precede the crown." Indeed, from the time he eventually set foot in America in 1790 to the moment he boarded a ship fourteen years later to return to England, a broken priest, his life was one continuous cross. All of this, however, he was willing to face because he was "burning with zeal to impart to others that felicity which I experience myself." Even after his failures in America, though, he returned to Europe to raise money to recruit and fund priests and religious to return to the American mission. After receiving back his faculties, he spent the remainder of his days a humble priest, in imitation of his patron, Benedict Joseph Labre. He died in 1815, with the reputation of a holy priest in the model of the Cure of Ars.

There is much that we can learn today from the experience of this "patron" of American clergy converts, but maybe most significantly, I believe that non-Catholic clergy inquirers and converts need to think very carefully as to whether the most obvious trajectory for their vocations is the Catholic priesthood. Instead, I believe they need to begin by focusing singularly on becoming faithful and holy Catholic lay men and women.

Jesus once told His hand-chosen Apostles, "When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so


that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14: 7-11). His Apostles would one day become the leaders of the fledgling Church. Yet, Jesus exhorted them to focus first on humbly pursuing holiness, receiving the Kingdom as children.

We become children in the family of God—the Body of Christ, the Church—through Baptism. Our primary calling is to become faithful, humble, submissive followers of Christ. If we come into the Catholic Church with a life-long non-Catholic heritage, like the life-long Puritan heritage of John Thayer, it takes a long-long time, sometimes many years, to fully understand what it means to live as a faithful Catholic—and to identify and then correct assumptions and eradicate habits from our past that may continue to plague us long into the future.


For this reason, I want to extend a caution: clergy inquirers and converts need to be careful not to presume that their Protestant training and ordinations now entitle them to automatic consideration

for Catholic ministry leadership. Their resumes may outline what they were able to do within a Protestant context, but it may not necessarily translate to what they can do in a Catholic context. It is amazing to what extent these two contexts are different!

Instead, clergy converts need to begin by recognizing that the vocation of a Catholic laymen is not a step down, but, by virtue of the sacrament of Confirmation, a step up! By humbly and willingly accepting the high call to be a Catholic laymen, convert clergy can then prove, in humility and love, whatever skills they have brought with them, so that, if God so leads, someone in



... I believe that non-Catholic clergy inquirers and converts ... need to begin by focusing singularly on becoming faithful and holy Catholic lay men and women.



parish or diocesan leadership may come to them, and invite them into leadership: "Friend, go up higher."

If he could, what might Father Thayer say, again with hindsight, to modern non-Catholic clergy inquirers and converts? Given what I've learned through my study of the successes and failures of his life, I believe he might give the same advice that Saint Paul gave to his fledgling associate bishop, Saint Titus: "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to

be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men" (Titus 3:1-2). I also believe he would second the advice of his Master: "When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place." There is not a one of us who can't use a double dose of humility. ■

## BLOG

Please visit [www.chnetwork.org/blog](http://www.chnetwork.org/blog) to comment on and discuss this article!

# Prayer List

## Clergy

■ For an Eastern Orthodox priest in Massachusetts, that he may come to accept the entirety of Sacred Tradition in communion with the successor of St. Peter.

■ For John, a Baptist minister in Illinois, that now that he knows that the Catholic Church is the true Church of Jesus, God would grant him the wisdom and prudence of how to proceed.

■ For Henry, a Pentecostal minister in Canada, that the Holy Spirit would guide his reading and his heart as he delves ever deeper into the truths of the ancient Church of the Apostles and prophets.

■ For Tim, a Fundamentalist seminarian in Illinois, that God would give him the courage to stand up for the truth of the Catholic Faith he is learning and to be open to the Father's vocation for him.

■ For a Baptist minister and his family in Maine, that God would give him the grace to follow the fullness of the truth wherever it leads him.

■ For Charles, a former Presbyterian minister in South Carolina, that he would be filled with the Lord's blessing in his new Catholic Faith.

■ For Ed, that Jesus would overcome his fears of the ramifications that may occur if he continues exploring the Catholic Church.

■ For Don, a Non-denominational minister in Virginia, that he may be drawn ever deeper into the heart of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.

■ For Matthew, an Anglican minister in California, that the guidance of his spiritual director would show him that he has a place in the Catholic Church.

## Lay

■ For Bob, as he undergoes treatment for prostate cancer, that Jesus be near to him during this difficult time.

■ For David and his wife, that their marriage be graced with God's presence as David feels drawn towards the Catholic Church without his wife's support.

■ For Amy, that her uncertainty about Catholic teachings melt away in the light of the Holy Spirit's guidance.

■ For Ruth, that Jesus gives her peace throughout her annulment process.



■ For Sue, a Calvinist, who is beginning to explore the teachings of the Catholic Church, that God give her answers to her questions.

■ For Patty's marriage situation to be resolved so that she may participate in the Sacraments instituted by Christ.

■ For Catherine, that she finds local support and fellowship as she journeys towards full communion with the See of St. Peter.

■ For a member who is encountering difficult decisions in his family on account of his becoming Catholic while his wife remains Evangelical.

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, both general and specific, of the *CHNetwork* and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to *CHNetwork* Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702. Or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org).

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

**The Coming Home Network International**

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# GET INVOLVED!

The Coming Home Network International encourages members to assist in our mission this month to help non-Catholic clergy and laity come home to the Catholic Church in the following ways:

1

Get the May 2012 Featured Resources, specifically designed to provide our members with excellent material to deepen their understanding of the Faith and in turn pass it along to non-Catholic family and friends.

For more information, see page 2 of this newsletter.

2

Make a copy of this newsletter and pass it along to someone you know who is not Catholic.



3

Spend time in Eucharistic adoration this month praying for the needs of the CHNetwork.

