



November 2009 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



My Conversion

—Mark McNeil

I am about to turn 40 years old. The older I get, the less inclined I am to speak about myself. I'd rather talk about Augustine, Aquinas, or someone else that time has vindicated their right to be heard. On the other hand, telling my story reveals to those who listen that the things I speak about are things that have guided the course of my life and truly reflect what is most meaningful to me. There is an enduring value, I think, to listening to the life-story of another. The more durable, coherent and compelling the discoveries of another turn out to be, the more meaningful and transforming they may turn out to be for another. Since my life has several significant "twists" and "turns," some find it at least curious that I have settled in the Roman Catholic Church. My arrival in the Catholic Church was neither quick nor easy. This arrival was not in the recent past. My initial choice to be Catholic and the present are separated by more than ten years. I think time has shown that my choice to be Catholic was neither hasty nor shallow. I hope you will find the following brief account helpful in your own journey.

In what follows I make a conscious attempt to express the development of my thinking in respect to Christian faith, culminating in my embracing Catholicism. Although I typically

tell stories of the persons and events that helped to challenge and direct my thinking, because of limitations of space, I have consciously chosen not to do that here. I apologize for not naming the many loved-ones, friends, students and theological sparring partners that have made my life what it is. Although not named, they fill my mind as I reflect on the past decades of my spiritual journey.

My Youth

When I reflect on my earliest memories of religious feelings and thoughts, four things come to mind: God, Christ, the Bible, and pride. Some explanation of each of these is in order.

Concerning God, I sincerely cannot recall a time that I did not have some sense of God. I don't recall a time when a reference to God would not have communicated something meaningful to my mind. This is especially interesting to me since I did not regularly attend church services as a child. My first experience of Christianity was attending a small Baptist church in our neighborhood. A bus would stop at our house and I, with my older sister, would travel to the church and sit through a children's service and then return home. I have some fond memories of those Sunday mornings. I remember hearing about

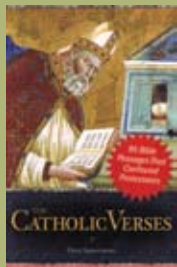
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Journeys Home

FEATURED RESOURCES

The Catholic Verses

By Dave Armstrong



Dave Armstrong explains 95 key Bible passages (in contrast to Luther's 95 theses) that confound all who would use Scripture to criticize the Catholic Church and her doctrines. These passages have drawn many serious believers—including

Armstrong—out of their Protestant congregations and into the Catholic Church.

A Father Who Keeps His Promises

Dr. Scott Hahn



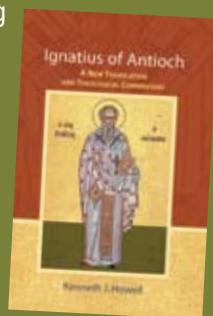
A Father Who Keeps His Promises explores God's covenantal love revealed to us through the Scriptures and explains how God patiently reaches out to us to restore us into relationship with his divine family. Join Scott Hahn as he follows the high adventure

of God's plan for the ages, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing down through the generations to the coming of Christ and the birth of the Church. You'll discover how the patient love of the Father revealed in the Bible is the same persistent love he has for you.

SPECIAL OFFER!

This fall, CHNI will be releasing the new expanded edition of Dr. Kenneth Howell's book *Ignatius of Antioch: A New Translation and Theological Commentary*. This new version will include his brand new translation and commentary of Ignatius' letters plus the letters of Polycarp. Therefore, we are offering a special

deal on the first edition of *Ignatius of Antioch: A New Translation and Theological Commentary*. This book is an outstanding resource on the Apostolic Fathers to read for yourself and to give away to friends. Order your copies of the first edition today at only \$5 each, while supplies last.



...Journeys Home Continued...

how much God loves us and how, even though we disappoint God by our sins, Jesus died for us on the cross two-thousand years ago.

My awareness of God, however, did not begin with those Sunday school classes. It is hard to explain, but I recall always being drawn to a kind of "cosmological" reasoning. There was something about the world that spoke of its dependence. On at least one occasion, this was almost a mystical awareness. It was as if everything around me became transparent and revealed its dependence on something else. I could not have articulated these thoughts in those days but they were very powerful to me. It was as if my mind found itself "slipping away" from everything I focused on in search of the reason for its being. This then prompted the age-old question: Why is there anything at all? The answer presented itself with no uncertainty: There must be a self-explained reality that is the ground or reason for the being of everything else. When the word "God" was used, then, I immediately connected that term with the supreme ground of all things. It was as if everything around me pointed to this supreme Source. This insight has affected me ever since and continues to shape my thoughts when I see a sunset, rest against a tree, or look into the face of another human person.

Concerning Christ, I mentioned already that I heard a simple presentation of the story of Jesus at a small Baptist church when I was only a small boy. That story captivated my young mind. To this day I find myself unable to turn away from Christ. I often tell my students that, in the final analysis, one must look into the face of Jesus and say either "yes" or "no." As for me, I simply cannot look into His face and say no. Although I have always had a great interest in "apologetics," or the defense of Christian faith in reply to alternative claims of truth, the fundamental choice to follow Christ is much more than the conclusion of a logical argument. The "choice" to love is, especially in its most powerful instances, overwhelming. The pull to love overcomes the obstacles "skeptics" may set in our way. Although I spent a good deal of time through the years studying about Christ and learning how to defend the orthodox way in which He is understood and explained, I have also come to believe that the root difference between the believer and unbeliever is found in how one responds to a deep, powerful, interior pull to love. I believe that the message of Christ is radically unique, compelling, moving, and satisfying to the deepest and most meaningful longings of the human mind and heart. I cannot recall a time, then, since I first learned of Christ, that I did not find myself strangely drawn to trust in Him and try to love in return for the love given to us in Him.

Concerning the Bible, it has intrigued me from the time my first copy was handed to me around Christmas of 1975. At barely six years of age, I found myself opening that Bible, hardly able to read, and trying to understand its contents. I thought, perhaps because this was the "book" that told the story of Christ, that great and profound mysteries were found in its pages. I spent a good deal of time during my teenage years memorizing large portions of Scripture. Early in my theological development I was drawn to a very high view of Scripture. My basic assumption was that the Bible is God's word and that it everywhere speaks the truth and, just as importantly, only the truth.



Given my orientation towards apologetics, I have always had a particular interest in understanding and communicating the *unity* of the biblical message. If the Bible is God’s word, I reasoned, it tells a unified story of God’s progressively unfolding plan in this world. As I look back on my theological development, it is interesting that, for many years, I learned the Bible and sought to find its unified message within the context of “dispensational premillennialism”. This approach, I later concluded, unjustifiably fragments the unity of the biblical story-line. Rather than such fragmentation, I found myself increasingly drawn to a covenantal approach to the Scriptures; one that sees the entire Bible as the progressive development of the one covenant made by God with Abraham and his descendents.

During much of my youth, I firmly believed that the Bible was perspicuous; that is, its meaning could be found through the hard work of studying context and word-meanings. I bought every commentary and biblical reference work I could find (or afford) and began learning the biblical languages. The more I learned, however, the more I began to face the uncomfortable fact that people much smarter than I understood the Bible very differently. I would often speak of and search for the “key” to properly interpreting the Bible. The problem, I found, is that there are too many “keys” that can be made to work when applied to the Bible. With enough work and skill, it is possible to make the Bible say many contradictory things. My respect and love of the Bible did not allow me to consider these thoughts for very long but they would rush forth with great force when I later learned of the Catholic understanding of the relationship between Scripture and the Church.

One danger of writing, I think, is that the writer is able to shape the impressions his readers will have by selectively informing them. This danger is especially acute when writing about one’s self. This problem is aggravated by the fact that we rarely have the ability to look at ourselves with the same objectivity we apply to others. In respect to my youth, I suspect that if I could go back in time and meet myself as a teenager, I would be disturbed by my exaggerated opinion of myself. I was frequently complimented and told I would be something great. I labored under the assumption that those listening to me speak cared as much about what I said as I. I think my greatest youthful weakness was my conviction that I could do anything and conquer any challenge and that I can be and should be the very best at what I cared most deeply about. Although not necessarily always bad, my ambition and pride caused me to think too little of others and too much of myself. I mention this unflattering piece of information because I think my gradual discovery of Catholicism coincided with a gradual realization that I depend on others, both past and present, much more deeply and profoundly than I ever realized. I came to see, in a life-changing way, that the most meaningful things I knew and believed were things I learned from others. When I later discovered the Catholic notion of Tradition, my youthful pride had already yielded to deep doubt about whether I should be listened to at all. I recall as a youth trying to develop “new” ways of reading the Bible but, now, I find myself much more anxious to listen and learn what “we” (that is, the Church through the centuries) understand the Scriptures to mean.

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NEWSLETTER COPIES



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



DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

Wednesdays **LIVE** at 2:00 PM ET

Encore: Wednesdays @ 9:00 PM ET

Sundays @ 7:00 AM ET



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

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

Deep in Scripture Guests for November:

November 4

Marc Ayers*

November 18

Tim Staples*

November 11

Bruce Fingerhut*

November 25

Fr. Jay Scott Newman*

*This schedule is subject to change





EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

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

TELEVISION

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

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

Thursdays 2:00 PM ET

Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

RADIO

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

Encores: Wednesdays 2:00 PM ET

Saturdays 7:00 PM ET

November 2

Dr. Kenneth Howell*

Former Presbyterian minister

November 9

Clyde Pearce*

Former Mormon bishop

November 16

*The Journey Home in Scandinavia **

November 23

David Mills*

Former Episcopalian

November 30

Corey & Katherine Huber*

Katherine-Former Episcopalian & Revert

Corey-Former Baptist

**This schedule is subject to change*

...Journeys Home Continued...

“Oneness” Pentecostalism

Although my first association with organized religion was with Baptists, it was not long before I became involved with the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostalism is known for its emphasis on spiritual gifts, especially “speaking in tongues.” Most Pentecostals have institutionalized their experience of speaking in tongues by understanding that experience as the “initial evidence” of receiving the Holy Spirit. I became involved with Pentecostalism because I learned of speaking in tongues and was intrigued by that and other “miraculous” spiritual experiences. Through a series of events, much too complicated to relate here, I came to embrace the initial evidence doctrine and had several experiences with speaking in tongues that changed the course of my religious experience.

I was not simply a Pentecostal, though. I was a Oneness Pentecostal. This requires some explanation. Pentecostalism is a twentieth-century movement that resulted from the development of a peculiar theology of the work of the Holy Spirit and the “gift” of speaking in tongues. The reasoning was fairly straightforward: In the Bible people spoke with tongues (i.e., languages they never learned) when they initially received the gift of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 2:4, 10:48). This “pattern” should be expected today. Most thought that the gift of the Holy Spirit was subsequent to the experience of “salvation” that comes through faith in Christ. Its purpose is to empower the Christian for the work of evangelizing the world.

Pentecostalism, from the start, saw itself as a renewal and reforming movement that sought to recover “lost” truths from early Christianity. They searched the Scriptures diligently in an effort to find patterns and truths that were abandoned or distorted through the centuries. Most of these “discoveries” were discarded and Pentecostalism became, for the most part, a revised synthesis of Wesleyan and Baptist ideas (reflecting its founders) with a heavy emphasis on spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues and divine healing.

During the early days of Pentecostalism, however, there was one unusual theological proposal that has survived in separate Pentecostal organizations. Although most Pentecostals are Trinitarians, a significant minority of the movement chose an anti-Trinitarian position. Questioning the Trinity as a valid theological synthesis of the biblical data grew out of a peculiar understanding of water baptism. Most Pentecostals understood baptism as an “ordinance” for adults declaring their conversion to Christ. The act of baptism was typically administered by full immersion using the traditional Trinitarian formula. Some claimed to have discovered, however, that baptism was not originally in the name of the Trinity. Instead, baptism in the New Testament was performed “in the name of Jesus” (e.g., Acts 2:38). This claim does not contradict the words of Matthew 28:19, they argued, since that text speaks of the *name* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The single “name” mentioned in that text is *Jesus*. Those not baptized with the name of Jesus uttered over them, then, are not correctly or validly baptized. Those emphasizing the “Jesus’ name” formula tended to understand baptism as much more than a declaration of conversion. Baptism was understood by many, including the major denominations that resulted from this early controversy, as the act of obedience that results in the forgiveness of sins. Baptism in Jesus’ name, then, is not optional but necessary.



It was not long before this controversy over baptism turned into a controversy over the nature of God. If Jesus is the “name” of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this leads naturally to a modalistic conception of God. The Father is simply one of the various modes, activities or roles of Jesus. For example, I am currently a father, son and husband yet only one person; similarly, God functions in various roles but is only one person. Since most Pentecostals adhered to the traditional understanding of God that affirmed three eternal divine Persons in the one nature of God, this was a controversy of massive significance. It not only had a bearing on how one will worship and think of God but also made a statement of how these Pentecostals saw themselves in relationship to the broader history of Christianity. Eventually, the Oneness Pentecostals, or the anti-Trinitarian groups, had to form their own organizations and expressions of faith.

Space is much too limited to describe or answer all the theological issues related to Oneness Pentecostalism. I’ve written a lengthy manuscript in which I do discuss the issues at great length. I believe all these positions are seriously flawed and quite answerable. Suffice it to say, though, this branch of Pentecostalism consciously chose to part ways with “traditional” Christianity on central questions of how we understand God and Christ as well as human salvation.

Through an unusual series of events, I found myself a Oneness Pentecostal for seven formative years of my youth. I was convinced during most of that time that we had the true understanding of the Bible and it was my goal to persuade as many people as I could that we were right. I did a good amount of preaching and teaching during those years and spent three years in a Oneness Bible college preparing for ministry, graduating in 1990.

Shortly after graduation, however, my theological convictions had developed to the point that I could no longer stay. The primary reason for this development is that I had turned most of my studies to the subject of the Trinity. My initial reason for this focus was that I wanted to thoroughly study the history and supposed scriptural bases for Trinitarian theology so that I could definitively show that it is false and contrary to the Scriptures. The conclusion of my study was that the Trinity is a more faithful synthesis of the biblical data than ours. There were certain verses of Scripture that simply could not be pressed into our theory without severe violence to their words (e.g., John 16:13, 17:5).

My study also impressed me deeply with the wisdom and insight of so many authors, past and present. I was particularly intrigued with the early Fathers of the Church. My fascination with the development of Christian theology in the early centuries opened my mind to areas of theology that I had never studied. Without describing all the specifics, I experienced a deep historical loneliness when I compared my faith with that of the early Fathers. Though I knew very little of Catholicism at the time, I couldn’t help noticing all the “Catholic” ideas that were interwoven into their writings (e.g., sacraments, tradition, apostolic succession). I was certainly not convinced that I should become a Catholic (the thought probably never crossed my mind) but I was convinced that I needed to draw closer to a historically conscious, creedal understanding of Christianity rather than the more individualistic approach that characterized Oneness Pentecostalism.

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MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

December 5, 2009

Prayer Breakfast Benefiting the Pilgrim
Center of Hope

Omni Hotel - San Antonio, TX

Tickets: 210-521-3377, trust@catholic.org, or
http://tinyurl.com/ComeSeeMarcus

December 11-12, 2009

Diocese of Toledo, OH

“History of the Catholic Church in America”

email: mccr@toledolink.com

January 9-16, 2010

KWKY Catholic Radio Cruise

7-Day Eastern Caribbean Cruise

www.catholicradiocruise.com

Be sure to tell them you heard about it from

The Coming Home Network by typing “CHN”

QUO VADIS NEWS

www.quovadis youth.org

The Coming Home Network International's youth apostolate Quo Vadis was established to provide peer support for the children of clergy of other faiths who are either on the journey to the Catholic Church or have already been received into the Church. If you are a young person who is interested in the Catholic faith or if you are a young person who would like to share your Catholic faith with others we invite you to discover Quo Vadis.

Interested in learning more?

Quo Vadis has a web site, www.quovadis youth.org with information about the network and ways to become involved. If you would like to learn more about Quo Vadis, or you have a question about the Catholic faith you are welcome to contact Mary Clare Piecynski.

Mary Clare Piecynski

maryp@chnetwork.org

740-450-1175 ext. 105



DEEP IN HISTORY MP3s

The Coming Home Network International is pleased to announce that MP3s of our 2003-2008 *Deep in History* conference talks are now available for download online. 2009 conference talks coming soon! Go to www.chresources.com to download the MP3s. Each talk costs \$5.

CHNI NEWSLETTERS BY EMAIL

The Coming Home Network International's monthly newsletter is now available by e-mail. Though *CHNI* members will always be able to receive the newsletter by regular mail, members now have the option to have it delivered to their inbox. Through e-mail the newsletter is more accessible to take with you, it is easier to forward onto friends who are not members, and it is simpler to make copies. As an added bonus, e-mail newsletters are in full color. *CHNI* members have the option to receive the newsletter both by e-mail, and through regular mail. To sign up to receive *The Coming Home Network International's* monthly newsletter by e-mail, please contact Rob Rodgers.

Rob Rodgers
rob@chnetwork.org
740-450-1175 ext. 109

...Journeys Home Continued...

From Pentecostalism to Catholicism

After some time of struggle and doubt about where to go, I turned to the Assemblies of God. The Assemblies is a Trinitarian Pentecostal denomination. There I found wonderful and receptive people. (I should add, I look back with fond thoughts on so many of those in every form of Christianity I've been privileged to journey with through the years.) I taught and preached for several years in several different churches, even doing pastoral work for two congregations. I continued my education earning bachelor's and master's degrees in Scripture. While still in the Assemblies, I decided to continue my study of historical and systematic theology at the Catholic seminary in Houston, Texas, eventually completing a second master's degree, this time in systematic theology. Even though the people in the Assemblies were friendly, supportive and receptive, I never felt completely comfortable with staying in that context. With a growing sense of history, tradition, sacraments and problems with some distinctive Protestant ideas, I began to look more seriously at the Catholic faith.

My theoretical interest in Catholicism turned into an existential challenge, however, when a young lady on the campus of the University of Texas asked me a question while I was participating in a panel discussion on Christian apologetics: "People constantly ask us to accept their version of 'truth.' I want to know from you why I should accept your interpretation of the Bible?" I do not recall how I answered her question. I do know that during my three-hour drive home that evening I was tormented by that question. Why should anyone listen to me? My mind rushed over all the possible answers to that question. The only one that continued to surface over and over again that had any real persuasive power was the one found in the early Fathers of the Church: The Christian faith that should be embraced is that passed along through unbroken succession from Christ through the Apostles and the Bishops that followed them. The reality of a true, public and objective continuity of teaching reaching back to the original source of our faith was far more compelling to my mind than the more "Gnostic" notion of "secret" revelation or private judgment.

To make matters worse, I began to go through a crisis regarding Scripture itself. I never wavered in my confidence that the Bible communicates God's truth but I found that it was rather difficult to think of the Bible without thinking of the way in which the Bible came to us in our time. I could not deny that the Bible was recognized, collected, and interpreted through a historical process. I also could not deny that I had always implicitly assumed the judgments of those involved in this historical process were correct. My love of the Bible, then, began to force me to acknowledge the divine guidance of the Church that passed along its contents through a long historical sequence. Since I wanted to embrace the Bible, I found myself increasingly forced to embrace the Church with succession from Christ and the Apostles as well.

This crisis of authority prompted an extended study of Catholic literature, old and new. I immersed myself in everything I could find. The more I studied Catholicism the more I discovered its consistency and beauty. Those things I thought were forbidding in Catholic faith became attractive when I saw them from within the Catholic world-view. I had long accepted inaccurate claims about Catholicism without sympathetically listening to the primary sources of

Catholic teaching. Now that I listened, I came to believe. I chose to embrace Catholic faith and enter the Church.

Perhaps it is fitting to mention that when this decision was made I had begun a new graduate program. In something of a shift in my studies, I chose to pursue understanding the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. My love of apologetics pushed me in that direction for quite some time. I would eventually complete a master's degree in philosophy, studying primarily ancient and medieval philosophy in dialog with Aquinas and the other great Catholic minds of the Middle Ages. I will be forever grateful for those years of studying Aquinas and others that provided further immersion into our great tradition. Not a day goes by that I do not draw from this deep well of insight that has continually confirmed my choice to embrace the Catholic faith.

Shortly after joining the Church, I began teaching at a wonderful Catholic school in Houston: Strake Jesuit College Preparatory. I could not hope for a more wonderful place to teach. I work with dedicated theology teachers and bright students who provide a community of faith and dialog that is always challenging and fulfilling. A few years later I began teaching part-time at the University of St. Thomas, an institution that has given much to me in my years of formal study in theology and philosophy. I consider it a true privilege to give something back to a school that has deeply impacted my life.

The Present

Perhaps it is appropriate to conclude this all-too-brief article with the observation that my story is still ongoing! What can I say about what being Catholic has meant to me over the last thirteen years or so since I decided to embrace this faith?

These years have been the most meaningful, fulfilling, trying, frustrating, challenging, and triumphant of my life. On one hand, my faith and convictions have been challenged in unique ways and, on the other hand, I have seen God work in truly astonishing and unexpected ways. The challenges of daily living in this world always make life interesting. I think I've seen enough, though, that I can make some general observations about how being Catholic has affected me.

First, I think being Catholic has caused me to reflect much more seriously on the universal purposes of God in this world. The very word "Catholic" speaks of the Church's universal mission. The great Catholic theologians have all sought to integrate the insights of human reason with the insights of our faith. I have grown to appreciate and share in this tradition and have become much more interested in understanding others. I see myself as a small part of a much larger unfolding plan, a plan I cannot fully grasp. Although that plan escapes our full intellectual grasp, our faith assures us that Christ is the key to its ultimate realization. I find it truly enriching to live within a tradition much bigger than myself that invites me to share in God's work here and now as well as strengthens my hope to share in the life to come.

Second, I have grown in my love of the liturgy. The Church's calendar invites us to journey through the seasons of the year, the mysteries of our faith, and the changing winds of daily life, with a true awareness of the infinite and timeless God. I see the liturgy as a true haven of stability in the midst of an unstable world. *...continued on page 8*



SPOUSES NETWORK

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

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

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

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

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

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTL'

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Third, I am apparently becoming something of a “softy”. During my youth, it was extremely rare for me to cry. Now I find my eyes welling with tears when I see a baby baptized or sing a gathering hymn that celebrates the fact that “in this place” every person is important and bears the divine image. Rather than always trying to learn something new, I now find much joy in reflecting more deeply on those things I know and experience on a regular basis. The mystery of love and our longing for happiness intrigue me each day as I seek to follow the way of Christ.

I am intrigued by the stories sometimes told by those narrowly escaping death. They often claim their lives flash before their mind’s eye. I sometimes think this happens at the moment of death. I suspect that when I breathe my last breath in this world, the faces of my loved ones and my students will flash before my mind’s eye. Even if I do not have a penny in my bank account, I will know that my life fulfilled its purpose when I see in one moment the faces of the thousands of lives into which I was privileged to place some parts of our wonderful faith. I also think that in that same moment I will see that, although I have changed much through the years, I have been faithful to the foundational convictions that awakened my heart and mind as a child: those pertaining to God, Christ, and the Scriptures. Along the road of life I discovered that I was best able to serve God, trust in Christ, and understand the biblical message within the context of the Catholic faith. Embracing the Catholic faith is not only intellectually satisfying, but it is also a way of life that makes sense of the many dimensions of human existence in this world. Living within the context of such an all-encompassing faith brings with it continual internal confirmation. Unlike my early days among the Baptists or Pentecostals, I now find myself unable to think of being anywhere else.

Of course, I am aware that I fall short all too often of the ideals suggested in these autobiographical reflections. It is comforting to know, however, that the history of our faith, reaching into the biblical texts themselves, is a long story of God’s patient workings with flawed people: people like me. To know ourselves is to live in dependence on God’s mercy and grace. The Catholic faith is a community, and grace, mercy and hope are reflected sacramentally in every Eucharistic celebration. I suppose this is the highest reason I am happy to call the Catholic Church my home. ■



Mark McNeil is currently the Department Chair of Theology at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory, where he has taught for ten years. He has earned master’s degrees in Scripture, theology and philosophy. Mark also teaches theology part-time at the University of St. Thomas and has spoken at parishes and conferences in the Houston area as well as throughout the country. He has also appeared twice on Eternal Word Television Network’s (EWTN) “Journeys Home” broadcast. Other talks by Mark McNeil are available from St. Joseph’s Communications in California. Mark is a convert to Roman Catholicism from Pentecostalism.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ For Paul, a former Anglican priest and his family who were recently received into the Catholic Church.

■ For Graham, a former Episcopal priest in Virginia, that God would guide him into working out His will in his life.

■ For Tom, a Presbyterian minister, and his wife in Arkansas, that the Lord Jesus would guide him to the fullness of faith, hope and charity in the holy Catholic Church.

■ For Geoff, an administrator at an Anglican seminary, who was recently received into the Ruthenian rite of the Catholic Church, and for his family, who remain Anglican, that the Holy Spirit may draw them all into perfect union with Christ their head.

■ For Noah, an Anglican seminarian, that the Lord Jesus would guide his heart and direct him to understand the fullness of the vocation to which he is being called.

■ For Daniel, an Eastern Orthodox seminarian, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to the answers to his questions concerning the Catholic faith.

■ For Michael, an Episcopal priest in the South, that with God's help he may successfully swim the Tiber.

■ For Mike, a United Methodist minister in Ohio, that the Lord Jesus would grant him the grace to return fully to the holy Catholic Church.

■ For a Christian and Missionary Alliance minister in the state of Washington, that he would be able to stop treading water as a Protestant and get aboard the Barque of St. Peter.

■ For Jeff, an Evangelical professor in Nebraska, that his studies of theology and history would be guided by the Spirit of grace and truth.

■ For Jeff, a former Baptist minister in Ohio, that the Lord would give him a complete healing from his surgery and also heal his relationship with the Catholic Church of Jesus.

■ For Eric, a United Methodist minister in Oklahoma, that he would find a good and faithful Catholic friend to guide him home to the Church of the apostles and martyrs.

■ For a Vineyard pastor in Missouri, that God would allow him to see that in becoming a Catholic Christian all that he now feels he is leaving behind will actually find fulfillment in the fullness of the Catholic faith.

■ For Gregg, a Non-denominational seminarian in Ohio, that all of the doctrinal issues that he perceives to be standing in the way to his coming into full communion with the Catholic Church may be totally and completely resolved to the glory of God the Father.

■ For Daniel, a United Brethren in Christ minister, that he would be able to crown his years of study of the Catholic Church by being able to experience the graces of the sacraments instituted by the Lord Jesus.

Layity

■ For Natalie, that her Catholic faith may increase and become stronger, and that she has the courage to spread the faith to those around her.

■ For financial security for Mark and emotional healing for Mark and Chris.

■ For Riley that he will be able to become Roman Catholic and that his wife will become open to joining him also. Also that he would receive healing from chronic pain.

■ For Nathan and Andrew, two young men who have drifted from the faith, that they may soon return.

■ For Heidi, that God may give her the courage and grace to follow his will.

■ For James's children and their return to the Catholic faith.

■ For Michael who is unemployed and is in danger of losing his home.

■ For Emily, Eric and Amnon to be open to the truth of the Catholic Church.

■ For Thomas and his health, that an ongoing infection will respond to antibiotics.

■ For Larry, that his family may forgive him for his past mistakes.

■ For all those who have died in the past year, may their souls rest in peace.

■ For Herman's family to return to the faith.

■ For the living and deceased members of Dorothy's family.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs in general and specific of the *CHNetwork*, its members, and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests & answers to:
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We use only first names to preserve anonymity.

The Early Church Fathers *I Never Saw* by Marcus Grodi

Whenever I reflect on my own conversion as well as that of *CHNI* members and the guests on *The Journey Home* program, the idea of “the verses we never saw” always rises to the top of the list of what opened our hearts to the Catholic Church. In other words, some Scripture, that we seemingly never noticed before or never clearly understood, all of a sudden caught our attention, or was pointed out to us, and *voilà*, we were on the “journey home.”

Also at the very top of that list must be placed the writings of the Early Church Fathers. Certainly an amazing majority of converts mention how reading the Early Church Fathers, either for the first time or for the first time with awareness, convinced them that the early Church was amazingly Catholic and certainly not Protestant!

With this in mind, I’d like to present a small sampling of quotes from these early Christian writers. This list of references that support the early presence of Catholic teaching and practice could be almost endless, but here are a few of those that were specifically influential in my own conversion.

The following quote certainly did not describe any form of Protestantism I knew. The author implies that the Apostles intended for the Church to be led by bishops who would then be succeeded by other bishops, as apposed to individuals who merely “sensed” that God was calling them into ministry or to start their own church or for a random group of believers to bond together and elect their leader. Here we see the early assumption of a continuous Apostolic Succession:

*“Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have **already been** mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved **men should** succeed to their ministry.”*

—**St. Clement of Rome**
Letter to the Corinthians, 44:1-2, c. AD 80

There is a lot in the next quote that is certainly not Protestant: abandoning the bishop, his presbytery of priests, and his deacons, meant abandoning the “Catholic Church” (the first recorded use of this title). And what is the significance of a “valid” Eucharist? Does this imply that there were Christians celebrating the Eucharist, or maybe calling it the Lord’s Supper, on their own apart from a bishop’s permission or authority? What difference does this make, if it was only “symbolic”?

*“You must follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would **the Apostles**. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of **concern** to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by **the bishop**, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there, just **as wherever** Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”*

—**St. Ignatius of Antioch**
Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8:1-2, AD 107

Does the following sound like the trajectory for today’s thousands of independent denominations, each with their own set of beliefs and practices? Or rather is the assumption that there was one Church, with “one soul and one and the same heart,” spread out as far as the one Gospel message (the Tradition) had reached:

*“The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although she is disseminated throughout **the whole** world, yet guarded it, as if she occupied but one house. She **likewise** believes these things just **as if** she had but one soul and one and the same heart and harmoniously she proclaims them and **teaches them** and hands them down, as if she possessed but one mouth. For, while the languages of the **world are** diverse, nevertheless, the authority of the Tradition is one and the same.”*

—**St. Irenaeus**
Against Heresies 1, 10, 2, c. AD 190

Everything in the next two quotes conforms with Catholic doctrine and practice concerning Baptism, the Eucharist, and the acceptance of Church teaching for reception of the sacraments; as a Protestant, I had disavowed nearly all of this, preaching against it, and explaining it otherwise:

*“They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is **the Flesh** of our Savior Jesus Christ, Flesh which suffered for our **sins** and which the Father, in His goodness, **raised** up again.”*

—**St. Ignatius of Antioch**
Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 7:1, AD 107

*“We **call** this food Eucharist; and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes **our teaching** to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the **remission** of sins and for **regeneration**, and is thereby living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread nor common **drink do** we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and **had both flesh** and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been **made into** the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood **and flesh** is nurtured, is both **the flesh** and the blood of that incarnated Jesus.”*

—**St. Justin Martyr**
First Apology 66, A.D. 151

The majority of conservative scholars—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—throughout Christian history have accepted that the author of the following letter was the bishop of Rome, probably the fourth, with Saint Peter being the first. The significance of this particular quote, therefore: What is the bishop of Rome, Italy, doing expecting obedience of a church in Corinth, Greece? Though Greece at this time was under Roman control, still there was no reason to expect a leader of a religious sect in Rome to have any clout over a similar group of religious sectarians in Greece, unless that leader was a bishop with authority over them.

"Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and misfortunes which have befallen us, we **must acknowledge** that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in **dispute among** you, beloved . . . Accept our counsel, and you will have nothing to regret. . . If **anyone** disobey **the things** which have been said by Him through us, let them know that they will involve themselves **in transgression** and **in no small danger**. . . You will afford us joy and gladness if, being obedient to **the things** which we have written through the Holy Spirit, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy."

—**St. Clement of Rome**

Letter to the Corinthians, 1: 58–59, 63, A.D. 80

Ignatius, who was from the East, wrote seven letters in all to seven churches, but it was only in his letter to the church in Rome, quoted below, that he expressed such exalted praise of the bishop!

"Ignatius. . . to the church also which holds the presidency in the place of the country of the Romans, **worthy** of God, worthy of honor, worthy of **blessing**, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you hold the presidency in love, named after Christ and named after **the Father**."

—**St. Ignatius of Antioch**

Letter to the Romans, 1:1, A.D. 110

Irenaeus, a bishop from the region of France, who learned his faith from Polycarp, who learned his faith from John, demonstrates below the assumption of his day: that all churches must agree with the Church of Rome. How would a Protestant have to re-write this?

"It is possible, then, for every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition **of the** Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position **to enumerate** those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our **own times**. . . But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the Churches, we shall **confound** all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through **blindness** and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by **pointing out** here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, **founded and** organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has **the tradition** and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. **For with** this Church, because of its superior origin, all Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in **the whole** world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition."

—**St. Irenaeus**

Against Heresies, 3, 3, 1-2, c. AD 190

What most impressed me about the next quote is that, as John Henry Cardinal Newman pointed out in his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, this defense of the primacy of the bishop of Rome, expressed rhetorically not defensively, predates by nearly a hundred years the conciliar definitions of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ!

"The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' He says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build **my Church**'. . . On him He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; **and although** He assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet He founded a single chair, and He **established by** His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that **also which** Peter was; but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one **Church and** one chair. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the Apostles **in single-minded** accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he **imagine** that he still holds the faith? If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still **be confident** that he is in the Church?"

—**St. Cyprian of Carthage**

The Unity of the Catholic Church, 1st edition, A.D. 251

The following two quotes from very influential Churchmen of the fourth century address the sacrilege of schism from the Church established by Jesus in his Apostles centered around Saint Peter:

"(T)hey have not the succession of Peter, who hold not the chair of Peter, which they rend by **wicked schism**; and this, too, they do, wickedly denying that sins can be forgiven even in the Church, whereas **it was** said to Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and **whatsoever** thou **shalt bind** on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven." And the vessel of divine election himself said: "If ye have forgiven **anything** to any one, I **forgive** also, for what I have forgiven I have done it for your sakes in the person of Christ."

—**St. Ambrose of Milan**

On Penance, Book One, Ch. VII, v. 33, c. A.D. 390

"There is nothing more serious than the sacrilege of schism because there is no just cause for **severing the** unity of the Church."

—**St. Augustine**

Treatise On Baptism Against the Donatists, Bk 5, Ch. 1, A.D. 400

Finally, this last quote from the early second century beckons to those outside the Church to come home:

"For as many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. And as many as shall, in **the exercise** of repentance, return into the unity of the Church, these, too, shall belong to God, that they **may live** according to Jesus Christ. Do not err, my brethren. If any man follows him that makes a schism **in the** Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If any one walks according to a strange opinion, **he agrees** not with the passion of Christ."

—**St. Ignatius of Antioch**

Letter to the Philadelphians, 3.2, ca. A.D. 110



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