



## November 2010 Newsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic *By David B. Currie*

The day President John F. Kennedy was shot is one of my most vivid childhood memories. I was in sixth grade playing on the playground when the rumors started. Just before the dismissal bell at the end of the day, the principal made the announcement over the PA system: JFK had been assassinated.

School was dismissed in eerie silence. Tears welled up in my eyes as I walked the half mile home that afternoon. My sorrow was almost overwhelming for a sixth-grader, not only because our President was dead, but primarily because in my heart of hearts I believed that he was in hell.

He was a Catholic, and I was a Christian fundamentalist.

I was the second child in a family of four children, the only boy. Since my father was a fundamentalist preacher, I was what people often called a “PK” (preacher’s kid). My parents had met at Houghton College after my mother transferred there from Nyack Bible Institute in New York. They returned to Chicago and were married by A. W. Tozer, a well-known fundamentalist author who was also their pastor. I was born while my father was attending Dallas Theological Seminary. At various times both of my parents taught at Moody Bible Institute.

I have fond memories of sitting in church every Sunday listening to my father preach. Through him I had an education in theology before I ever attended

seminary. Every Sunday we attended church for Sunday school, morning worship, evening worship, and youth group. We also faithfully attended Wednesday prayer meeting and Friday youth group each week. Our entire lives revolved around our church.

The only annual religious celebrations our church observed were Christmas and Easter. Other than those two holidays, I had never even heard of a “church calendar” that recognized the events of the Incarnation every year. We did celebrate certain secular holidays, however, such as Mother’s Day.

We were called “fundamentalists” because we believed in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Fundamentalism as a theological movement had been formulated in reaction to the rise of modernism in Protestant theology around the beginning of the twentieth century. We felt that it was important that we be clear on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, as well as the truths of Christ’s Deity, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and imminent second coming to set up His earthly kingdom. (The last of these beliefs is known as “premillennialism.”)

Although we believed that fundamentalist Christianity predated the Reformation, we still accepted the twin pillars of the Reformation: *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone).

... continued on page 2

*Journeys Home*

## FEATURED RESOURCES

### Rapture: The End-Times Error That Leaves the Bible Behind

By David Currie

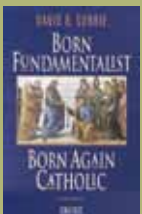


Many people believe that one day all true Christians will suddenly be snatched up to heaven. The unfortunate souls left behind by this “rapture” will endure seven horrible years of tribulation, at the end of which Christ will return to earth for a glorious thousand-year reign. In this careful and thorough scriptural study of the rapture, Currie demonstrates why accepting the Bible means rejecting the notion of the rapture. Reading this book will make Scripture, prophecy, and history come alive, and demonstrate how by opening your Bible you’ll find that God’s plan for the future of the world is not filled with darkness and disaster, but with light, mercy and hope. (*Sophia*, 2003)

**Please return the envelope enclosed with your newsletter to receive either book with a donation of \$35 or more, or both books with a donation of \$50 or more.**

### Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic

By David Currie



This book was written to explain to the author’s fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant friends and family why he became a Catholic. Currie presents a lucid, systematic and intelligible account of the reasons for his conversion to the ancient Church that Christ founded. He gives a detailed discussion of the important theological and doctrinal beliefs Catholics and evangelicals hold in common, as well as the key doctrines that separate us, particularly the Eucharist, the Pope and Mary. (*Ignatius*, 1996)

You may also order these and other resources by calling (740) 450-1175 or by going to [www.chresources.com](http://www.chresources.com)

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

A person became a Christian, we insisted, by believing that Christ died to pay the penalty of sin, admitting that all his own efforts at heaven were useless, and accepting Christ as his personal Savior. A single prayer was the only prerequisite for a “personal relationship” with God.

On a practical level, being fundamentalist meant keeping myself separate from the evils of the world. As such I did not dance, attend movie theaters or the ballet, use tobacco, drink alcohol, swear, play cards, gamble, or date non-fundamentalists. (Our Southern counterparts also forbade males and females to swim together.) I was almost thirty when I first stepped into a tavern. When I took my own children to see old Walt Disney reruns, I was seeing the movies for the first time.

The adults around me lived up to these standards, and their example made it easier to live this way. I never detected any of the hypocrisy in my parents that the major media tried to portray within fundamentalism. My parents taught me that commitment to the truth was always worth any sacrifice.

### Views on the Catholic Faith

I was taught always to be polite and neighborly to Catholics and other people we considered to be non-Christians. Yet always we had the desire to see them some day become true believers like us. I was trained in how to turn a friendly conversation into one in which I could share the gospel. When I was in a social situation and failed to accomplish this goal, I felt a twinge of remorse, or even guilt.

Our worldview divided the world into very neat categories. Fundamentalists were the true Christians like those of the early Church. Liberals questioned the fundamentals of the faith. This group included most non-fundamentalist Protestants. Liberals might make it to heaven, but it was rather unlikely. It was bad to be a liberal, but it was much worse to be a Roman Catholic.


Catholics were not even really Christians, we believed, because they did not understand that salvation was by faith alone. We believed Catholics were going to hell because they tried to earn their salvation by good works rather than trusting only in the finished work of Christ on the Cross. No one was good enough to earn salvation. We could prove that from the Bible.

Most converts to fundamentalism were former Catholics. Although they were not saved, at least Catholics could be convinced from the Bible that they needed to be.

The last category was made up of those people who were total unbelievers. There weren’t that many of them around. I met my first atheist during my junior year in high school.

All through history, we believed, God had preserved a remnant of people who protected the truth just as we fundamentalists did now. It was easy to see that the Roman Catholic Church did not contain these believers. All one had to do was look at their beliefs.

Didn’t any Catholics ever read their Bible? We were convinced that so much of what they believed was in direct opposition to God’s Word. (I had never actually read any Catholic theology for myself, but nonetheless I was sure that I knew what Catholics believed.) We seldom pondered the many areas of agreement we had with Catholics, such as the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth, and the inspiration of Scripture.



It has been said that few people disagree with what the Church actually teaches, while there are multitudes who disagree with what they mistakenly think she teaches. I fit into the second category, finding offensive many teachings that I thought were Catholic.

I thought it was obvious that Mary had not remained a virgin after Christ's birth, since the Bible mentions the brothers of Jesus. I could see no basis for a belief in the Assumption or the Immaculate Conception. The view of Mary as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix seemed to lower the role of Christ as our sole redeemer and mediator.

Catholic prayers to saints and veneration of images and relics also seemed to impinge on the authority of Christ. The belief that our own works were involved in our salvation seemed to fly in the face of Bible verses I had memorized as a child. How could water baptism be essential to our regeneration? That seemed too physical, too superstitious, too medieval to be true.

Purgatory flew in the face of Christ's finished work on the Cross, as did the sacrifice of the Mass. Everyone knew that indulgences had proved to be so susceptible to manipulation. The idea that a mere man, the pope, could be infallible — well, that idea was hardly worth addressing. The few Catholics that I did know did not even seem to believe that idea.

The practice of adoring a wafer of bread and chalice of wine seemed to be as foreign to true Christianity as anything of which I could conceive. I would never have addressed any non-relative as Father, especially a priest who had never married and had children of his own. Why would anyone confess their sins to a mere mortal when they could go directly to God and be forgiven with so much less trouble?

Everyone whom I respected was convinced that the Catholics had inserted books into their Bible to bolster these false beliefs. With their Traditions, the Catholic Church belittled scriptural authority.

As is evident, there was very little distinctive to the Catholic faith that I had not been trained to reject. But what made things even worse were lukewarm Catholics. It seemed that Catholics lacked any deep commitment to their beliefs. Was it because they did not undergo adult baptism?

## Baptism

In fundamentalism, babies were never baptized. Baptism was not a sacrament that actually changed someone. Nor did it bestow anything. Baptism was merely an ordinance that we did as adults

for one reason: to show our obedience to Christ's command. Since a baby could never do that, it was reserved for teenagers and adults.

I remember being baptized by my father at age 14. I publicly announced my faith in Christ, and he baptized me in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. I was then completely immersed in what I recall was extremely cold water.

In the years leading up to my baptism, I had answered numerous "altar calls." An altar call was frequently given at the end of a service. While singing a hymn, people in the congregation were urged to walk down to the front of the aisle and meet with an elder of the church. At that time, he would be led in prayer to receive Christ as personal savior.

The catch 22 was this: How did you know whether your faith was strong enough to save you? As a child, I repeatedly would hear the altar call and wonder, "What if I was not really sincere last time?" The best solution was to go down again and make sure. Since faith was all it took to be saved, it was important to be sure that the faith you mustered up was genuine!

It was sometime after becoming Catholic that I realized my baptism had been a turning point. Although it was too subtle to notice at the time, in hindsight I realized that my relationship with God had turned a corner at my baptism. Before it, I had continually wondered if my faith was strong enough, and walked the aisle in an effort to make sure. After my baptism, I had a deep assurance that God was my loving Father. I no longer doubted that He wanted me to go to heaven even more than I did myself.

Without knowing it at the time, I had experienced my first sacrament. God had imprinted my soul with His mark. I was His.

It would take me decades before I would appreciate this truth, but God had given me the grace of faith through a sacrament. I did not totally understand the sacrament (who does?), but I did want to be baptized in accordance with Christ's command. In His grace, God had carried me the rest of the way.

Years later, I was amazed that the Church steadfastly refused to rebaptize me after investigating my initial baptism. As a fundamentalist, I had seen many Catholics rebaptized when they left the Catholic Church. In seminary, I was taught that rebaptizing Catholic converts was necessary.

## Seminary

The seminary I attended was evangelical Protestant. Perhaps I should define terms here. Within a few generations after the emergence of the fundamentalist movement, many fundamentalists had adopted for themselves the name ... continued on page 4

“How did you know whether your faith was strong enough to save you?”





## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

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

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET  
Encores: Tuesdays 1:00 & 9:00 AM ET, Thursdays  
2:00 PM ET, & Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

### November 1

Richard Lane, *Former Lutheran\**

### November 8

Peggy Bowes, *Revert\**

### November 15

*The Journey Home* in Scandinavia\*

### November 22

Dr. Peter Williamson, *Former Presbyterian\**

### November 29

Barry Metzentine, *Former Mormon\**

*\*This schedule is subject to change*

## DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

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

For more information and a link to watch the program  
LIVE online go to [www.deepinscripture.com](http://www.deepinscripture.com)

### Deep in Scripture Guests

#### November 3

Dr. Peter Williamson\*

#### November 17

Paul & Carol Quist\*

#### November 10

TBD\*

#### November 24

TBD\*

*\*This schedule is subject to change*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

“evangelicals” instead. This “evangelicalism” became in certain ways theologically broader than fundamentalism and more accepting of modern culture. Many evangelicals laid aside the strict fundamentalist rules against attending the theater, playing cards, and the like.

I met some wonderful professors and fellow students at the seminary. I learned a great deal, but some lessons stuck with me even after I left.

First, my Church history class was taught by a devout Presbyterian. I came away from the course with the distinct impression that the Protestant Reformation was very complex. There were important political forces at play that overshadowed any theological disagreements.

This fracturing of Christianity had continued right down into our own day. I had seen congregations split over “theological issues.” But when all the facts came to light, a different story usually emerged. There were political disagreements in these congregations that were at least as important as the theological. There would be two strong-willed men, or two groups of men, that simply chose to split a congregation rather than submit to any authority. Theology was many times the public justification, but certainly not the entire reason.

I also discovered that when Protestants study early Church history, they rarely read the primary sources at length. We read a great many comments about what the early Church Fathers believed. But any actual writings by the Fathers were read in snippets.

I later found what I thought might be a large part of the reason why. When


I read the Fathers on my own, I came to the distinct impression that they were thoroughly sacramental and thoroughly obedient to a hierarchy already existent within the Church. In other words, they were not Protestants, evangelicals, or fundamentalists. The early Fathers had been thoroughly Catholic.

I found the theological terrain within evangelicalism in crisis. During college, I had majored in philosophy. I had come to the point where I no longer considered myself a fundamentalist. The rigidity of its theology and the lack of charity were exhibited most clearly in its doctrine of “separation.” But overall, I had just come to disagree with too much that fundamentalists held important.

In seminary, however, I found that evangelicalism was “all over the map.” There were disagreements about everything even within the seminary itself. Some of the matters of disagreement were perhaps understandable: predestination, premillennialism, the ordinances of the church. But other issues seemed to be basic enough that there should have been some semblance of consistency. There was not.

The most disturbing disagreements centered on the many Bible passages that had no plausible “Protestant” explanation. I had tucked some of them in the back of my mind before seminary. I was sure I would discover the answers to these passages. But rather than finding them answered, I found myself with a longer and longer list as I progressed through my training.

“ I also discovered that when Protestants study early Church history, they rarely read the primary sources at length. ”



I was surrounded by the brightest and best that evangelicalism had to offer. My professors came from many different Protestant traditions. But none of them had a satisfying interpretation of these passages — even though these verses were in the one Book that they all agreed contained all they needed for salvation.

## Suffering

Perhaps two examples might be helpful to illustrate this dilemma.

First, how an all-loving and all-powerful God can allow human suffering has been a topic of discussion since long before the biblical character Job suffered. As a college philosophy major, I read *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis for the first time. It made tremendous sense to me.

Lewis's major point is that suffering is not random. Suffering helps a Christian grow even when no one else knows about it. Suffering teaches unqualified obedience. This perspective made a tremendous amount of sense, but unfortunately it is incomplete when compared with Scripture.

I remember once sitting in our living room with the president of Dallas Theological Seminary when I was a teenager. I had a question. How would he reconcile Colossians 1:24 with the idea of salvation by faith alone?

St. Paul had written to the Colossians: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

Paul's perspective on suffering was much more comprehensive than C. S. Lewis's ideas. Paul attributed salvific merit to his own suffering, even for others. His perspective in this passage was not that people could be saved by "faith alone."

Somehow Paul assumed that the Colossians knew that faith must be perfected through suffering — dare I say, through works. He did not justify his statement as though it were a novel idea. He just stated it and moved on, as though no knowledgeable Colossian Christian would have had any doubt about his statement.

I was surprised that the learned, holy fundamentalist president of Dallas Theological Seminary had no good way to reconcile this verse in Colossians with his soteriology (theology of salvation). But I could tell that he had obviously thought about it a great deal. Later in seminary, I encountered this phenomenon repeatedly. Verses existed that could not be reconciled with any Protestant tradition by any of the professors I encountered. But it seemed to me that if some of Scripture directly contradicted my theology, it was my responsibility to rethink the theology, not the Bible.

Suffering and its role in salvation did not make sense to me until I discovered the writings of Pope John Paul II long after seminary. Somehow I got on a mailing list for a Catholic publisher. I was

scandalized that they had somehow obtained my name. But I love books, so I stayed on the list.

One day I saw a book in that publisher's catalog that had organized topically the thinking of Pope John Paul II. The Pope had been so influential in the liberation of Europe that I thought I should read some of what he had to say. It was my first direct encounter with a faithful Catholic author.

The Pope made clear that suffering is not enjoyable. But he insisted that it is essential to salvation. This thoroughly Catholic concept not only makes sense of the verse in Colossians; it infuses suffering with dignity. This was the beginning of my discovery that Catholic literature plumbed a depth of spirituality I had never even dreamed was available in print.

In some mysterious way, Pope John Paul taught, our suffering can even help in the process of other people's salvation. Perhaps I should let him speak for himself:

"In the Paschal Mystery Christ began *the union with man in the community of the Church*. ... The Church is continually being built up spiritually as the Body of Christ. In this Body, Christ wishes to be united with every individual, and in a special way He is united with those who suffer. ... The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's Redemption. This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as His Body, Christ has in a sense opened His own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings ... to that extent *he in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world. Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No ... Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limit, but at the same time He did not bring it to a close. ... It seems to be part *of the very essence of Christ's redemptive suffering* that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 24; emphasis in the original).

Suffering's role in our salvation is clearly taught in Scripture. I found no good explanation for this fact until I embraced the ancient faith of the Catholic Church.

## The "End Times"

The biblical truth about suffering was only one of many truths I encountered that pressed me to explore Catholic teaching. I came to the firm conclusion that the best way to understand the Bible was to listen to the Catholic Church. Even so, a second example might be helpful. ... *continued on page 6*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

### SHARE YOUR STORY!

*The Coming Home Network International* always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to email a written conversion story of approximately either 1700 or 4000 words, along with your name and contact information, to:

**Mary Clare Piecynski**  
maryp@chnetwork.org

### UNSOLICITED MAIL

*The Coming Home Network International* 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 *CHNI* 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.

### NEWSLETTER COPIES

*CHNI* 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. *CHNI* and the authors reserve all rights and permissions.



I had always believed in a version of premillennialism that teaches Christ will return very soon to set up a 1,000-year reign in Jerusalem with the Jews. Most American premillennialists also believe this scenario entails a “rapture” that will take “true believers” out of the world. This “rapture” will allow a seven-year “Great Tribulation” that punishes unbelievers and prepares the world for Christ’s second coming.

You may have heard of Christians who are striving to rebuild the Jerusalem temple, or seeking to breed the pure red heifer whose ashes, once sacrificed and burned, they believe are necessary to consecrate the temple site (see Numbers 19:1–10). These people are premillennialists.

While in seminary, I pondered how to reconcile Christ’s finished work on the cross with any resumption of the Old Covenant animal sacrifices. The Book of Hebrews, for example, teaches that the old cult is no longer necessary and must pass away.

For me, the hardest biblical passage related to this discussion was found in Zechariah. I remember standing in a hallway with a man whose specialty was general eschatology (study of the “end times”). A young man approached us and asked this respected teacher about this verse. His question was this: “If Jesus’ sacrifice is final and complete, why will there be sacrifices needed in Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Jesus?”

The scholar’s face momentarily clouded with annoyance. I have never forgotten his next statement. He admitted that he knew of no plausible evangelical explanation for these two verses.

Zechariah 14:20–21 states prophetically: “On that day ... all who come to sacrifice [in Jerusalem] will take some of the pots and cook in them.” Most premillennialists agree that this passage is speaking of a time after Christ’s first coming. Why is it so problematic for them? Because they understand these events to occur during the 1000-year reign of Christ over an earthly kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem.

Here’s the rub. After Christ has died and set up His kingdom, why would sacrifices be resumed? There is absolutely no good Protestant response to that question. Evangelicals are adamant about the fact that priesthood here on earth is no longer needed. Sacrifices after the passion of Christ are unnecessary. The crucifixion of Christ was the last sacrifice ever needed. So why rebuild Jerusalem’s temple?

This verse had remained an enigma to me for sixteen years, ever since seminary. When I was investigating Catholic Church teaching, I realized that Zechariah was actually talking about a sacrifice offered in Jerusalem every day *now*. He was referring to the Eucharist!

The Eucharist is the only sacrifice that would have any value after the Messiah’s passion because of its connection to the passion. The sacrifice of the Mass is being offered every day in Catholic churches, not only in Jerusalem, but all over the world. In other words, the continuing sacrifices of the Church were foretold in the Old Testament. When this reality dawned on me, I got so excited I ran into our living room and gave a “high five” to my thirteen-year-old son.

### Crisis and Reconciliation

We all reach certain critical decision points in our Christian pilgrimage. God gives us a choice: to follow or not to follow. These crisis points are never easy. They always involve sacrifice and suffering. And they are always an occasion of grace.

At the rather late age of 40, I knew that I had approached one of these crisis points. I had been studying Scripture all my life. By this time, I had spent the previous months studying Catholic teaching in relation to Scripture. I had desperately attempted to find a reason not to become Catholic.

I knew my family would lose friends. I knew my wife and children would have to start all over again in a new social circle. I knew that once I “went public” with these convictions, life could never again be the same. I hesitated, wondering if this was the right thing to do.

One day I woke up and knew something for certain. I turned to my wife and said, “Colleen, I know that I believe.” We had been investigating and discussing so much that I did not even need to tell her what I believed. After months of study and discussion, she knew that I was referring to the Eucharist. I believed it really was Christ’s Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. This faith was a gift from God.

It was not a bolt out of the blue. I had spent months trying to justify to myself what I had always believed: the Protestant interpretation of John 6. Jesus had said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the *bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh*” (v. 51, emphasis added).

After studying this text from a Catholic perspective, I knew in my head that the Church was right. John 6 clearly taught that the Body of Christ was the sustenance that I needed for eternity. Zechariah had predicted it. Jesus had instituted it. And only one Church in town taught this truth as Jesus stated it: the Catholic parish five blocks from my house.

But that morning was different. That morning I woke up with the firm conviction in the center of my soul that the Church was correct about the Eucharist. I was certain of this divine truth. This grace was not a gift that I deserved. I do not know why I was singled out to receive it. Someone was obviously offering prayers and sufferings up for my enlightenment.

At this point God showed me that He had already given me another great gift: my beloved wife. At that crisis point, she simply said, “David, if that is what you believe, then you need to follow your beliefs and join the Church.”

Several months later, through another grace of God, I was reconciled to the Catholic Church: not alone, but together with my wife and all six of our children. That was 17 years ago. Since then, God has blessed us with two more children.

I can honestly say that reconciling with the Church is the best thing our family has ever done. This Church is a wonderful place to raise a family and to travel on our pilgrimage to heaven. In fact, it is the only place God ever intended for us. ■



**David B. Currie** is the author of two bestselling books. Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic (*Ignatius*, 1996) presents a detailed account of his conversion to the Catholic faith. *Rapture: The End-Times Error that Leaves the Bible Behind* (Sophia Press, 2003) explores the biblical, historical, and theological roots of the modern “left behind at the rapture” movement. David is a research fellow with the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology in Steubenville, Ohio. He and his wife, Colleen, have eight children and three grandchildren.

## THE COMING HOME NETWORK INT’L

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

■ For a community of Anglican Franciscans in Puerto Rico, that the Lord Jesus would swiftly open the door for their reception into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For Ryan, a Lutheran minister in Minnesota, that he would come to realize that his longstanding interest in the Catholic faith and the Catholic friends God has sent to him are moments of grace guiding him to the apostolic Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ.

■ For Joshua, a non-denominational missionary, that he may be granted his wish to learn more about the Catholic faith and be guided into full unity with the ancient Church of the Apostles and prophets.

■ For Vincent, a Lutheran minister in Pennsylvania, that he may learn the joy and freedom of the fullness of the faith of Christ found only in the Catholic Church.

■ For Michael, a Presbyterian minister in Minnesota, that as he reads and prays the Holy Spirit would guide his heart so that he may be granted the grace to become a Catholic Christian.

■ For Ryan, a Methodist minister in North Carolina, that God's love and grace would open his heart and mind to allow him to seek to enter into full communion with the See of St. Peter.

■ For Robert, an Anglican minister in Oregon, that the Holy Spirit would inspire him and his wife as they participate in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and enable them to receive our Lord Jesus' Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Holy Eucharist at the next Easter Vigil.

■ For Thomas, an Episcopal minister in Connecticut, that he may come to embrace the ancient three-legged stool of the Catholic faith: Holy Scripture, Sacred Tradition and apostolic authority.

■ For David, an evangelical missionary in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that he may be a good witness about the Catholic faith to his evangelical friends as he seeks to enter into full communion with the Universal Church in communion with Pope Benedict XVI.

■ For Steve, a Church of God minister in Georgia, that he may answer the call of the Holy Spirit and act upon the grace granted to him that is calling him to enter the fullness of the Faith in the Catholic Church.

■ For a Baptist minister in Oklahoma, that he will be given a zeal to learn as much as he can about the Catholic Church, and that his heart may become the heart of a Catholic Christian.

## Laity

■ For Deanna's health, and that her mother will return to the Catholic faith.

■ For Richard, that he will be healed from his many health problems.

■ For Frances and her family; may God pour down upon them His blessings and grace.

■ For Debra and Paul; may the Lord Jesus bring them ever closer to Him.

■ For Gary and Ernie to return to the Catholic Church.

■ For Nik to receive God's guidance that he may know his vocation.

■ For Theresa's family, who have left the Catholic Church, that they will become convicted of Catholic truth.

■ For Richard; may his soul rest in peace and may his family find comfort in God's abiding love.

■ For a family who recently has lost a loved one to suicide.

■ For Jim, Matt and Randy to come to the Lord's Table as Catholics.

■ For Donna's family to re-embrace the treasures of wisdom and truth found within Mother Church.

■ For Edward, that he will find relief from his spinal pain.

■ For Louise's family; may they return to the Catholic Church and grow ever closer to the Divine Savior.

■ For Francisco, that he will be able to offer forgiveness and experience God's mercy in his life.

■ For Lorena, that the God of all understanding will bless her with the gift of faith.

■ For Benedetta's family to return to the Catholic faith.

■ For David and his wife, that they will be healed from their addictions.

■ For Ira as he undergoes back surgery, that he will experience a speedy recovery and complete healing.

■ For Joe and Ruth's family and their intentions, that God will hear and answer them out of His merciful goodness.

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 CHN Prayer List, P.O. 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.



# Taking the Seat Farthest Back

Recently I received by email a link to an interesting article coauthored by the convert psychologist Dr. Paul Vitz and his brother, Daniel C. Vitz, a seminarian. The article is entitled “Messing with the Mass: The Problem of Priestly Narcissism Today.” (It originally appeared in the November 2007 issue of *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*.)

The essay examines the motives for irregular liturgical practices of some priests, making use of observations in Dr. Vitz’s insightful earlier work, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (1977, 1994). Its arguments are quite convincing and ought to be prayerfully and humbly considered by many to whom it applies. The authors give the following summary of their conclusions:

We propose that the primary [psychological] motivation behind many of these [irregular] changes [in the celebration of the Mass] derives from underlying narcissistic motives; that is, extreme self love, found in many people in contemporary culture. This is especially the case with the relatively small changes introduced in an idiosyncratic way into the Mass. We first summarize and describe the nature of this narcissism, then apply it to the situation found among priests.

To read the entire article, go to <http://Dominic-cooray.blogspot.com/2009/09/messing-with-mass-problem-of-priestly.html>.

As I read this essay, and smirked in agreement, I was chastened to remember a few things. First, I recalled that Jesus warned us to take the log out of our own eye before we attempt to remove the sliver from our brother’s. As an elderly minister I once heard put it, using a more folksy expression and speaking in a southern drawl: “When you point a finger, you’ve got three pointing back at yourself!”

With these words in mind, I immediately embarked on an examination of my own blind tendencies toward narcissism (self-love), and realized that I am certainly far from being faultless. *Mea maxima culpa!*

But then it struck me how perfectly the Vitz brothers described the environment and attitudes in which many of us former Protestant clergy had heard our “calls” to the ministry. We lived immersed in the narcissistic culture that the Vitzes describe. Except for the cautions and corrections divine grace may have made to our consciences, many of us were carried along, inebriated and blinded by the attention, praise, and prestige of our positions and influence.

Jesus warned His disciples to choose a seat in the back (see Lk 14:7–11). But many of us may have become so accustomed to being led to the front that, with each new advancement or appointment,

we began expecting that we would always be invited to stand front and center.

Consider, for example, the following five traits of the narcissistic personality, as enumerated by the Vitz brothers. Rather than looking for these in others, let’s consider to what extent they may describe ourselves:

1. “An excessive need for admiration and praise; and with this comes an equally excessive need to avoid criticism. Often this is associated with obvious attention-seeking behavior.”
2. “A sense of entitlement, of unreasonable expectations of favorable treatment and of automatic compliance of others with one’s suggestions and expectations. . . . An attitude of the ‘rules don’t apply to me’ comes with this sense of entitlement.”
3. “A belief that they are superior, special, or unique, and expect others to recognize this; that they should only associate with other people who are special or of high status.”
4. “Arrogant, haughty behaviors and attitudes.”
5. “A lack of empathy, that is, an unwillingness to recognize or identify with the feeling and needs of others.”

Sound at all familiar? If not, then to what extent could this be because we are blindly in denial of how much we have been infected by immersion in our narcissistic society?

Certainly we are familiar with all the ways Christ has called us to be humble, self-effacing, and others-focused. After all, we certainly have waxed eloquently on this matter from our pulpits.

Now that we are Catholics, however, or on the journey toward giving up our prestigious pastoral positions, how many of us show evidence of the above traits when the Catholic Church leadership fails to recognize our abilities, training, and experience? How many of us show evidence of these traits especially when Church leaders refuse to grant us a position, if not on the same trajectory, at least comparable to the one we left behind?

I believe this is exactly why St. Paul warned St. Timothy that anyone who “aspires to the office of bishop . . . must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit, and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim 3:1, 6). Why might a new convert be any more prone to becoming “puffed up with conceit” than a life-long Catholic? Perhaps some of the baggage we bring with us — our poorly formed consciences and impartially corrected misunderstandings — has not yet had sufficient time for necessary adjustments.

Much of what we have brought with us needs to be enriched by the actions of sacramental grace. Other things, even some that we once held dear, may need to be taken away as we discover that they are in fact detrimental to our spiritual welfare.

In essence, perhaps we have not had enough time to suffer and to grow.

The opening of our minds and hearts to the truth and fullness of the Catholic faith is a gift of God's grace. By this grace He intends to form us more into the likeness of Christ. Often, mention is made of what gifts we clergy and academic converts are to the Church *because* of what we bring with us. Yet ironically, it is specifically because of what we bring that we can find it particularly difficult to respond to this grace and accept this transformation.

Sometimes, the more we were once in a position to preach to others about the need to be humble and detached, the more difficult it is for us to hear that message ourselves.

In the past, I've given talks about how the Beatitudes (see Mt 5:1–12) are a staircase to conversion, based on the writings of several early Church Fathers. When Jesus preached these as part of His "Sermon on the Mount," He was addressing the entire crowd gathered around Him. But He was certainly pointing more directly to the religious leaders.

For this reason, what He preached has much to say to any clergy convert who decides to follow Jesus home into His Church. Our journey must begin with a willing detachment from the world (poverty of spirit), from sin (mourning), and self (meekness), which opens our hearts to a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. The problem is that we can be so convinced of the "entitlements" of our training, experiences, ordination, and accomplishments that we are blind to our attachments and encumbrances.

We can view our conversion as if we were merely transferring from one company to another, or from one branch of a company to

another, or from one league to another. But we aren't. Our Protestant denominations, whether high or low, liturgical or more casual, were not parallel organizations co-equal with the Church, or even branches of the larger Church. Every Protestant tradition is in some way in schism.

Conversion, then, is not a melding or a compromise. It is a surrender, a repentance, an undemanding willingness to relinquish the front seat and take the seat farthest in the back, until someone of authentic apostolic authority invites us forward.

Perhaps all these problems are mine alone. Maybe I'm the only clergy convert with narcissistic tendencies, and for these I humbly ask God's forgiveness and help!

But in case you're wondering whether you could be struggling as I have, consider asking yourself the following questions — a unique type of "litany" — whenever you conclude that the Church has failed to appreciate and acknowledge the abilities, training, and experience you bring with you into the Church:

- Is my desire for a leadership position in the Church based on an excessive need for admiration and praise, with an equally excessive need to avoid criticism?

*If so, Lord, help me!*

- Is my desire for a leadership position in the Church based on a sense of entitlement, of unreasonable expectations of favorable treatment? Are there ways in which I feel the rules don't apply to me?

*If so, Lord, help me!*

- Is my desire for a leadership position in the Church based on an assumption that I am superior, special, or unique, and so I expect others to recognize this? Do I prefer to associate with other people who are special or of high status?

*If so, Lord, help me!*

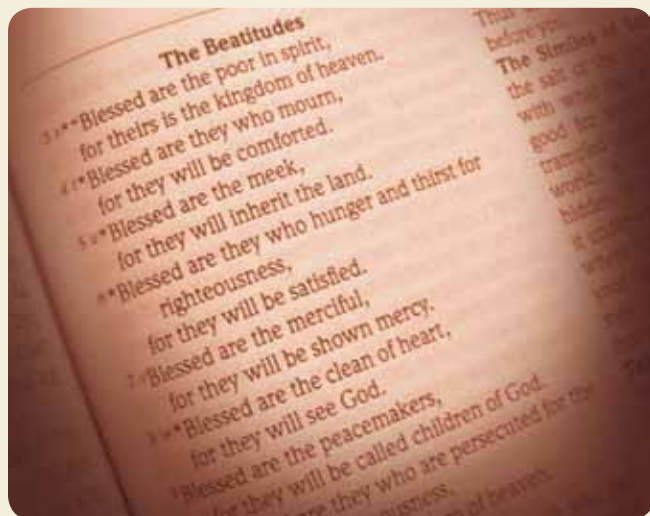
- Is my desire for a leadership position in the Church based on arrogant, haughty behaviors and attitudes?

*If so, Lord, help me!*

- Do I desire a leadership position in the Church even though I may actually lack empathy for the feelings and needs of others?

*If so, Lord, help me!*

Certainly we recognize that the decision of a local bishop or priest does not necessarily represent the final decision of the Church regarding the validity of our call to ministry. But I would humbly recommend that, before we denounce a bishop or priest who has not affirmed our gifts or confirmed our calling, we first listen closely to what God may be trying to tell us in the process.



Was the call we received way back then a specific call to fulltime ministry, and more specifically a preliminary call to the Catholic sacramental priesthood? Without hesitation, St. Paul claimed that “for the sake of [Christ’s] body, that is, the church ... [he] became a minister according to the divine office which was given to [him] ... to make the word of God fully known” (Col 1:24–25).

Paul didn’t just decide for himself that God was calling him to leave everything and go to seminary, based on some “feeling” that came after the scales had fallen from his eyes, which was then confirmed by family, friends, and a local pastor. No, Scripture tells us how his divine call was clearly delivered by Christ Himself (see Acts 9:1–19) and then confirmed by the Apostles (see Gal 2:1–10). We also learn that it was fourteen years after Paul left the Jewish priesthood before he embarked on his missionary work (see Gal 2:1)!

Can any of us claim such a clear calling from God? In First Timothy, Paul warned his young protégé, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you” (1 Tim 4:14). Most of us believe that when we were ordained, as so described, we were following God’s call into ministry. As a result, we conclude, we received unique spiritual gifts for ministry. Yet some of us, now that we are Catholic and not finding ways to use these gifts, wonder whether we had “misheard” God way back then.

I think it’s important for us, at the very least, to be certain that if we were praying for God’s guidance and desiring to follow Him, He was never far from us. As St. Paul promised, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). If we love God, we know He loved us first (see 1 Jn 4:7–19). And Catholic spiritual writers have long affirmed that the primary call every disciple receives from God, especially when accompanied by an experience of spiritual awakening, is a call to deeper conversion and holiness.

What is possible is that the enthusiastic call some of us believed we received way back then was, in essence, this basic call to holiness. But in the midst of our particular Protestant milieu, we read into it more than was intended. God continued to bless and honor our efforts, but our past experiences and successes do not necessarily translate into a confirmation that God had actually called us or is now calling us into ministry. This matter needs to be discerned under the auspices of a successor of the Apostles — a bishop — assisted by his vocational director and our own Catholic spiritual advisor.

Our abilities, training, and experiences are certainly gifts we bring with us into the Church. But we need to be fully willing to lay these gifts at the altar, without demands or expectations. I believe that those who are not ready to do so may not be ready to convert. This is advice we give to all those who come to us on the journey.

For all the reasons I’ve mentioned above, I encourage each of you: Pray for those on the journey, clergy as well as laity and their families; pray for those who’ve already “come home,” who may still be struggling with these issues; pray for the bishops and vocation directors upon whose shoulders this discernment lies. And please pray for the work of *The Coming Home Network International*, for it is our one desire to stand beside all those on the journey, to help them hear and follow God’s will for their lives.

— Sincerely in Christ, Marcus Grodi ■



## MARCUS GRODI’S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

### November 5-6, 2010

#### YB Catholic Conference

Saint Luke the Evangelist Parish  
8 Atkinson Depot Road  
Plaistow, NH 03865  
(603) 382-8324

### November 19, 2010

#### Parish Events

Saint Joseph Catholic Church  
1029 Kundek Street  
Jasper, IN 47546  
<http://www.chnetwork.org/parishevents.html>



### November 20, 2010

#### Parish Events

Saint Lawrence Catholic Church  
1916 Meharry Street  
Lafayette, IN 47904  
<http://www.chnetwork.org/parishevents.html>

### November 28, 2010

#### Annunciation Radio

Saints Peter & Paul Catholic Church  
510 Columbus Avenue  
Sandusky, OH 44870  
[pcbobber@gmail.com](mailto:pcbobber@gmail.com)

### February 5, 2011

#### Saint Brigid Catholic Church

3400 Old Alabama Road  
Johns Creek, GA 30022  
(678) 393-0060



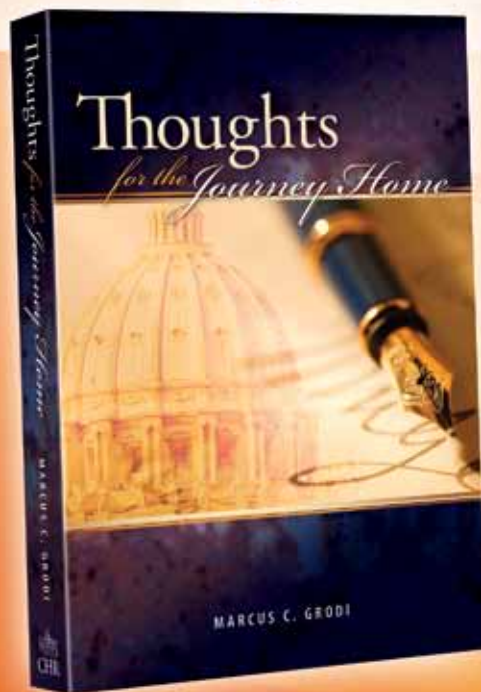
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“MARCUS GRODI is a man of many talents. His TV appearances on EWTN are captivating, capturing many converts to the Church; his work with *The Coming Home Network International* has helped countless pilgrims on the journey home; and his excellent novel is a true edge-of-the-seat page-turner.

As a long-time admirer of his work, I am excited by this new collection of essays from his illustrious pen.”

— *Joseph Pearce*

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