



## November 2011 Newsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Hauled Aboard the Ark

By Peter Kreeft

I was born into a loving, believing community, a Protestant “mother church” (the Reformed Church) which, though it had not for me the fullness of the faith, had strong and genuine piety. I believed, mainly because of the good example of my parents and my church. The faith of my parents, Sunday School teachers, ministers, and relatives made a real difference to their lives, a difference big enough to compensate for many shortcomings. “Love covers a multitude of sins.”

I was taught what C. S. Lewis calls “mere Christianity,” essentially the Bible. But no one reads the Bible as an extraterrestrial or an angel; our church community provides the colored glasses through which we read, and the framework, or horizon, or limits within which we understand. My “glasses” were of Dutch Reformed Calvinist construction, and my limiting framework stopped very far short of anything “Catholic.” The Catholic Church was regarded with utmost suspicion. In the world of the forties and fifties in which I grew up, that suspicion may have been equally reciprocated by most Catholics. Each group believed that most of the other groups

were probably on the road to hell. Christian ecumenism and understanding has made astonishing strides since then.

Dutch Calvinists, like most conservative Protestants, sincerely believed that Catholicism was not only heresy but idolatry; that Catholics worshipped the Church, the Pope, Mary, saints, images, and who knows what else; that the Church had added some inane “traditions of men” to the Word of God, traditions and doctrines that obviously contradicted it (how could they not see this? I wondered); and, most important of all, that Catholics believed “another gospel;” another religion, that they didn’t even know how to get to Heaven: they tried to pile up brownie points with God with their good works, trying to work their way in instead of trusting in Jesus as their Savior. They never read the Bible, obviously.

I was never taught to hate Catholics, but to pity them and to fear their errors. I learned a serious concern for truth that to this day I find sadly missing in many Catholic circles. The typical Calvinist anti-Catholic attitude I knew was not so much prejudice, judgment with no concern for

... continued on page 2

*Journey Home*

## EVANGELIZATION OUTREACH PACKAGE

In each monthly newsletter we feature resources chosen specifically to air our members in evangelization. We encourage our members to take advantage of this month's **Evangelization Outreach Package**.

### Journeys Home

Edited by Marcus Grodi



This third, revised edition of *Journeys Home* contains the stories of men and women who, having surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ, heard a call to follow Him more completely.

Many of them were pastors or missionaries. Others were lay men and women who, though working in secular jobs, took their calling to serve Christ in the world very seriously. In each case, their desire to follow Christ faithfully — to remain faithful to the truth He taught and to the Church He established through His apostles — led them to embrace the Catholic Church. These conversion stories provide insight, encouragement, and inspiration for those who are thinking about making the same journey — and for Catholics born in the faith as well.

### Deep in Scripture Radio Program Special!



Dr. Thomas Howard joins Marcus Grodi in this exceptional *Deep in Scripture* radio program as they discuss a Scripture passage that has played an important role in Dr. Howard's life as a convert to the Catholic Church.

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

evidence, but judgment based on apparent and false evidence: sincere mistakes rather than dishonest rationalizations.

Though I thought it pagan rather than Christian, the richness and mystery of Catholicism fascinated me—the dimensions which avant-garde liturgists have been dismantling since the Silly Sixties. (When God saw that the Church in America lacked persecutions, he sent them liturgists.)

The first independent idea about religion I ever remember thinking was a question I asked my father, an elder in the church, a good and wise and holy man. I was amazed that he couldn't answer it. "Why do we Calvinists have the whole truth and no one else? We're so few. How could God leave the rest of the world in error? Especially the rest of the Christian churches?" Since no good answer seemed forthcoming, I then came to the explosive conclusion that the truth about God was more mysterious—more wonderfully and uncomfortably mysterious—than anything any of us could ever fully comprehend. (Calvinists would not deny that, but they do not usually teach it either. They are strong on God's "sovereignty," but weak on the richness of God's mystery.) That conviction, that the truth is always infinitely more than anyone can have, has not diminished. Not even all the infallible creeds are a container for all that is God.

I also realized at a very young age, obscurely but strongly, that the truth about God had to be far simpler than I had been taught, as well as far more complex and mysterious. I remember surprising my father with this realization (which was certainly because of God's grace rather than my intelligence, for I was only about eight, I think): "Dad, everything we learn in church and everything in the Bible comes down to just one thing, doesn't it? There's only one thing we have to worry about, isn't there?" "Why, no, I don't see that. There are many things. What do you mean?" "I mean that all God wants us to do—all the time—is to ask Him what He wants us to do, and then do it. That covers everything, doesn't it? Instead of asking ourselves, ask God!" Surprised, my father replied, "You know, you're right!"

After eight years of public elementary school, my parents offered me a choice between two high schools: public or Christian (Calvinist), and I chose the latter, even though it meant leaving old friends. Eastern Christian High School was run by a sister denomination, the Christian Reformed Church. Asking myself now why I made that choice, I cannot say. Providence often works in obscurity. I was not a remarkably religious kid, and loved the New York Giants baseball team with considerable more passion and less guilt than I loved God.

I won an essay contest in high school with a meditation on Dostoyevski's story "The Grand Inquisitor;" interpreted as an anti-Catholic, anti-

authoritarian cautionary tale. The Church, like Communism, seemed a great, dark, totalitarian threat.

I then went to Calvin College, the Christian Reformed college which has such a great influence for its small size and provincial locale (Grand Rapids, Michigan) because it takes both its faith and its scholarship very seriously. I registered as a pre-seminary student because, though I did not think I was personally “called” by God to be a clergyman, I thought I might “give it a try.” I was deeply impressed by the caption under a picture of Christ on the cross: “This is what I did for thee. What will you do for Me?”

But in college I quickly fell in love with English, and then Philosophy, and thus twice changed my major. Both subjects were widening my appreciation of the history of Western civilization and therefore of things Catholic. The first serious doubt about my anti-Catholic beliefs was planted in my mind by my roommate, who was becoming an Anglican: “Why don’t Protestants pray to saints? There’s nothing wrong in you asking me to pray for you, is there? Why not ask the dead, then, if we believe they’re alive with God in Heaven, part of the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ that surrounds us (Hebrews 12)?” It was the first serious question I had absolutely no answer to, and that bothered me. I attended Anglican liturgy with my roommate and was enthralled by the same things that captivated Tom Howard and many others: not just the aesthetic beauty but the full-ness, the solidity, the moreness of it all.

“

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”

subjectivistic: their love of God had no visible object to focus it. The living water welling up from within had no material ... continued on page 4

I remember a church service I went to while at Calvin, in the Wealthy Street Baptist Temple (fundamentalist). I had never heard such faith and conviction, such joy in the music, such love of Jesus. I needed to focus my aroused love of God on an object. But God is invisible, and we are not angels. There was no religious object in the church. It was a bare, Protestant church; images were “idols.” I suddenly understood why Protestants were so



## DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

### On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

Airs: Wednesdays @ 2:00 PM ET

Encores: Thursdays @ 1:00 AM ET

Sundays @ 7:00 AM ET

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

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

### Deep in Scripture Guests

#### November 2

Caroline Rood\*

#### November 9

Dan Burke\*

#### November 16

John Fraysier\*

#### November 21

TBD\*

#### November 28

Debbie Herbeck\*



\*This schedule is subject to change.





## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

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

### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET

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

Thursdays 2:00 PM ET

Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET

Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET

Sundays 1:00 AM ET

### November 7

Dan Burke\*

*Convert from Judaism*

### November 14

John Frasier\*

*Former Evangelical Free*

### November 21

*The Journey Home* in England with guests  
Sr. Mary of the Trinity S.O.L.T.,  
Jeremy de Satge, and Msgr. Keith Baltrop

### November 28

Debbie Herbeck\*

*Convert from Judaism*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

riverbed, no shores, to direct its flow to the far divine sea. It rushed back upon itself and became a pool of froth.

Then I caught sight of a Catholic spy in the Protestant camp: a gold cross atop the pole of the church flag. Adoring Christ required using that symbol. The alternative was the froth. My gratitude to the Catholic Church for this one relic, this remnant, of her riches, was immense. For this good Protestant water to flow, there had to be Catholic aqueducts. To change the metaphor, I had been told that reliance on external things was a “crutch!” I now realized that I was a cripple. And I thanked the Catholic “hospital” (that’s what the Church is) for responding to my needs.

Perhaps, I thought, these good Protestant people could worship like angels, but I could not. Then I realized that they couldn’t either. Their ears were using crutches but not their eyes. They used beautiful hymns, for which I would gladly exchange the new, flat, unmusical, wimpy “liturgical responses” no one sings in our masses—their audible imagery is their crutch. I think that in Heaven, Protestants will teach Catholics to sing and Catholics will teach Protestants to dance and sculpt.

I developed a strong intellectual and aesthetic love for things medieval: Gregorian chant, Gothic architecture, Thomistic philosophy, illuminated manuscripts, etc. I felt vaguely guilty about it, for that was the Catholic era. I thought I could separate these legitimate cultural forms from the “dangerous” Catholic essence, as the modern Church separated the essence from these discarded forms. Yet I saw a natural connection.

Then one summer, on the beach at Ocean Grove, New Jersey, I read St. John of the Cross. I did not understand much of it, but I knew, with undeniable certainty, that here was reality, something as massive and positive as a mountain range. I felt as if I had just come out of a small, comfortable cave, in which I had lived all my life, and found that there was an unsuspected world outside of incredible dimensions. Above all, the dimensions were those of holiness, goodness, purity of heart, obedience to the first and greatest commandment, willing God’s will, the one absolute I had discovered, at the age of eight. I was very far from saintly, but that did not prevent me from fascinated admiration from afar; the valley dweller appreciates the height of the mountain more than the dweller on the foothills. I read other Catholic saints and mystics, and discovered the same reality there, however different the style (even St. Thérèse “The Little Flower”!) I felt sure it was the same reality I had learned to love from my parents and teachers, only a far deeper version of it. It did not seem alien and other. It was not another religion but the adult version of my own.

Then in a church history class at Calvin a professor gave me a way to investigate the claims of the Catholic Church on my own. The essential

\*This schedule is subject to change.



claim is historical: that Christ founded the Catholic Church, that there is historical continuity. If that were true, I would have to be a Catholic out of obedience to my one absolute, the will of my Lord. The teacher explained the Protestant belief. He said that Catholics accuse we who are Protestants of going back only to Luther and Calvin; but this is not true; we go back to Christ. Christ had never intended a Catholic-style Church, but a Protestant-style one. The Catholic additions to the simple, Protestant-style New Testament church had grown up gradually in the Middle Ages like barnacles on the hull of a ship, and the Protestant Reformers had merely scraped off the barnacles, the alien, pagan accretions. The Catholics, on the other hand, believed that Christ established the Church Catholic from the start, and that the doctrines and practices that Protestants saw as barnacles were, in fact, the very living and inseparable parts of the planks and beams of the ship.

I thought this made the Catholic claim empirically testable, and I wanted to test it because I was worried by this time about my dangerous interest in things Catholic. Half of me wanted to discover it was the true Church (that was the more adventurous half); the other half wanted to prove it false (that was the comfortable half). My adventurous half rejoiced when I discovered in the early Church such Catholic elements as the centrality of the Eucharist, the Real Presence, prayers to saints, devotion to Mary, an insistence on visible unity, and apostolic succession. Furthermore, the Church Fathers just “smelled” more Catholic than Protestant, especially St. Augustine, my personal favorite and a hero to most Protestants too. It seemed very obvious that if Augustine or Jerome or Ignatius of Antioch or Anthony of the Desert, or Justin Martyr, or Clement of Alexandria, or Athanasius were alive today they would be Catholics, not Protestants.

The issue of the Church’s historical roots was crucial to me, for the thing I had found in the Catholic Church and in no Protestant church was simply this: the massive historical fact that there she is, majestic and unsinkable. It was the same old seaworthy ship, the Noah’s ark that Jesus had commissioned. It was like discovering not an accurate picture of the ark, or even a real relic of its wood, but the whole ark itself, still sailing unscathed on the seas of history! It was like a fairy tale come true, like a “myth become fact;” to use C. S. Lewis’ formula for the Incarnation.

The parallel between Christ and Church, Incarnation and Church history, goes still further. I thought, just as Jesus made a claim about His identity that forces us into one of only two camps, His enemies or His worshippers, those who call Him liar and those who call Him Lord; so the Catholic Church’s claim to be the one true Church, the Church Christ founded, forces us to say either that this is the most arrogant, blasphemous and wicked claim imaginable, if it is not true, or else that she is just what she claims to be. Just as Jesus stood out as the absolute exception to all other human teachers in claiming to ... continued on page 6

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

be more than human and more than a teacher, so the Catholic Church stood out above all other denominations in claiming to be not merely a denomination, but the Body of Christ incarnate, infallible, one, and holy, presenting the really present Christ in her Eucharist. I could never rest in a comfortable, respectable ecumenical halfway house of measured admiration from a distance. I had to shout either “Crucify her!” or “Hosanna!” if I could not love and believe her, honesty forced me to despise and fight her.

But I could not despise her. The beauty and sanctity and wisdom of her, like that of Christ, prevented me from calling her liar or lunatic, just as it prevented me from calling Christ that. But simple logic offered then one and only one other option: this must be the Church my Lord provided for me—my Lord, for me. So she had better become my Church if He is my Lord.

There were many strands in the rope that hauled me aboard the ark, though this one—the Church’s claim to be the one Church historically founded by Christ—was the central and deciding one. The book that more than any other decided it for me was Ronald Knox’s *The Belief of Catholics*. He and Chesterton “spoke with authority, and not as the scribes!” Even C. S. Lewis, the darling of Protestant Evangelicals, “smelled” Catholic most of the time. A recent book by a Calvinist author I went to high school with, John Beversluis, mercilessly tries to tear all Lewis’ arguments to shreds; but Lewis is left without a scratch and Beversluis comes out looking like an atheist. Lewis is the only author I ever have read whom I thought I could completely trust and completely understand. But he believed in Purgatory, the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and not Total Depravity. He was no Calvinist. In fact, he was a medieval.

William Harry Jellema, the greatest teacher I ever knew, though a Calvinist, showed me what I can only call the Catholic vision of the history of philosophy, embracing the Greek and medieval tradition and the view of reason it assumed, a thick rather than a thin one. Technically this was “realism” (Aquinas) asvs. “nominalism” (Ockham and Luther). Commonsensically, it meant wisdom rather than mere logical consistency, insight rather than mere calculation. I saw Protestant theology as infected with shallow nominalism and Descartes’ narrow scientificization of reason.

A second and related difference is that Catholics, like their Greek and medieval teachers, still believed that reason was essentially reliable, not

“  
But [C. S. Lewis] believed  
in Purgatory, the Real  
Presence in the Eucharist,  
and not Total Depravity.”



utterly untrustworthy because fallen. We make mistakes in using it, yes. There are “noetic effects of sin,” yes. But the instrument is reliable. Only our misuse of it is not.

This is connected with a third difference. For Catholics, reason is not just subjective but objective; reason is not our artificial little man-made rules for our own subjective thought processes or intersubjective communications, but a window on the world. And not just the material world, but form, order, objective truth. Reason was from God. All truth was God’s truth. When Plato or Socrates knew the truth, the logos, they knew Christ, unless John lies in chapter 1 of his gospel. I gave a chapel speech at Calvin calling Socrates a “common-grace Christian” and unwittingly scandalized the powers that be. They still remember it, 30 years later.

The only person who almost kept me Protestant was Kierkegaard. Not Calvin or Luther. Their denial of free will made human choice a sham game of predestined dice. Kierkegaard offered a brilliant, consistent alternative to Catholicism, but such a quirkily individualistic one, such a pessimistic and antirational one, that he was incompletely human. He could hold a candle to Augustine and Aquinas, I thought—the only Protestant thinker I ever found who could—but he was only the rebel in the ark, while they were the family, Noah’s sons.

But if Catholic dogma contradicted Scripture or itself at any point, I could not believe it. I explored all the cases of claimed contradiction and found each to be a Protestant misunderstanding. No matter how morally bad the Church had gotten in the Renaissance, it never taught heresy. I was impressed with its very hypocrisy: even when it didn’t raise its practice to its preaching, it never lowered its preaching to its practice. Hypocrisy, someone said, is the tribute vice pays to virtue.

I was impressed by the argument that “the Church wrote the Bible:” Christianity was preached by the Church before the New Testament was written—that is simply a historical fact. It is also a fact that the apostles wrote the New Testament and the Church canonized it, deciding which books were divinely inspired. I knew, from logic and common sense, that a cause can never be less than its effect. You can’t give what you don’t have. If the Church has no divine inspiration and no infallibility, no divine authority, then neither can the New Testament. Protestantism logically entails Modernism. I had to be either a Catholic or a Modernist. That decided it; that was like saying I had to be either a patriot or a traitor.

One afternoon I knelt alone in my room and prayed God would decide for me, for I am good at thinking but bad at acting, like Hamlet. Unexpectedly, I seemed to sense my heroes Augustine and Aquinas and thousands of other saints and sages calling out to me from the great ark, “Come aboard! We are really here. We still live. Join ... continued on page 8

## YEAR END GIVING

Please consider including CHNetwork in your year end giving plans! Year end tax statements are provided in January each year, and include all online donations and checks mailed by December 31 in accordance with IRS regulations.

## 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 go to <http://chnetwork.org/converts> to review our writer’s guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

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CHNI’s apostolate and become more involved in our mission to assist men and women who are on the journey to the Catholic Church.

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

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## *...Journeys Home Continued...*

us. Here is the Body of Christ.” I said Yes. My intellect and feelings had long been conquered; the will is the last to surrender.

One crucial issue remained to be resolved: Justification by Faith, the central bone of contention of the Reformation. Luther was obviously right here: the doctrine is dearly taught in Romans and Galatians. If the Catholic Church teaches “another gospel” of salvation by works, then it teaches fundamental heresy. I found here however another case of misunderstanding. I read Aquinas’ Summa on grace, and the decrees of the Council of Trent, and found them just as strong on grace as Luther or Calvin. I was overjoyed to find that the Catholic Church had read the Bible too! At Heaven’s gate our entrance ticket, according to Scripture and Church dogma, is not our good works or our sincerity, but our faith, which glues us to Jesus. He saves us; we do not save ourselves. But I find, incredibly, that 9 out of 10 Catholics do not know this, the absolutely central, core, essential dogma of Christianity. Protestants are right: most Catholics do in fact believe a whole other religion. Well over 90% of students I have polled who have had 12 years of catechism classes, even Catholic high schools, say they expect to go to Heaven because they tried, or did their best, or had compassionate feelings to everyone, or were sincere. They hardly ever mention Jesus. Asked why they hope to be saved, they mention almost anything except the Savior. Who taught them? Who wrote their textbooks? These teachers have stolen from our precious children the most valuable thing in the world, the “pearl of great price;” their faith. Jesus had some rather terrifying warnings about such things something about millstones.

Catholicism taught that we are saved by faith, by grace, by Christ, however few Catholics understood this. And Protestants taught that true faith necessarily produces good works. The fundamental issue of the Reformation is an argument between the roots and the blossoms on the same flower.

But though Luther did not neglect good works, he connected them to faith by only a thin and unreliable thread: human gratitude. In response to God’s great gift of salvation, which we accept by faith, we do good works out of gratitude, he taught. But gratitude is only a feeling, and dependent on the self. The Catholic connection between faith and works is a far stronger and more reliable one. I found it in C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, the best introduction to Christianity I have ever read. It is the ontological reality of we, supernatural life, sanctifying grace, God’s own life in the soul, which is received by faith and then itself produces good works. God comes in one end and out the other: the very same thing that comes in by faith (the life of God) goes out as works, through our free cooperation.

I was also dissatisfied with Luther’s teaching that justification was a legal fiction on God’s part rather than a real event in us; that God



looks on the Christian in Christ, sees only Christ's righteousness, and legally counts or imputes Christ's righteousness as ours. I thought it had to be as Catholicism says, that God actually imparts Christ to us, in baptism and through faith (these two are usually together in the New Testament). Here I found the fundamentalists, especially the Baptists, more philosophically sound than the Calvinists and Lutherans. For me, their language, however sloganish and satirizable, is more accurate when they speak of "Receiving Christ as your personal Savior."

Though my doubts were all resolved and the choice was made in 1959, my senior year at Calvin, actual membership came a year later, at Yale. My parents were horrified, and only gradually came to realize I had not lost my head or my soul, that Catholics were Christians, not pagans. It was very difficult, for I am a shy and soft-hearted sort, and almost nothing is worse for me than to hurt people I love. I think that I hurt almost as much as they did. But God marvelously binds up wounds.

I have been happy as a Catholic for many years now. The honeymoon faded, of course, but the marriage has deepened. Like all converts I ever have heard of, I was hauled aboard not by those Catholics who try to "sell" the church by conforming it to the spirit of the times by saying Catholics are just like everyone else, but by those who joyfully held out the ancient and orthodox faith in all its fullness and prophetic challenge to the world. The minimalists, who reduce miracles to myths, dogmas to opinions, laws to values, and the Body of Christ to a psycho-social club, have always elicited wrath, pity, or boredom from me. So has political partisanship masquerading as religion. I am happy as a child to follow Christ's vicar on earth everywhere he leads. What he loves, I love; what he leaves, I leave; where he leads, I follow. For the Lord we both adore said to Peter his predecessor, "Who hears you, hears Me." That is why I am a Catholic: because I am a Christian. ■

*Source: "Hauled Aboard the Ark – The Spiritual Journey of Peter Kreeft" excerpt from The Spiritual Journeys published by the Daughters of St. Paul. Used with permission of the author.*



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## BLOG

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## THE SPOUSES NETWORK

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

The *Spouses Network* aids and provides fellowship for the spouses of clergy on the journey to the Catholic Church as well as those who are new Catholics. Through the *Spouses Network*, spouses of clergy who have embraced the Catholic faith provide one-on-one assistance to clergy spouses who are still on the journey or have recently become Catholic. In this way they offer a source of friendship, support, and increased love of Jesus Christ and His Church.

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

For more information, please contact:

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740-450-1175 ext. 105

We ask all members of *The Coming Home Network International* please to 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.

# What is **God's Will** for my—for **OUR** lives?



By Marcus Grodi



As this newsletter goes to print, we have nearly 750 non-Catholic clergy members who are still somewhere on the journey towards the Catholic Church. Most of these men and women are actively pastoring non-Catholic churches—of nearly a hundred different denominations. Some have grown discouraged and cold in their interest in the Catholic Church; many others are convinced and ready to “come home”, but are stalled in their journeys because they face seemingly insurmountable hurdles—vocational, occupational, financial, and sometimes marital.

As we stand beside these men and women, trying to do what we can to encourage and pray for them, the one theme that more than any other rises to the top is the discernment of God’s will. They love Jesus Christ and have committed their lives to follow Him wherever He leads. Sometime in this process they became convinced that He was calling them out of the world and into ministry, and this included some form of seminary training, confirmed by some form of ordination, and then lived out in some form of pastoral ministry. Then at some point during their desire to follow Christ faithfully they discovered the Catholic Church, often to their utter chagrin, throwing a wrench into the workings of everything they held true and dear.

Now they are left with the questions: Lord, what are You calling me to do? What about Your calling to the ministry? What about my training, my gifts, my experiences? What about my marriage and family? Lord Jesus, how can I know Your will for my—for OUR lives?

Years ago I was faced with this very question. Though the Coming Home Network was not yet around, I was fortunate to have been gifted with the friendship of Fr. Ray Ryland, a former Episcopal minister, now a Catholic priest (who presently serves as our Chaplain). I ran these questions by him, especially the one about discerning God’s will, and he gave me what he called his Rule of Thumb for Decision Making, which he has followed for many years. It involves pondering three questions:

- 1) Can I honestly say I desire above all else to know God’s will in this matter?
- 2) Can I honestly say I have exerted great effort to discern God’s will?
- 3) Can I honestly say that if I can discern His will, I will do my very best, by grace, to carry out that will?

His advice was that if I could honestly answer “yes” to these questions, then I should follow what seemed to be my best inclination, assuming that to be God’s will—unless, of course, there were circumstances or conditions (such as being contrary to the Church’s teaching) which make it clear that my inclination could NOT be God’s will.

My wife, Marilyn, and I prayerfully followed his advice, and indeed found our way home to the Church, and have never doubted that this was God’s will for our lives.

Recently, while doing more research on how to help our clergy-on-the-journey discern God’s direction for their lives, I came across the following tremendously helpful article on Discernment by Dr. Peter Kreeft. With his permission, we thought this a great opportunity to not only pass it along for your encouragement, but also include his own story of conversion. May they both be a strong encouragement for you to follow faithfully God’s will for your life. ■

**BLOG**

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By Peter Kreeft

# Discernment

**D**oes God have one right choice for me in each decision I make?

When we pray for wisdom to discern God's will when it comes to choosing a mate, a career, a job change, a move, a home, a school, a friend, a vacation, how to spend money, or any other choice, big or little, whenever there are two or more different paths opening up before us and we have to choose, does God always will one of those paths for us? If so, how do we discern it?

Many Christians who struggle with this question today are unaware that Christians of the past can help them from their own experience. Christian wisdom embodied in the lives and teachings of the saints tells us two things that are relevant to this question.

First, they tell us that God not only knows and loves us in general but that he cares about every detail of our lives, and we are to seek to walk in his will in all things, big and little. Second, they tell us that he has given us free will and reason because he wants us to use it to make decisions. This tradition is exemplified in Saint Augustine's famous motto "Love God and [then] do what you will." In other words, if you truly love God and his will, then doing what you will, will, in fact, be doing what God wills.

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Do these two pieces of advice pull us in opposite directions, or do they only seem to? Since there is obviously a great truth embodied in both of them, which do we emphasize the most to resolve our question of whether God has one right way for us?

I think the first and most obvious answer to this question is that it depends on which people are asking it. We have a tendency to emphasize one half of the truth at the expense of the other half, and we can do that in either of the two ways. Every heresy in the his-

tory of theology fits this pattern: for instance, emphasizing Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity or his humanity at the expense of his divinity; or emphasizing divine sovereignty at the expense of free will or free will at the expense of divine sovereignty.

Five general principles of discernment of God's will that apply to all questions about it, and therefore to our question too, are the following:

1. **Always begin with data**, with what we know for sure. Judge the unknown by the known, the uncertain by the certain. Adam and Eve neglected that principle in Eden and ignored God's clear command and warning for the devil's promised pig in a poke.
2. **Let your heart educate your mind**. Let your love of God educate your reason in discerning his will. Jesus teaches this principle in John 7:17 to the Pharisees. (Would that certain Scripture scholars today would heed it!) They were asking how they could interpret his words, and he gave them the first principle of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation): "If your will were to do the will of my Father, you would understand my teaching." The saints understand the Bible better than the theologians, because they understand its primary author, God, by loving him with their whole heart and their whole mind.
3. **Have a soft heart but a hard head**. We should be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," sharp as a fox in thought but loyal as a dog in will and deed. Soft-heartedness does not excuse soft-headedness, and hard-headedness does not excuse hard-heartedness. In our hearts we should be "bleeding-heart liberals" and in our heads "stuck-in-the-mud conservatives."
4. **All God's signs should line up**, by a kind of trigonometry. There are at least seven such signs: (1) Scripture, (2) church teaching, (3) human reason (which God created), (4) the appropriate situation, or circumstances (which he controls by his providence), (5) conscience, our innate sense of ... *continued on page 12*



right and wrong, (6) our individual personal bent or desire or instincts, and (7) prayer. Test your choice by holding it up before God's face. If one of these seven voices says no, don't do it. If none say no, do it.

5. **Look for the fruits of the spirit**, especially the first three: love, joy, and peace. If we are angry and anxious and worried, loveless and joyless and peaceless, we have no right to say we are sure of being securely in God's will. Discernment itself should not be a stiff, brittle, anxious thing, but—since it too is part of God's will for our lives—loving and joyful and peace-filled, more like a game than a war, more like writing love letters than taking final exams.

Now to our question. Does God have just one right choice for me to make each time? If so, I must find it. If not, I should relax more and be a little looser. Here are some clues to the answer.

The answer depends on what kind of person you are. I assume that many readers of this page are (1) Catholic, (2) orthodox and faithful to the teachings of the church, (3) conservative, and (4) charismatic. I have had many friends—casual, close, and very close—of this description for many years. In fact, I fit the description myself. So I speak from some experience when I say that people of this type have a strong tendency toward a certain character or personality type—which is in itself neither good nor bad—which needs to be nourished by one of these emphases more than the other. The opposite personality type would require the opposite emphasis.

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### Relax. Enjoy life.

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My **first** clue, based on my purely personal observation of this kind of people, is that we often get bent out of human shape by our desire—in itself a very good desire—to find God's perfect will for us. We give a terrible testimony to non-Christians; we seem unable to relax, to stop and smell God's roses, to enjoy life as God gives it to us. We often seem fearful, fretful, terribly serious, humorless, and brittle—in short, the kind of people that don't make a very good advertisement for our faith.

I am not suggesting that we compromise one iota of our faith to appeal to unbelievers. I am simply suggesting that we be human. Go watch a ball game. Enjoy a drink—just one—unless you're at risk for alcoholism. Be a little silly once in a while. Tickle your kids—and your

wife. Learn how to tell a good joke. Read Frank Schaefer's funny novel *Portofino*. Go live in Italy for a while.

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### Most do not have knowledge of God's will in every single choice.

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Here's a **second** clue. Most Christians, including many of the saints, don't, in fact, have the discernment we are asking about, the knowledge of what God wills in every single choice. It's rare. Could something as important as this be so rare? Could God have left almost all of us so clueless?

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### The gospel frees us from sin and its consequences, but not suffering and uncertainties.

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A **third** clue is Scripture. It records some examples—most of them miraculous, many of them spectacular—of God revealing his particular will. But these are reported in the same vein as miracles: as something remarkable, not as general policy. The "electronic gospel" of health and wealth, "name it and claim it," is unscriptural, and so is the notion that we must find the one right answer to every practical problem, for the same reason: we are simply never assured such a blanket promise.

Darkness and uncertainty are as common in the lives of the saints, in Scripture as well as afterwards, as pain and poverty are. The only thing common to all humanity that the gospel guarantees to free us from is sin (and its consequences, death, guilt, and fear), not suffering *and not uncertainties*. If God had wanted us to know the clear, infallible way, he surely would have told us clearly and infallibly.

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### Reason and free will always go together. God created both in us as part of his image.

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A **fourth** clue is something God did in fact give us: free will. Why? There are a number of good reasons—

for instance, so that our love could be infinitely more valuable than instinctive, unfree animal affection. But I think I see another reason. As a teacher, I know that I sometimes should withhold answers from my students so that they find them themselves, and thus appreciate and remember them better—and also learn how to exercise their own judgment in finding answers themselves. “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” God gave us some big fish, but he also gave us the freedom to fish for a lot of little ones (and some big ones) ourselves.

Reason and free will always go together. God created both in us as part of his image. He gives supernatural revelation to both: dogmas to our reason and commandments to our will. But just as he didn’t give us all the answers, even in theology, in applying the dogmas or drawing out the consequences of them, so he didn’t give us all the answers in morality or practical guidance, in applying the commandments and drawing out their consequences. He gave us the mental and moral equipment with which to do that, and he is not pleased when we bury our talent in the ground instead of investing it so that he will see how much it has grown in us when he returns.

In education, I know there are always two extremes. You can be too modern, too experimental, too Deweyan, too structureless. But you can also be too classical, too rigid. Students need initiative and creativity and originality too. God’s law is short. He gave us ten commandments, not ten thousand. Why? Why not a more complete list of specifics? Because he wanted freedom and variety. Why do you think he created so many persons? Why not just one? Because he loves different personalities. He wants his chorus to sing in harmony, but not in unison.

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As long as you love God  
and act within his law,  
he wants you to play  
around a bit.

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I know Christians who are cultivating ingrown eyeballs trying to know themselves so well—often by questionable techniques like the enneagram, or Oriental modes of prayer—so that they can make the decision that is exactly what God wants for them every

time. I think it is much healthier to think about God and your neighbor more and yourself less, to forget yourself—follow your instincts without demanding to know everything about them. As long as you love God and act within his law, I think he wants you to play around a bit.

I’m happily haunted by Chesterton’s image of the playground fence erected around the children on top of the mountain so that they could play without fear of falling off the side. That’s why God gave us his law: not to make us worried but to keep us safe so that we could play the great games of life and love and joy.

Each of us has a different set of instincts and desires. Sin infects them, of course. But sin infects our reason and our bodies too; yet we are supposed to follow our bodily instincts (for example, hunger and self-preservation) and our mind’s instincts (for example, curiosity and logic). I think he wants us to follow our hearts. Surely, if John loves Mary more than Susan, he has more reason to think God is leading him to marry Mary than Susan. Why not treat all other choices by the same principle?

I am not suggesting, of course, that our hearts are infallible, or that following them justifies sinful behavior. Nor am I suggesting that the heart is the only thing to follow. I mentioned seven guidelines earlier. But surely it is God who designed our hearts—the spiritual heart with desire and will as much as the physical heart with aorta and valves. Our parents are sinful and fallible guides too, but God gave them to us to follow. So our hearts can be worth following too even though they are sinful and fallible. If your heart loves God, it is worth following. If it doesn’t, then you’re not interested in the problem of discernment of his will anyway.

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Peace is a mark of the  
Holy Spirit.

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Here is a **fifth** clue. When we do follow Augustine’s advice to “love God and then do what you will,” we usually experience great relief and peace. Peace is a mark of the Holy Spirit.

I know a few people who have abandoned Christianity altogether because they lacked that peace. They tried to be super-Christians in everything, and the pressure was just unendurable. They should have read Galatians.

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Goodness is multicolored. Only pure evil lacks color and variety.

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Here is a **sixth** clue. If God has one right choice in everything you do, then you can't draw any line. That means that God wants you to know which room to clean first, the kitchen or the bedroom, and which dish to pick up first, the plate or the saucer. You see, if you carry out this principle's logical implications, it shows itself to be ridiculous, unlivable, and certainly not the kind of life God wants for us—the kind described in the Bible and the lives of the saints.

Clue number six is the principle that many diverse things are good; that good is plural. Even for the same person, there are often two or more choices that are both good. Good is kaleidoscopic. Many roads are right. The road to the beach is right and the road to the mountains is right, for God awaits us in both places. Goodness is multicolored. Only pure evil lacks color and variety. In hell there is no color, no individuality. Souls are melted down like lead, or chewed up together in Satan's mouth. The two most uniform places on earth are prisons and armies, not the church.

Take a specific instance where different choices are both equally good. Take married sex. As long as you stay within God's law—no adultery, no cruelty, no egotism, no unnatural acts, as, for example, contraception—anything goes. Use your imagination. Is there one and only one way God wants you to make love to your spouse? What a silly question! Yet making love to your spouse is a great good, and God's will. He wants *you* to decide to be tender or wild, moving or still, loud or quiet, so that your spouse knows it's *you*, not anyone else, not some book who's deciding.

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God writes the story of our lives with the pen strokes of our own free choices.

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Clue number **seven** is an example from my own present experience. I am writing a novel for the first time, and learning how to do it. First, I placed it in God's hands, told him I wanted to do it for his kingdom, and



photo by Svilen Milev/stock.xchng

trusted him to lead me. Then, I simply followed my own interests, instincts, and unconscious. I let the story tell itself and the characters become themselves. God doesn't stop me or start me. He doesn't do my homework for me. But he's there, like a good parent.

I think living is like writing a novel. It's writing the story of your own life and even your own self (for you shape your self by all your choices, like a statue that is its own sculptor). God is the primary author, of course, the primary sculptor. But he uses different human means to get different human results. He is the primary author of each book in the Bible too, but the personality of each human author is no less clear there than in secular literature.

God is the universal storyteller. He *wants* many different stories. And he wants you to thank him for the unique story that comes from your free will and your choices too. Because your free will and his eternal plan are not two competing things, but two sides of one thing. We cannot fully understand this great mystery in this life, because we see only the underside of the tapestry. But in heaven, I think, one of the things we will praise and thank God the most for is how wildly and wonderfully and dangerously he put the driving wheel of our life into our hands—like a parent teaching a young child to drive.

You see, we have to learn that, because the cars are much bigger in heaven. There, we will rule angels and kingdoms.

God, in giving us all free will, said to us: "Your will be done." Some of us turn back to him and say: "My will is that your will be done." That is obedience to the first and greatest commandment. Then, when we do that, he turns to us and says: "And now, *your* will be done." And then he writes the story of our lives with the pen strokes of our own free choices. ■

*This article appears online at <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/discernment.htm>. Used with permission of the author.*

**BLOG**

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# Prayer List

## Clergy

■ For an Episcopal priest in West Virginia, that the Lord Jesus would guide his journey home in every respect.

■ For David, an Anglican priest in the Eastern US, that as he guides his flock home God would send him strength and support.

■ For a United Methodist minister in North Carolina, that all of the stumbling blocks he sees standing in his way to being a Catholic may be removed by Jesus.

■ For John, a Charismatic Episcopal priest, that our Lord Jesus would show him the way to return to the Church of his youth with his family.

■ For a Lutheran seminarian in Kentucky, that the Holy Spirit would show him that the best way to minister to people is through the complete gifts and graces found in the One Church.

■ For Fr. Ray, in Florida, that God in His love and grace would guide him home to the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church of his youth.

■ For David, a United Church of Christ lay minister in Missouri, that as he delves deep into the truths of the Catholic faith he may experience the joy of the fullness of the Faith.

■ For Julie, a Presbyterian minister, that she may recover her health so that she can resume her journey to full communion with the Catholic Church.

## Laity

■ For Elizabeth, that she will return to full participation in the Church that Christ founded.

■ For Sara who is seeking answers to her many questions about Catholic beliefs, that the Holy Spirit give her the necessary understanding for her to know God's will.

■ For John, that he finds comfort in Jesus' arms as he suffers from the loss of his wife.

■ For the supporters of the CHNetwork who are suffering from cancer, that they unite their sufferings to the cross of Christ for the good of His Body.

■ For Adam who is estranged from his Catholic faith and his family, that he may find healing and peace.

■ For Dolores' son, a Catholic priest, that the Lord bless and protect him as he strives to bring Christ's light to the darkened world of today.

■ For Philip and his wife to recognize the truth and beauty of the Catholic faith.

■ For Mary's health to improve so she can care for her husband.

■ For Timothy that he will be healed of the lung condition that has immobilized him.

■ For Vicky and her husband as they study about the Catholic faith in RCIA.

■ For all the members of the CHNetwork, that they may give thanks for the multitude of gifts and blessings God has bestowed upon them in the past year.



■ For Dorothy and her family, that God continue to bless them with new Catholic friends as they journey towards full communion with the See of St. Peter.

■ For a couple experiencing tension in their marriage on account of the husband's desire to enter the Catholic Church.

■ For Patrick, his wife, and children to experience the fullness Christ has to offer.

■ For a woman striving to discern God's leading in her faith walk while suffering from numerous health issues.

■ For Darla, as she seeks an ever-deepening relationship with our Lord Jesus.

■ For Stephanie who is continuing to draw closer to Christ and His Church despite numerous trials in her personal life.

■ For Ruth to connect well at her local parish and establish wholesome friendships to encourage her in her faith journey.

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

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

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

**The Coming Home Network International**

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

# GET INVOLVED!

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

1

Get the November 2011 "Evangelization Outreach Package," specifically designed to provide our members with excellent material to deepen their understanding of the Faith and in turn pass it along to non-Catholic family and friends. For more information, see page 2 of this newsletter.

2

Visit [chnetwork.org/blog](http://chnetwork.org/blog) where you will see our featured newsletter article. Please stop by, leave a comment or question, and share the article with others!



3

If you are a convert or revert prayerfully consider submitting your story to the CHNetwork. Go to <http://chnetwork.org/converts/share-your-story/> for more information.

SHARE  
YOUR  
STORY