



## November 2012 Newsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Upon This Rock — That Doesn't Roll

*Dale Ahlquist*

He was called the “Father of Jesus Rock.” Everyone who was an Evangelical or Pentecostal Christian in the 1970s knew who he was. He wrote such songs as “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” “U.F.O.,” “One Way,” “I Am a Servant,” and “Righteous Rocker, Holy Roller.” He was the one who lamented playfully, “Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?” He had brilliant lyrical and musical gifts. He could hold audiences in the palm of his hand, easily making them roll with laughter, rock with praise, or be quiet and thoughtful.

His name was Larry Norman — and he was married to my sister.

My brother-in-law was certainly one of the most influential people in my life. As a teenager in the 1970s, I, too, wore my hair long, played the guitar, and wrote songs. I was also an outspoken Christian, and everyone who knew me knew I was a Christian. I was unafraid to share my faith, unafraid to defend it.

Larry not only helped pay for my college education, he provided some fascinating summer employment in his office and recording studio in Los Angeles, which was a long way from my home in St. Paul, Minnesota. With him, I always felt right in the thick of things. During those interesting summers, I had long talks

with Larry about everything: music and movies and art and love and the world and God.

### Better than C.S. Lewis

His primary influence on me did not come from those talks, his dynamic personality, his creative intellect, the fact that he was married to my sister, or that he was too religious for the rock-and-roll people, yet too rock-and-roll for the religious people. It came from a simple passing remark when he saw me reading *Mere Christianity*.

“You like C.S. Lewis?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I replied.

“Have you ever read any G.K. Chesterton?”

“I’ve never heard of G.K. Chesterton.”

“Chesterton is a lot better than C.S. Lewis. In fact, if you read Chesterton, you wouldn’t even need to read C.S. Lewis, because all of Lewis is inside Chesterton.”

To me this bordered on blasphemy, but the comment stuck in my head. I soon began to notice Lewis’s references to Chesterton here and there. I went on to read how C.S. Lewis had been a confirmed atheist — until he read *The Everlasting Man* by G.K. Chesterton. Lewis said that a young man who is serious about his atheism cannot be too careful about what he reads. ... continued on page 2

*Journeys Home*

# FEATURED RESOURCES

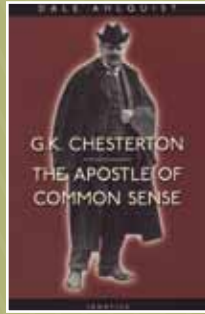
## Deep in Scripture Radio program special!

Dale Ahlquist joins Marcus Grodi in this insightful *Deep in Scripture* radio program.



## G.K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense

By Dale Ahlquist



G. K. Chesterton was one of the most well-known and beloved writers of his time. Yet he has been strangely neglected today. This book is the perfect introduction to Chesterton. Ahlquist is an able guide who takes the reader through twelve of Chesterton's most important books as well as the famous Father Brown stories.

There is something special that runs throughout Chesterton's books that sets him apart from the confusing philosophies of the modern world. That common thread in Chesterton's writings is common sense. It is instantly recognizable and utterly refreshing.

Ahlquist makes the literary giant accessible, highlighting Chesterton's amazing reach, keen insight, and marvelous wit. Each chapter is liberally spiced with Chesterton's striking quotations.

\$35

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

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *G.K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD & *G.K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

...*Journeys Home Continued...*

He called *The Everlasting Man* the best book of apologetics in the 20th century. But it would be four more years before I actually read a Chesterton book and a lot of things changed in those interim years. Larry divorced my sister and his career as a Jesus Rock singer began a steady decline. I graduated from college and got married in 1981.

My wife, Laura, and I went to Italy on our honeymoon. She had been born there and spoke the language. We were in Rome on a rather momentous day: May 13, 1981, the day Pope John Paul II was shot. We were in the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains, looking at Michelangelo's statue of Moses, when we heard the news. As we walked back to our hotel room, we watched the city transform from utter chaos to an eerie calm. After the sirens died down, the streets became strangely empty. A silence descended on Rome. It was as if everyone went home to pray. A few days later street vendors were selling postcards of the pope waving from his hospital bed.

Little did I know that my path to Rome *began* in Rome; the city amazed me in every way, with the weight of its history and beauty, and with the urgency and significance of what was happening during our visit. Regardless, the farthest thing from my mind at the time was that I would ever become a Catholic. I was only there as a tourist, an outsider.

Born and raised a Baptist, I knew my Bible sideways and diagonally and I knew all the things that were wrong with the Catholic Church. Yet, a seed was planted while I was in Rome; an unlikely seed in an unlikely soil. It had nothing to do with the churches, shrines, or holy sites I saw. It had to do with the reading material I brought with me on my honeymoon: a book by G.K. Chesterton.

People get a good laugh out of the fact that I read *The Everlasting Man* on my honeymoon. What makes it even funnier is that my bride was reading *Les Miserables* and crying her eyes out. In contrast to her experience, my sensation upon reading my book was the same as that described by Dorothy L. Sayers the first time she read Chesterton: she said it was like a strong wind rushing into the building and blowing out all the windows. It was utterly fresh and it knocked me over! I knew I had encountered a writer like no other. His words resounded with a splendor of confidence and truth from the opening sentence: "There are two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there." In the book, which is a condensed history of the world, Chesterton demonstrates that Christ is the center of history, the center of the human story. He brings together history, literature, mythology, science, and religion, and swats the skeptics who

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

scoff at the Christian claims. “The most ignorant of humanity know by the very look of earth that they have forgotten heaven.”

Chesterton gave me a completely new perspective of the coming of Christ: a baby, outcast and homeless. “The hands that had made the sun and the stars were too small to reach the huge heads of the cattle.” He awed me with his description of the Crucifixion, when the darkness descended, and “God had been forsaken of God.” Then the Resurrection, which was the first morning of a new world, when “God walked again in the garden.”

I did not know at the time that Chesterton was a Catholic convert. It was a fact that I avoided as I continued to collect and read books by Chesterton: *Heretics*, *Orthodoxy*, *All Things Considered*, *Tremendous Trifles*, even books with giveaway titles like *St. Francis of Assisi*, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, and the Father Brown mysteries. I simply could not get enough of this unique writer. I found that there was no subject that he did not address, that he said something about everything and said it better than anybody else.

I could not understand why hardly anyone had heard of G.K. Chesterton, why he was not required reading in the schools, why his sweeping ideas, his energizing wit, and his profound insight were not discussed and debated and searched out and savored by everyone.

In 1990, I completed a Master’s thesis on Chesterton and that same year was delighted to learn of a Chesterton conference being held in Milwaukee. I drove six hours from the Twin Cities, and when I walked into the room there were about 20 people sitting in a few rows of folding chairs, listening intently to an Englishman named Aidan Mackey giving a talk on Chesterton’s poetry.

I immediately knew I was among friends, among people who had discovered the same treasure that I had discovered. As I had the pleasure of getting to know these Chestertonians, I was not surprised to find that they were incredibly articulate, morally grounded, and fun loving. I suppose I was a bit surprised to find that almost all of them were Catholic. It was the first time I had ever met Catholics who could actually explain and defend their faith.

A year later, I was back and presenting a synopsis of my thesis at this same conference. It was warmly received and I was soon contributing a regular column to a modest Chesterton newsletter. I invited friends to attend subsequent conferences with me and as the Midwest Chestertonians continued to tap me to do work for their small group, I had an urge to do even more, to get more people to discover Chesterton. Here was a complete thinker. No holes. No loose ends. His Christian faith, his philosophy, his art, his politics, his economics, his literature, and his laughter were all of a piece, truly a seamless garment, and I regarded this neglected literary master as a prophet holding the cure for what ails the modern world. People who had not heard of him and had not read his works were simply being cheated! So, with the help of some co-conspirators, I started the American Chesterton Society, and, soon after that, helped launch *Gilbert! The Magazine of G.K. Chesterton* — and this all happened *before* I became a Catholic!

But let’s back up a minute.

... continued on page 4

## EWTN’S THE JOURNEY HOME

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

**TELEVISION** — Mondays at 8 PM ET, Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET  
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

**RADIO** — Mondays at 8:00 PM ET, Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET, Sundays 1:00 AM ET  
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Friday 12 AM ET

### November 5

Brian Besong\*  
Former Baptist/Presbyterian

### November 12

Dawn Eden\*  
Convert from Judaism

### November 19

The Journey Home International

### November 26

Leah Darrow\*  
Revert

\*Schedule is subject to change.

## DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Since 2006, we at the Coming Home Network have been blessed to have our *Deep In Scripture* radio program air weekly on the EWTN Radio Network. By mutual agreement between EWTN and CHNetwork, *Deep In Scripture* will no longer be airing each Wednesday afternoon.

EWTN radio is excited to announce that the “*At Home with Jim & Joy (Pinto)*” program will now air Monday-Thursday at 2:00pm (Eastern) instead of only on Mondays.

Here at the CHNetwork, we will be using our studio time reserved for *Deep In Scripture* to produce **NEW** programs exclusively for our CHN members. Stay tuned for details!





## SPOUSE'S NETWORK

### *Are you the spouse of a Protestant minister interested in becoming Catholic?*

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

If the Spouses Network is something you feel called to, whether you are a spouse of a clergy who has become Catholic and would like to assist someone, or if you are the wife of a pastor who is in need of support on the journey home, we would like to invite you to contact Mary Clare at [maryp@chnetwork.org](mailto:maryp@chnetwork.org) or by phone at 740-450-1175 ext 105.

*We ask all the Coming Home Network International's members to please keep the Spouse's 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.*

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

### **I began to feel a burden**

My father was a Baptist missionary's son. He was born and raised in the jungles of northeast India, in Assam, among the headhunting tribes of the Garo Hills. His father was a doctor and a pastor, who not only brought the Good News of Christ to the natives, but the medical miracles that healed thousands of people. Dr. Ahlquist was a beloved man who was tragically killed in an automobile accident on a mountain road when my father was only 18 years old. My father came back to America and a few years later met my mother at a Baptist church in St. Paul. She was a farm girl who had come to the big city to study nursing. My father became a high school biology teacher and he and my mother had six children. We went to church four times a week. I was a counselor at a Billy Graham Crusade when I was 14 years old. I led youth groups, Bible studies, and "singspirations." By the time I was in college, I could recite whole books of the Bible from memory. I was active in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in college and challenged my professors about, well, everything. I even taught a weekly class to other students on Christian apologetics.

It was while I was in college, however, that I began to feel a burden that would not go away. I was very troubled by the deep divisions within Christianity. I took the opportunity to visit every single church in Northfield, Minnesota, a classic college town. I wanted to see what they were like and, this way, I got a taste of over twenty different denominations (but since this was Minnesota, an undue portion of them were Lutheran.) For the most part, there wasn't much difference, but there was always *some* difference. The most telling event came one Sunday when I attended a "New Testament" church. It was new indeed and was meeting in a temporary facility. There were only 30 people there, a group of maybe 7 or 8 families. I soon learned that it was the final Sunday that they would be meeting together because the following Sunday they were going to be splitting up into two different churches, not for evangelistic reasons, but because they had a disagreement. This tiny nascent group could not even hold itself together, and so one faction was breaking away to form a new church.

To me it epitomized everything that was wrong with Christianity. Instead of working out their differences and mending their divisions, instead of *uniting* in Christ, they splintered off into a still smaller group, with a new name, a new denomination, thus rendering themselves more insignificant and ineffectual in a world that needed Jesus. It was clear to me that though they were utterly sincere and devout in their faith, there was no way that such a show of sincerity or devotion honored the Body of Christ. It was division. It was brokenness.

### **Where to pray?**

I got married a year after college and, after our Italian honeymoon, Laura and I began to look for a church that we could attend regularly. We soon gave up. Nothing seemed quite right. I eventually became a "lone ranger" Christian. When we had kids, we had "home church" and why not? There was nothing that was done in a Protestant church that we couldn't do at

...Journeys Home Continued...



home. We read the Bible, we sang, we prayed, and I sermonized. Once in a while we did attend a church and had the exact same experience: some Scripture readings, songs, and prayers wrapped around a sermon.

Even though my theology was still Baptist, I no longer wished to be known as a Baptist, but simply as a Christian. I noticed, too, that the mega-churches in the Twin Cities that had previously called themselves Baptist had also dropped the word “Baptist” from their names. I also saw that they were looking less and less like churches. Their “sanctuaries” had become mere auditoriums. Regardless of whether they were latent Baptists or blatant Baptists, the fact was, there were still over fifty different Baptist denominations.

All the while, I was reading Chesterton and yearning for a place to pray.

During the week, I would “sneak” into Catholic churches and kneel and pray, reciting one of the many Psalms that I had memorized, such as Psalm 130: “Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my prayer... My soul waits for the Lord. More than the watchman waits for morning. More than the watchman waits for morning.”

Why did I go into *Catholic* churches? Well, they were usually the only ones open and, importantly, I sensed a presence there that I did not sense in any Protestant church: a sanctuary — a *holy* place.

## What happened before the Reformation?

Soon, I had a brand new problem. I found myself longing for the ancient, historical Faith. I had to admit, reluctantly, that Baptists were a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of Christianity. What, I had to ask, was going on during the huge period of time before the Reformation? None of that portion of history had ever been explained to me. It had only been explained away. I started to dig into that history, reading the Early Church Fathers and books on the history of the Church. I also read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and Chesterton’s most Catholic books: *The Thing*, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, and *The Well and the Shallows*.

Chesterton describes the three stages a convert goes through. The first is deciding to be fair to the Catholic Church. However, there is no being *fair* to it. You are either for it or against it. When you stop being against it, you find yourself being drawn towards it. Then comes the second step, the fun one. It is learning about the Catholic Church, which is like exploring an exotic country full of strange new animals and flowers that you had never imagined existed. It is fun because there is no commitment and you can run away anytime you want. Which leads to Chesterton’s third step: running away. You do everything you can to avoid becoming Catholic. You know it is the right Church and you will not admit it, because admitting it means changing your life forever. Your head is convinced, but your heart is still trying to talk you out of it.

One by one, I had dealt with each of my Baptist objections to Catholicism. Any good Baptist is raised with a subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) anti-Catholicism. The Baptist way could almost be described as a point-by-point reaction against and rejection of Catholicism. We rejected the papacy, the priesthood, the Eucharist, celibacy, saints, ... continued on page 6

## SUPPORTING CHNETWORK JUST GOT EASIER!

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

### CHNetwork

Attention: Ann Moore

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702

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

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

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## KEEP IN TOUCH!

The CHNetwork would like to keep in touch with you via e-mail. Please go to [www.chnetwork.org/update](http://www.chnetwork.org/update) to ensure the CHNetwork has your e-mail address on file. We especially ask non-Catholic clergy and converts to provide us with your e-mail to allow us to keep in contact.

## EBOOKS & AUDIO BOOKS

The CHNetwork is pleased to now offer a number of our resources as eBooks! Professionally recorded audiobooks of Marcus Grodi's novels *How Firm a Foundation* and *Pillar & Bulwark* are also now available.

Visit [www.chnetwork.org/ebooks](http://www.chnetwork.org/ebooks) for more information.



## NEWSLETTER COPIES

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Confession, crucifixes, and so on. We identified ourselves by the name of a sacrament we also rejected. Though we insisted on a “believer’s baptism” and full immersion, we also insisted that it had absolutely no effect on a person whatsoever. It was merely a symbol. The Bible was our final authority in all matters and we were quite convinced that the Catholic Church deliberately kept its members from reading the Bible in order to keep them ignorant and malleable — which is quite a trick, especially if you can do it for two thousand years.

There is a major hole in the logic of those Christians who protest against the Catholic Church: you cannot use the authority of Scripture to attack the authority of the Church when it was the authority of the Church that recognized the Scripture’s authority. The hierarchy, the sacraments, the major doctrines of the Catholic Church were all well in place — centuries in place — before the biblical canon was in place and, of course, it was the Catholic Church that authorized the biblical canon. Chesterton says he can understand someone looking at a Catholic procession, at the candles and the incense and the priests and the robes and the cross and the scrolls, and saying “It’s all bosh.” But what he cannot understand is anyone saying, “It’s all bosh — except for the scrolls. We’re going to keep the scrolls. In fact, we’re even going to use the scrolls against the rest.”

## There’s something about Mary...

I also learned that the Catholic Church, in spite of its reputation among Baptists, is intensely scriptural. Ironically, at any Catholic Mass you will hear far more Scripture than at any Baptist service. And it was also my observation that every Protestant sect at some point simply disregards certain Scriptures that are not convenient to its own teachings.

There is not enough space here to deal with all of my objections to Catholic doctrine and how each was resolved, but I must mention one. The first hurdle and the final hurdle for me was Mary. I’m sure it is the same for most Baptist converts to the Catholic Church. Mary represents all the things we object to in one package. She is the pagan remnant in the Catholic Faith, the goddess-worship, idolatry, bigger-than-Christ in all the prayers, art, and music devoted to her, appealing to the ignorant who do not read their Bibles, and so on.

My objections to the Catholic view of Mary were deeply ingrained. The first thing that helped me overcome them was reading something that Cardinal Leo Suenens once said when speaking to a group of Protestants. He said, “I’m going to say to you what the angel said to Joseph in a dream: ‘Don’t be afraid of Mary.’”

I was indeed afraid of Mary.

Do not be afraid of Mary. This is the first step. And it was like Chesterton’s three steps of conversion. I had to start by deciding not to fear Mary, but to be *fair* to her. Then, it was a matter of discovering her. Then, running away from her.

The next thing that helped me with Mary was something I read when I went on a retreat to a Trappist monastery in Iowa. (Imagine! Here’s a guy who thinks he’s running away from the Catholic Church and he goes on



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

a retreat to a monastery! Though I have never been too bright, I have still always managed to outsmart myself.) In that place of silence and solitude I read how the monks there model themselves on Mary because Mary is the model Christian. She obeyed God's call, she carried Christ within her, and she then revealed Him to the whole world. She stayed close to Him and, so, she experienced the suffering of His death, the glory of His resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. We are to imitate her. What she did, literally, we must do in every other way. Who can argue with that beautiful image? It is an image worth meditating on every day, which is exactly what devotion is, and why so many have meditated on and been devoted to Mary. In doing so, they have also fulfilled her prophesy in Scripture by rising up and calling her "blessed."

After a few more intermediate steps, I went to another monastery on a retreat (again, I was retreating in the *direction* of the Church). The priest there looked me in the eye and asked, "Why haven't you converted yet?" I mumbled something about Mary. He did not loosen his gaze, but asked, "Do you believe that her soul magnifies the Lord?"

The literal Baptist in me had never considered that verse literally before: "My soul makes God bigger." I had run out of excuses.

### The final step in my journey home

It became clear that every other Christian sect was exactly that — a sect, a section, something less than the whole. I discovered, as Chesterton had discovered, that "the Catholic Church is not only right, but right where everything else is wrong."

The hardest thing I have ever done — and what I don't doubt delayed my decision — was to tell my parents that I was going to become a Catholic. They were good, Christian people who had raised me to be a man of God. I did not want to make them feel that I was rejecting them, but that it was because they had imbued in me a love of the truth that I pursued that truth to its fullest expression. After that first awkward evening when I broke the news to them, we had many deep discussions about the Catholic Faith. They asked a ton of questions. They did not like all my answers, but I was at least able to answer their questions, since I had asked all those questions myself during my pilgrimage. Many of the answers did make a great deal of sense to them. My father said to me, "You're telling us things we never knew."

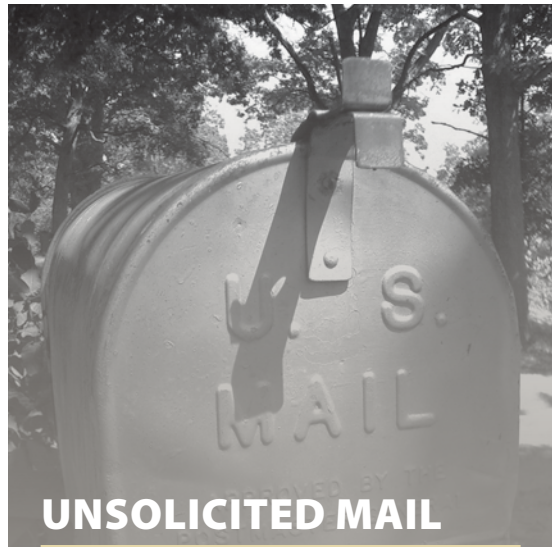
I was received into the Catholic Church on the Feast of the Holy Family in 1997, along with my two oldest children Julian and Ashley. At the same time, my wife, who had not been a practicing Catholic when we met, returned home to the Church.

Not long after my conversion, I was invited by Marcus Grodi to be on *The Journey Home* to talk not only about Chesterton's conversion, but my own. As I walked off the set at the end of the program, the producer came up to me and said, "We should do a whole series on Chesterton." About a year later I was taping the first season of *The Apostle of Common Sense*. My conversion led to a new vocation. I became, as some have said, "The Apostle of the Apostle of Common Sense," and I have had the privilege of traveling the country giving talks on the life-changing writer, G.K. Chesterton. ... continued on page 8



## SHARE YOUR STORY!

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



## UNSOLICITED MAIL

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

# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

PO Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH  
43702  
(740) 450-1175  
www.chnetwork.org

## President/Founder

Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor)

## Chaplain

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

The literary society became a full-time Catholic apostolate with a unique form of evangelism.

Chesterton said, “Becoming a Catholic does not mean leaving off thinking. It means learning how to think.” I can scarcely convey how astounding that comment is from someone like Chesterton, who was not exactly a dunce before his conversion. However, I discovered first hand that the Catholic Faith was not only central to Chesterton’s profound thought, it is central to *everything*.

One of Larry Norman’s songs described Jesus as the Rock that doesn’t roll. Though the image of Jesus as a rock is a valid one, one of the many metaphors that describe Him — the Lamb, the Lion, the Vine, the Shepherd, the Door — the image of the rock is far more important for the man, Peter, whom Jesus Himself named the rock: the rock upon whom He would build His Church. Peter is truly the rock that doesn’t roll because of Jesus’ promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church that He built on Peter. There is only one, true Church and everything else that calls itself a church is something that has separated from it. Everything else is a splinter. You cannot call twenty thousand different denominations the Church. You cannot even call fifty different Baptist denominations *the* Church. You can only look to the Church that they all left behind. We have nearly lived through five hundred years of the Reformation. It is time for the reunion. Lord, hear our prayer.

I did have one reunion of sorts with Larry Norman. After a twenty-year silence, we reconnected over the phone and through e-mail. I interviewed him for *Gilbert Magazine* and when I was on a speaking tour in California we got together for just a few minutes. He was very ill. He expressed his awe at my accomplishment in helping lead the Chesterton revival. I told him he created a monster that day he told me to read G.K. Chesterton and I thanked him. We said “I love you” to each other and “good-bye.” Less than five months later he was dead. Grant him eternal rest, O Lord. ■



DALE AHLQUIST is the president of the American Chesterton Society, creator and host of EWTN’s *G.K. Chesterton — The Apostle of Common Sense*, publisher of *Gilbert Magazine*, and author or editor of several books on Chesterton, including *G.K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense*. For more information, visit [www.chesterton.org](http://www.chesterton.org)

## BLOG

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





Marcus Grodi

# Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks.

*“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:16-18).*

“But why me?!”

Years ago I was warned that a good faithful, trusting Christian should not utter those words—at least as an expression of complaint or self-righteous incredulity—for they can convey thankless ingratitude toward God, not trusting in the good intentions of His mysterious will. Rather, as St. Paul exhorted the first generation of Christians, “in all circumstances,” the will of God “in Christ Jesus” for every Christian is always to “rejoice ... pray ... [and] give thanks.”

Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks.

Admittedly, at times and in many circumstances, this is easier said than done—especially if we find ourselves backed into a seemingly hopeless and impotent circumstance, either as the result of our own decisions, or someone else’s, or no one’s, such as with a debilitating illness.

“What have I ever done to deserve this?! I only wanted to do Your will. I thought I was hearing and following You! Why are You doing this to me?!”

Again, we need to be careful that these cries of near despair do not, in fact, pass into despair, for in such instances we give in to the temptation to distrust and reject the constant providence of God.

Yet, when asked as a sincere prayerful inquiry, these questions can be profound steps into spiritual growth and holiness: “Why me? Why are You allowing this to happen to me now at this time in my life?”

Before I was a Catholic, I had no place for suffering in my personal or preached theology, and I admittedly avoided the many Scriptures that speak of suffering. After becoming a Catholic—actually it took several years after becoming an informed Catholic—I not only began to understand the meaning and importance of, but more significantly, the necessity of suffering.

Throughout the New Testament we hear about the necessity of growing in holiness:

*You, therefore, must **be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48).*

*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and **make holiness perfect in the fear of God** (2 Cor 7:4).*

*Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God **in true righteousness and holiness** (Eph 4:22-24).*

*For God has not called us for uncleanness, but **in holiness**. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you (1 Thes 4:7-8).*

*Strive for peace with all men, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).*

Generally, when I think of what a person needs to do to grow in holiness, the first actions require willful *metanoia*, or turning away from anything in our lives that pulls us away from God, aided, of course, by grace. There is a constant battle with temptation to fight against doing or thinking or possessing that which is evil.

But the great Catholic spiritual writers have always described this growth in holiness in stages, the first stages centering more on the willful turning away from external attachments to the world, the flesh, and the devil, with the later more advanced stages dealing more with purging the interior, the soul: our attitudes, motives, desires, passions, self-sufficiency, self-esteem, and especially our pride. A person can look perfectly holy and cleansed on the outside, but may be going through excruciating temptations and trials on the inside. This is where suffering comes in.

Ever notice how so many of the greatest saints died early after experiencing much suffering and pain? Why would God do this? Why He would allow St. Therese or St. Bernadette to go through such agonizing physical suffering? Is it that, though they had rid their external lives of most obvious attachments, God desired to give them every opportunity to grow in holiness, even toward perfection. Isn’t it because when we are in the midst of physical suffering we are most challenged to trust in God’s constant love and care, to believe that He has not abandoned us, to accept that whatever has befallen us, to believe it is somehow for our good will?

Another aspect of the spiritual life that I learned to appreciate after my Catholic conversion is the necessity of fasting and abstinence. The Church “imposes” this upon us as a regular portion of our spiritual duties, but the reason is specifically because God loves us and wants us to be prepared

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for the suffering that surely will come. If from the time we are very young we have fasting and abstinence as a regular part of our lives, disciplining and training our wills in the little restraints, then as we age we can face with courage and thankfulness whatever suffering comes our way.

All of this is clearly described by the NT writers:

*“For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:6-14).*

When we lie in bed in painful suffering, no longer able to take care of even our most basic needs, we need to ask God to give us the grace to avoid the temptation to demand, “Why me, Lord? What have I done to deserve this?,” and realize that every moment of suffering is a gifted opportunity to grow in grace. Rejoicing may be too much to ask, but yet, the reason many Catholics put a crucifix in every room is so that every glance can remind us that “by His stripes we are healed.” When Jesus faced His suffering, He first asked, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;” but this was done in the relinquishing attitude of “nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mt 26:39). Called to imitate Him, we can indeed ask that God in His mercy and power relieve us of suffering, and this includes utilizing the means He has provided through medicine, counseling, etc. in accordance with the guidance of His Church; but always with an attitude of relinquished trust. As Catholics, we draw strength in the midst of our trials from the graces of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist

We can meditate on Scriptures, like the following, whenever we face trials, pain, and suffering that seems beyond our ability to cope:

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character*

*produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rom 5:1-5).*

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Rom 8:15-17).*

*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine (Phil 1:29-30).*

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:4-8).*

*Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:8-11).*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:4-7).*

*Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me (Phil 4:11-13).*

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden*

for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints (Col 1:24-26).

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim 4:3-5).

"Why me?!" Because God loves you.

For a beautiful reflection on suffering, the CHNetwork encourages you to read Blessed John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering) available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). ■

## BLOG

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

# Prayer List



## Clergy

■ For a Non-denominational minister in Liberia, that the grace of our Lord Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit would grant him an open heart for the fullness of the truth and give him a faithful Catholic friend to guide him into the Church.

■ For an Evangelical pastor in Oklahoma, that as he studies and prays over the true meaning of the Sacred Scriptures he may come to be convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and be led with his wife to come into full-communication with the successor of St. Peter, the chief of the holy Apostles.

■ For Jim, a Christian Reformed missionary in Massachusetts, that our Lord Jesus may use his love for his Catholic brothers and sister to bring him home to the Church founded by Jesus and the Faith preserved in its fullness in each century by the Holy Spirit.

■ For Jim, a Baptist pastor in Pennsylvania, that God lead him towards the Catholic Church.

■ For Ryan, a Pentecostal minister in the Northwest, that God would give him the grace to act upon the truth he has learned about Christ's Church and give him the courage to step out in faith.

■ For José, a lay minister in the Dominican Republic, that he may come to grasp the meaning of the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love which will come to him in the sacraments of the one holy, Catholic Church.

■ For an Old Catholic bishop, that God would bless and guide him home to the true old Catholic Church of his youth, founded by Jesus and always preserved in full-communication with the Holy Father, the Bishop of Rome.

■ For an Mormon minister in Uruguay, that God guide him and his congregation home to the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church founded by Christ and ever faithful to the fullness of His revelation.

■ For Mark, a Lutheran minister who was asked by his congregation to resign because he is "too Catholic," that his newfound freedom would enable him to come home soon.

## Layity

■ For David, that he may rediscover & embrace the true Faith and return to the Church & the sacraments.

■ For Sandra and her family to recognize and embrace the fullness of truth in the Catholic Faith.

■ For Greg, that his interest in the Catholic Faith bring him ever closer to Jesus and that his wife understand his search.

■ For Christy, that she will come to appreciate the richness Catholicism offers.

■ For Mary, that she live her new life as a Catholic to the fullest.

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.



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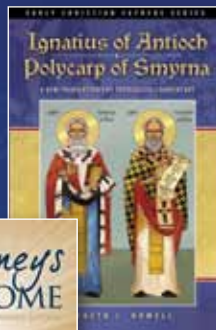
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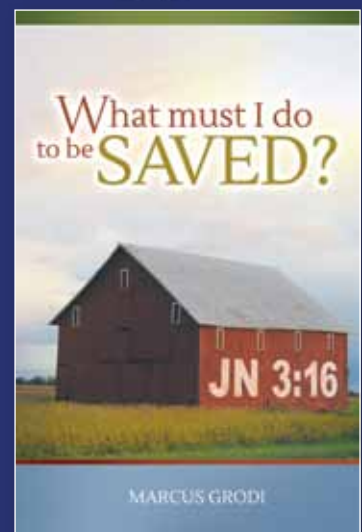
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**What Must I Do to Be Saved?**  
Marcus Grodi



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