

# The *Coming Home Network* International

OCTOBER 2006 NEWSLETTER

## JOURNEYS HOME

### A FORMER FUNDAMENTALIST

### FINDS THE FAITH

BY MICHAEL MATTHEWS

FORMER FUNDAMENTALIST BAPTIST PASTOR



We are often told that the Christian life is a journey. Well, mine has been a very bumpy ride! When I was a child, faith was never a big part of our family life. I am originally from St. Mary's County in Maryland, the cradle of Catholicism in English America. As an infant I was baptized into the Catholic faith and later attended two years of catechism class. I never received the Eucharist, however, and was never confirmed. By the age of eight, I was never darkening the door of a church except for weddings and funerals. Parents should take note: The Faith is always caught as well as taught and it needs to be both caught and taught at home.

My early Christian experience imparted a basic knowledge of some Christian doctrines (the nature of God, Jesus as Savior, etc.) and an insatiable curiosity about things spiritual, or more properly, supernatural. My three great loves in school were science, history (especially ancient and medieval history), and literature (especially fiction). These interests came together in my reading habits, which gravitated toward science fiction on one hand and historical fiction or fantasy on the other. I collected comic books from the age of four, delved into Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology, and watched most of the science fiction movies and shows that were available. Unfortunately some of these genres included elements of the occult, which drew me like a moth to a very dangerous flame.

As a teenager, I read a great deal of occult material and even fantasized about being a sorcerer of sorts. Still, I never became actively involved in things magical until I was fourteen. By that time, my public school had placed me in their "Talented and Gifted" program. In the interest of stirring our imaginations, the class introduced role-playing games, specifically one called *Dungeons and Dragons*. This game is known for incorporating many elements of actual occult practices, including spells, symbols, magic circles, and

conjuring demons, and is so close to the real thing that some devotees have written books to guide players into real magic and witchcraft.

Being interested in the supernatural as I was, it did not take long for me to begin dabbling. A great deal of "psychic" phenomena began to manifest itself. Eventually I developed a "New Age" approach to spirituality, and came to view God not so much as a Person, but as a "force." New Age "spirituality" is attractive because it allows one to feel and seem spiritual without having to be accountable to a personal, holy God. Such activities naturally made me vulnerable to outside influences and contact with the spirit world, and I found myself confronted by the reality of the forces of darkness. Voices in the night, faces in the shadows, and dreams of death and dying plagued me for several years.

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Ironically, while my love of science fiction and fantasy got me into trouble, it also led to my conversion. In 1981, when I was sixteen and doing a school project, I came across the book *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay. This book was the best-selling non-fiction book of the 1970's, and far from being science fiction, it concerned Biblical prophecy. According to Lindsay, all the signs indicated that the end of the world was coming true in our time. Jesus was coming soon and only those who truly knew Him would be able to escape seven years of Hell on earth. This would be the Great Tribulation. Of course, since I did not want to be around for that, I wanted to be raptured!

While there is much in the book with which I no longer agree, I have to admit that it was just what I needed (God will use anything to get our attention). It literally scared the devil out of me! It made me face my own sinfulness and the Hell that I so richly deserved. I came to personal faith and forgiveness in Jesus as the Messiah and my Savior, and to believe in the Bible as the Word of God. My life changed completely, and I cheerfully burned several hundred dollars worth of paraphernalia dealing with the occult. I was free!

Soon after graduating from high school, I began attending a small Baptist church in the area. I was surprised how much I enjoyed it! Every service featured good music, relevant preaching, and, most importantly, an invitation to receive Jesus as your personal Savior. But while I grew in my relationship with the Lord and in my knowledge of the Word of God, there was poison in the grape juice.

This particular church was an independent fundamental Baptist church that held to a view of church history called the "Trail of Blood." According to this view, the Roman Catholic Church had drifted off into apostasy and idolatry during the Middle Ages, and all the true "Bible-believers" went underground. These "real Christians" were composed of all the groups (such as the Waldensians and Albigensians) that were so viciously persecuted by the "Papists." Since today's Baptists are supposedly all descended from those groups, they were never part of the "Harlot of Babylon" (the Catholic Church). I often heard touted, "John was a Baptist, and baptized Jesus. So what does that make Jesus? Baptist!"

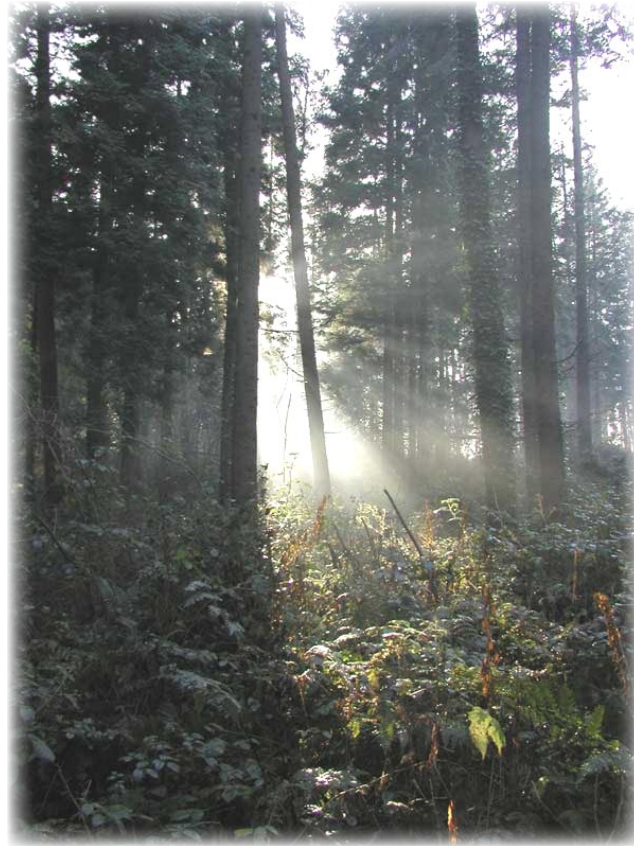
I also began to study the writings of Jack Chick, and came to the conclusion that as a child I had been badly deceived about the Catholic Church. I "discovered" that Catholicism was at best a cult, and at worst the religion of the Antichrist, and no Catholic could be saved without leaving the Church. To make matters worse, I enthusiastically began to share my faith, especially in door-to-door evangelism. A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing! In those early years, I witnessed to a wide variety of people from an incredible range of backgrounds. But of course the people that I most enjoyed confronting were Catholics!

I would use a plan called the "Roman Road," a handful of Scriptures taken completely out of context, to show a person how he or she could have complete knowledge and security of going to Heaven. From there it was common for me to ask, "Now, why have you never heard this in your church?" I admit, to my shame, that it was extraordinarily easy to lead Catholics out of the Church with this reasoning.

When I was 21, I felt a call to the ministry and went to study at Pensacola Christian College and Seminary. It is best known for the *A Beka* textbooks and curriculum, which are used by many home-schoolers and Christian schools, Protestant and Catholic. What is not widely known is that the college is a center of anti-Catholic teaching, in a manner similar to that of Bob Jones University. As I heard on several occasions, they use the "same King James Bible that Paul used!"

All of my courses, including those on Scripture, were tainted with the standard anti-Catholic Fundamentalism. The notable exception to this, however, were the college courses on Church history. I was astounded to learn that there were people who loved the Lord during the Middle Ages; that so many of the ancestors of modern Baptists (according to the "Trail of Blood") were, in fact, heretics that denied the core teachings of the Christian Faith; that Christianity was not put on hold until the Reformation; and that many of the "fundamentals" of the Faith had been defined by men such as Augustine, Jerome, and Thomas Aquinas. Of course, I wasn't told that they were St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Thomas!

*continued on page 3...*



# The Verses I Never Saw, Part II

by Marcus Grodi

In the last issue, I reflected on key passages from Scripture that as a Protestant minister I often overlooked, or simply ignored. When acknowledged at all, they were frequently interpreted with a tortured logic to avoid the inevitable conclusions that a straightforward reading would bring. In seeing these verses on their own terms for the first time, it became clear, as it has for so many Protestant clergy, that the Catholic Church well deserves the title, “the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth.”

Last month, I discussed 1). Proverbs 3:5-6, 2). 1 Timothy 3: 14-15, 3). 2 Timothy 3:14-17, 4). 2 Thessalonians 2:15, and 5). Matthew 16:13-19. Here are five more “verses I never saw:”

## 6. Revelation 14:13

For years, as a Calvinist preacher, I recited this verse in every funeral graveside service. I believed and taught *sola fide* and discounting any place for works in the process of our salvation. But then, after my last funeral service as a minister, a family member of the deceased cornered me. He asked, with a tremble in his voice, “What did you mean that Bill’s deeds follow him?” I don’t remember my response, but this was the first time I became aware of what I had been saying. This began a long study on what the New Testament and then the Early Church Fathers taught about the mysterious but necessary synergistic connection between our faith and our works.

## 7. Romans 10:14-15

I had always used these verses to defend the central importance of preaching and why I, therefore, had given up my engineering career for seminary and the great privilege of becoming a preacher of the Gospel! And I was never bothered by the last phrase about the need of being “sent,” because I could point to my ordination where a cackle of local ministers, elders, deacons, and laymen laid their hands on my sweaty head to send me forth in the Name of Jesus. But then, first through my reading of the history and writings of the Early Church Fathers and second through my re-reading of the scriptural context of Paul’s letters, I realized that Paul emphasized the necessity of being “sent” because the occasion of his letters was to combat the negative, heretical influences of self-appointed false teachers. I had never thought of myself as a false teacher, but by what authority did those people send me forth? Who sent them? In this I realized the importance of Apostolic [those who have been sent] succession.

## 8. John 15:4 and 6:56

The book of the Bible I most preached on was the Gospel of John and my most preached on section John 15, the analogy of the vine and the branches. I bombarded my congregations with the need to “abide” or “remain” in Christ. But what does this mean? I always had an answer, but when I saw “for the first time” the only verse where Jesus himself defines clearly what we must do to abide in Him, I was floored. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.” This led me to study a boatload of verses in John 6 “I had never seen before,” and in the end, when it came accepting Jesus at His word on the Eucharist, I had only one answer: “Where else can we go? Only you have the words of life.”

## 9. Colossians 1:24

I don’t know if I purposely avoided this or just blindly missed it, but for the first 40-years of my life I never saw this verse. And to be honest, when I finally saw it, I still didn’t know what to do with it. Nothing in my Lutheran, Congregationalist, or Presbyterian backgrounds helped me understand how I or anyone could rejoice in suffering, and especially why anything was needed to complete the suffering of Christ: nothing was lacking! Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection were sufficient and complete! To say anything less was to attack the omnipotent completeness of God’s sovereign grace. But then again, this was the apostle Paul speaking in inerrant, infallible Scripture. And we were to imitate him as he imitated Jesus. It took a reading of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical on the meaning of suffering to open my eyes to the beautiful mystery of redemptive suffering.

## 10. Luke 1:46-49

Finally the hardest hurdle for so many Protestant converts to get over: our Blessed Mother Mary. For most of my life, the only place Mary came into the picture was at Christmas—and dare I say, as a statue! But I never referred to her as “blessed.” Yet Scripture says all generations will call her blessed. Why wasn’t I? This led me to see other verses for the first time, including John 17 where from the cross Jesus gave his mother into the keeping of John, rather than any supposed siblings, and by grace I began, in imitation of my Lord and Savior and eternal brother Jesus, to recognize her, too, as my loving Mother.

# Conference Speakers and Their Topics

## The English Reformation

*Marcus Grodi*



Marcus Grodi will give an overview of the importance and impact on our lives today from this religious upheaval in the English Church of the 16th century. He will examine how the history of this period was doctored, cleaned up, reshaped into an “official history,” and then passed on, usually unquestioned, into the textbooks, popular history books, and minds of most Americans. We will see that much of what we assume about the foundation of our American culture is built upon a mythical understand of English history.

*Dwight Longnecker*



Dwight Longenecker will give a short overview of the history of the English Church before addressing three commonly held historical misconceptions that the Anglican Church springs from an ancient Celtic Church that was independent of Rome, that the Catholic Church just before the Reformation was entirely corrupt, moribund, and in need of revolutionary reform, and that the English people welcomed the new Protestant Reformation.

*Msgr. Frank Lane*



Msgr. Lane will explore the origins in Europe of the relationship between the Church and the secular rulers. He will talk about the foundations of the idea of the primacy of the secular ruler, the Church's challenge to that idea in the 11th Century, and how that conflict continued in the English Reformation. This conflict was central in the initial break with Rome by Henry VIII.

During the reign of Elizabeth (1558 - 1603) secular primacy was solidified in England.

*James Bogle*



James Bogle will discuss the circumstances surrounding Queen Mary's effort to return the kingdom of England to communion with the Catholic Church. He will examine the initial popularity of her efforts and the resistance to her policies that grew from Protestant preachers and also from people who feared losing their newfound wealth gained from the dissolution of the monasteries.

*Joseph Pearce*



Joseph Pearce looks at the compelling evidence for Shakespeare's secret Catholicism, from his childhood in a family of Catholic recusant outlaws until his death as “a Papist”. Apart from a detailed examination of the facts of Shakespeare's life, Professor Pearce will also examine the evidence for Catholicism in his plays.

*Dr. Paul Thigpen*



In England, the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath cost hundreds of faithful Catholics their lives. Dr. Thigpen will discuss how these brave souls refused to join the revolt against Rome and the ancient faith of their ancestors — even though they knew their allegiance to the Church would likely lead to imprisonment, torture, and death. Their faith, their lives, and their glorious martyrdoms can teach us important lessons about what it means to take up our cross and follow Our Lord.

*Dr. Scott Hahn*



Dr. Hahn will examine the lives of two great champions of the truth of the Catholic faith, John Fisher, the bishop of Rochester, and Thomas More, a layman and Chancellor under King Henry VIII. These men were willing to stand up against the will of both king and parliament and give their lives as martyrs rather than compromise and betray their Lord and his Church.

*Fr. Charles Connor*



Fr. Connor will discuss the Counter Reformation in England, a period of time when Catholics were branded as traitors to the crown for simply practicing their faith and worshiping God according to the dictates of their conscience in the holy Mass. He will talk about the valiant Jesuit priests, such as St. Edmund Campion, who poured out their lives, to the point of shedding their own blood, to minister to the Catholic people of the realm.

*Joanna Bogle*



Joanna Bogle will take us through a brief history of Catholicism in England, focusing on the recent centuries of Catholicism's fall and rise again in the face of the attempts to make England a Protestant nation. Did it work? We will see, as the modern English nation, awash in relativism and losing much of its historic identity, finds its Catholic's claiming their own heritage, and offering England a sorely needed vision of moral and spiritual clarity.

*Fr. Ray Ryland*



Fr. Ryland will explain the attraction of Anglicanism, the lecturer's appreciation of what he found there, and the reasons he had to move on. On his pilgrimage he seriously considered Eastern Orthodoxy, whose shortcomings he will analyze. Finally, he will summarize contrasts between the Catholic Church and all non-Catholic traditions.





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**DEEP IN  
 SCRIPTURE  
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 WITH  
 MARCUS GRODI & GUESTS  
 TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**



- October 4 Guest: JIM ANDERSON . . . . "God & Mammon" . . . . Text: Mt. 6:19-24
- October 11 Guest: JIM ANDERSON . . . . "Detachment" . . . . . Text: Mt. 6:25-34
- October 18 Guest: CARLOS CASO-ROSENDI. ."Simon the Rock". Text: Mt. 16:13-19
- October 25 Guest: JIM ANDERSON. . . . ."Judging & Swine" . . . . Text: Mt. 7:1-6

- October 2:** Open Time 1st Monday  
**James Pinto**  
*Former Charismatic Episcopal Priest*
- October 9:** **Gene Fadness,**  
*Former Morman*
- October 16:** *International Pre-Tape*
- October 23:** **Richard C. Borgman**  
*Former Christian Missionary  
 Fellowship Pastor*
- October 30:** **Karl Kohlase**  
*Former Evangelical Free*

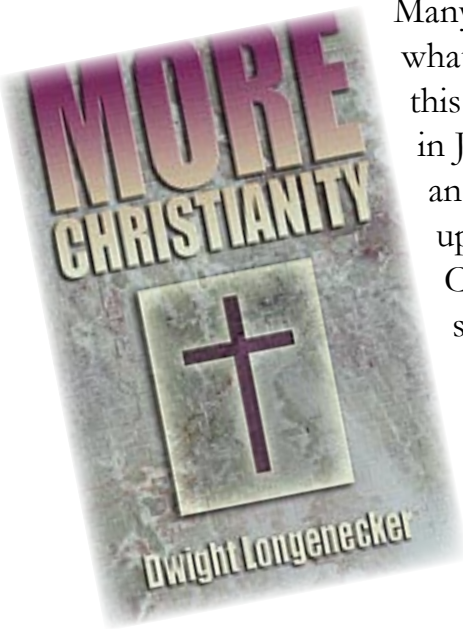


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# Featured Resources

## More Christianity by Dwight Longenecker



Many Christians in the Protestant traditions yearn to live more fully what they call that "old, old story." The great C.S. Lewis referred to this as Mere Christianity, or finding the essence of what this faith in Jesus of Nazareth is all about. With a Bible-based, charitable, and crisply written account, Dwight Longenecker dares to stand upon the platform built by Lewis, and proclaim that it is in the Catholic Church that the fullest expression of this "old, old story" is to be found. Respecting other traditions, and careful to avoid divisive language, Longenecker helps demonstrate to others, particularly non-Catholic Christians, just what the Church is, what it really teaches, and how they can truly experience More Christianity than they ever have before.

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 \$35.<sup>00</sup> OR MORE!**



CHN Members' Section



*continued from page 2...*

In 1988, at the age of twenty-four, I graduated from college and was ordained an independent Baptist minister. A month later I was married, and my new wife Trudie (who was a lifelong independent fundamental Baptist) and I looked forward to a life together in ministry.

My spiritual gifts and seminary training had prepared me for ministry as an evangelist, and aside from a year in Maryland as a youth director (a rite of passage for any Baptist minister), I began to pursue the calling of evangelistic ministry. Almost immediately we began to notice a very interesting facet of fundamentalism: the process of multiplication through division. Fundamental Baptists tend to be even more divided than most Protestants, and we were faced with the fact that many of our “brethren” refused to fellowship with us simply because we did not attend the right Bible college.

My evangelistic work took us to Charlotte, NC. During this time, I came across the single best Bible commentary I have ever read: *Days of Vengeance, a Commentary on the Book of Revelation* by David Chilton. Chilton was a Presbyterian minister whose work not only shattered my belief in the “Rapture” theory, but it also steered me in the direction of Rome. According to Chilton, the book of Revelation is a “worship service” that takes place in Heaven. Imagine my amazement years later when I discovered the Mass!

When our son Jonathan was born in 1991, I became involved with pro-life work, eventually serving as director of the Charlotte, NC, branch of Operation Rescue. I was appalled to discover that so many of our fellow Baptist church members would have nothing to do with such a ministry. The prevalent attitude among most fundamentalists appeared to be that you don’t polish brass on a sinking ship. The world is coming to an end and this is all unavoidable, so why do anything besides “get people saved”? Unfortunately, this sort of “Last Days Madness” has kept many evangelicals and fundamentalists from engaging the culture and getting involved in transforming society.

I soon noticed, however, that more than half of the people who supported our work were . . . Catholic. Grudgingly, I had to admit that maybe, just maybe, there were Catholics who were truly saved! I also came to realize that the Catholic Church was the only “denomination” that has steadfastly maintained its stand on, not only abortion, but contraception and euthanasia as well.

About this time, I became acquainted with the testimony of Scott Hahn, a former evangelical Presbyterian minister, through his book, *Rome Sweet Home*. Scott presented such a straightforward Biblical account of his reasons for conversion

to Catholicism that I could not help but be intrigued. With a great deal of help from Scott, and after much prayer and study, I came to understand the true biblical basis for many of the doctrines that I had once thought were superstitions and the traditions of man. I came to a firm conviction that the Catholic Church is indeed the Church founded by Jesus, and for nearly 1500 years there were no other options. I realized that all Catholic beliefs about Mary flow from what all Christians believe about Jesus. It’s all about Him, not her! I embraced the fact that Peter was the first Pope, and that groups that break away from the Pope inevitably fracture. Above all, I took seriously Jesus’ words about “eat My Body” and “drink My Blood,” as well as St. Paul’s teaching that “anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body eats and drinks damnation.” The Eucharist is far more than a symbol, it is the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, a spiritual marriage, where Christ and His Bride become one flesh! As

I made these incredible life-changing discoveries, Trudie also came to share my enthusiasm and my convictions.

In 1996, my “tent-maker job” moved us to southeastern Virginia, where we soon began actively exploring the Catholic Faith. After a year in RCIA, and even more study and prayer, my family was received into the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church; and our Easter

Vigil was glorious! Today, years later, we are all evermore active in our faith. Trudie is a music minister, playing her flute during the Mass, and Jonathan is an altar server and violinist (he was confirmed at St. Peter’s Basilica in 2004). I have served as a lector, Communion minister, and teacher of RCIA and adult formation. The Lord has given me back my ministry, this time for the Catholic Church.

I also serve as director of *Triumphant Ministries*, an apostolate of apologetics, evangelization, Scripture study, and adult formation. And I am the author of a series of Catholic tracts that have seen distribution around the world. As a Catholic lay evangelist, I have been honored to speak in parishes across the country. Granted, life has not always been easy. Many family and friends have expressed great opposition to our conversion. But our lives are filled with a sense of awe, joy, peace, and sanctity that we have never known before. Not a week passes that one of us doesn’t say, “I’m so glad we’re Catholic.” We are home!

*Michael appeared on the Journey Home program on EWTN. The audio of the show can be heard at [ewtn.com](http://ewtn.com). For more information on Triumphant Ministries, contact: Triumphant Ministries, PO Box 424, Carrollton, VA 23314 [Triumph@CatholicExchange.com](mailto:Triumph@CatholicExchange.com)*

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# 2006 DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCE

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