

The Coming Home Network

SEPTEMBER 2005 MEMBER NEWSLETTER

Journeys Home

A Funny Thing Happened on My Way to Presbyterian Ordination

by Rick Howick



I remember looking out over the Golden Gate Bridge as the sun set in August of 1992. From the roof of my apartment building, I felt that the setting sun sinking into the Pacific directly over the bridge represented my career, sinking with far less glory. I had completed my seminary degree with almost all A grades; I had passed all of my pre-ordination exams; I had finished my internship as a Pastor's Assistant; I had most of my second masters degree in Church History finished; I was ready for ordination—yet that was certainly not going to happen now. What had I done to trigger such change to my life which had been destined for Presbyterian ministry? I converted to the Catholic Church.

I was born into a marginal Methodist family where my religious life had been going well until about age five. Then the minister's wife ran off with a Sunday school teacher, and we ceased our regular attendance. Around the age of 12, I began exploring the faith on my own in response to televangelists who spoke of Hell for non-believers in Jesus. This worried me, since I couldn't say I honestly believed in Jesus as God's Son. So I walked down to a Woolco department store and bought a huge King James Bible and began reading that night. A year later I had finished and then read a popular best-seller about biblical prophesy, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Lindsey, 1969). The chapter on Jesus pushed my 14 year-old logic over the edge to where I was ready to accept Jesus as "my personal Lord and Savior". At no time did I attend a church during that year and half; just televangelists, books, and the Bible.

In high school, after gaining the freedom to drive for myself, I began attending a Southern Baptist

congregation. Like most evangelicals, however, I attended several different congregations of similar denominations. In college, I discovered that asking questions can be a problem amongst fundamentalists, so I began discussing religion with the Presbyterian Campus Minister at Long Beach State. The questions I was raising caused several of my Baptist friends to wonder whether I was firm on my foundation. On Jesus, I was; on classic evangelicalism, I was not.

Around that time, I became close friends with a student who suffered from a brain tumor. We talked deeply, until she took a turn for the worse, and passed away at the age of 22; I was just 19. Up to that time, I had

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planned a Law career. Yet, something in how she faced death forced me to confront several aspects of my faith. She was the first Roman Catholic I had ever really known spiritually, and she remained a deep Christian to the end. I left the Southern Baptists and joined the Presbyterians, serving as student President of the Presbyterian Campus Ministry my senior year. I explored seminary, but having been spoiled by state school tuitions, I balked at the high expense.

After graduation, I began teaching Special education (a ministry in itself). Shortly after beginning, I accepted a weekend job as Evangelism Director for a small Presbyterian Church. Two years of Special Ed and this part-time ministry helped me discern the call to fulltime ministry, teaching, and preaching. After securing a scholarship which covered tuition, I left for Northern California to attend Seminary to be ordained a Presbyterian minister.

The scholarship was given in part because of my conservative background. The seminary, in an attempt to shift its reputation from being so liberal, had begun recruiting evangelical minded Presbyterians. Some of the minority conservatives on Campus invited me to be one of the editors of Logos, an upstart campus paper, which quickly put my reputation out there. As an evangelical, I had to work hard to keep my academic ducks in order, but this helped me do well academically. By the second year, I began working as a Pastor's Assistant at a parish in Sonoma, and I added a second Master's degree to my program.

It was this second masters program, on the development of the very early Church, which would turn everything inside-out. What began to emerge was a picture of a very Catholic early Church—and not just in name, but in all ways. The Eucharist was the real Body and Blood (no where did I find it simply as a symbol, as Calvin had taught); salvation was not presented as assured but clearly dependent upon our continued cooperation (not by faith alone as Luther taught); and for me, most importantly, the Church was made up of communicating bishops who were in union with each other, all either

expressly beholden to Rome as first among equals, or indirectly submitting to the Roman bishop's authority. I felt troubled.

I began to talk some of these issues through. First, I asked Presbyterians: the Seminary Chaplain, a professor, and a pastor, for the evidence of salvation by faith alone (commonly referred to as sola fide), for the sole authority of Scripture (sola scriptura), and for an answer to the burning question: "What was Peter's role?" These discussions helped me realize that what I had always assumed to be biblically based had scanty biblical support once examined openly.

The Presbyterian answers were paltry, striking out on faith alone (James 2 is sufficient for that, though this is supported by many other verses) and sola scriptura (the standard 2 Tim 3:16 was full of holes). I was left with Peter clearly in charge of the Church by the time one finishes the first half of Acts. I was getting worried.

Friends challenged me to an obvious duel: if Peter had been placed in charge, when did that charge stop? Even Protestants maintained that the Catholic Church had at one time received authority, though they insist that it lost this authority due to its abandonment of the Gospel message. But when exactly had this happened?

When I talked to Catholics, things only got worse. Friends challenged me to an obvious duel: if Peter had been placed in charge, when did that charge stop? Even Protestants maintained that the Catholic Church had at one time received authority, though they insist that it lost this authority due to its abandonment of the

Gospel message. But when exactly had this happened? The stakes were high, because if the Popes were still in charge, I was in rebellion against Christ's will for us. I loved Christ, but was realizing this was a start, not an end.

Finally, a Slovenian priest (Fr. Kozina, then of St. Margaret Mary's in Oakland) began meeting with me to discuss my questions. When these three issues emerged from those meetings and subsequent meetings with others, I was stunned to find what they revealed. First, I found that not one Pope—even among those with horrible moral reputations in the 9th and 10th centuries—had committed any kind of disqualifying heresy. The second fact that I discovered was the reality of the Eucharist. The first time this hit me, I shuddered, yet felt great hope, for by that time I knew that the Bible clearly taught the Real Presence. Third, I discovered that

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Why We are Helping Them Home

by Marcus Grodi

Many times in past newsletters, I have addressed this question, and probably each time I have declared that this time I was presenting the definitive reason why you and I are called to help our separated brethren come home to the Catholic Church. At times, my thoughts have ruffled feathers, because today the growing opinion is that, since the Church no longer seems to stress extra ecclesiam nulla salus (“outside the Church there is no salvation”), we should leave our separated brethren contentedly where they are. Many have extrapolated the Church’s statement that non-Catholic Christian churches can be a means of salvation to mean that they are means of salvation.

There is a wide chasm between these two statements! The first emphasizes the loving mercy of God; the second implies that the Catholic Church no longer matters: “Any church is a good port in the storm.”

In this article, I’ll not jump back into this melee, but suggest yet another essential reason why you and I must witness to those outside the Church. This became exceedingly clear to me this morning while rereading Fr. Thomas Dubay’s wonderful book *Fire Within*. (A must read!) In the context of discussing the transforming union—the highest level of spiritual intimacy one can attain this side of heaven—he writes: “If we did not have the mystic’s teaching about the loftiest prayer, we would be at a loss to explain a great deal of scripture” (pg. 195).

Consider the following verses:

...we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.
(2 Corinthians 3:18)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:19)

...that ... you may ... become partakers of the divine nature.
(2 Peter 1:4)

And lest we forget:

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

The list goes on and on with verses whose meaning is not obvious and which have led to a myriad of conflicting conclusions. But what Fr. Dubay and other Catholic mystics point out is that (1) many of these scriptural texts refer to a much higher and more demanding—that is, more sacrificial—spiritual life than most of us might otherwise imagine, and (2) without trustworthy spiritual guidance, we can be led on potentially damning spiritual goose chases if we rely on our own private interpretation or that of some charismatic personality.

What, for example, does it truly mean to be born again, to abide in Christ, to have Christ dwelling in your heart, to have eternal life, or to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Think of the wide range of interpretations and how these have spawned a wide world of religious craziness! Just spend one evening watching Christian television, where each new program contradicts the spiritual insight of the last.

And what does it mean anyway to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Is this not exactly what Catholic mystical writers such as St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and Fr. Dubay are trying to teach us?

Father Dubay wrote:

Our being filled with God is, of course, the reason for everything else in the economy of salvation ... the transforming union is likewise the purpose of all else in the Church. The Eucharist itself, the Sacrament of all Sacraments, is, according to the Word of the Lord, aimed at producing eternal life here on earth. Jesus declares that whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood HAS

eternal life (Jn 6:54-56). It is a life that is to be abundant to the full (Jn 10:10). The fullness is the Transformation; there is no other.
(*Fire Within*, pgs.196-197)

We are to reach out to our separated brothers and sisters, not in judgment of their place in salvation, but because we want them to have a true and authentic personal relationship with Jesus Christ, not one based on their best guess of what some scriptural text means.

Sadly, though, coming home to the Catholic Church does not, in and of itself, ensure an understanding and reception of the fullness. This requires a receptive and remorseful heart and mind; an obedient spirit willing to be nurtured and led by God’s appointed leaders; and a diligent desire to do whatever is necessary to grow closer to God in prayer and love.

In a two-edged statement that both states a fact and issues a warning, Fr. Dubay continued:

In this Mystical Body of Christ [the Eucharist] we are to find our fulfillment, not something less. Thus all structures in the Church—institutions, priesthood, curias, chancery offices, books, and candles, and all else—are aimed at producing this abundance of life, this utter immersion in triune splendor, this transforming union.
(*Fire Within*, pg.197)

Since our separated brethren may be misinterpreting and thereby misapplying some scriptural texts in relation to worship, church government, and other aspects of ministry, it behooves us to be guarded when we imitate or follow their lead in the name of ecumenism. We must not abandon the firm foundation of Catholic tradition for the emotional and, yes, sensual stimulation of passing fancies.

As we reach out in the Name of Christ and His Church, let us humbly make sure that when they see and hear us and worship with us, they are not distracted from correctly seeing Jesus.

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Continued **Fellowship** and **Encouragement** for those who have entered the Church, and want to live fully Catholic lives.

Opportunities for these new Catholics to share with the Catholic Church ideas for renewal and evangelization which the Holy Spirit had blessed in their previous experiences.

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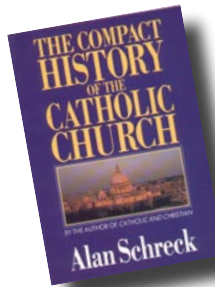
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Featured Resource



In this lively and readable guide to the life of the Church through the ages, Dr. Alan Schreck covers more than just names, dates, and places. He also goes beyond the topics and issues of each period, but also skillfully guides us through the maze of politics, scandals, and heresies which have challenged the Church both from within and without. Most importantly, he brings to life the people of God in each century who have faithfully loved and served the Church, often at the cost of great personal sacrifice and persecution. (A great way to prepare for the conference!)

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Note of Apology:

Concerning the book: Martin Luther, by Richard Marius

In our last newsletter, we recommended and featured a book entitled "Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death," by Richard Marius. Under the stress of getting the newsletter into print, we relied upon the recommendations of two good & faithful Lutheran converts who had found this book an unbiased, fair appraisal of Luther's character and motives, and especially a helpful look into key aspects of Luther's personality that other biographers generally miss. Then last weekend I was able to start reading the book for myself. While the author does provide these important insights, I'm not comfortable with many of his attitudes towards Scripture, Tradition, and Church history. This book may be helpful for clergy and academics who are well aware of the opinions of critical scholarship, but the author's opinions—and sometimes language—may be offensive to some readers.

Therefore, we apologize for this mix-up. If any of you who ordered this book would like to return it, please contact us for a complete refund including all shipping charges. We promise to be more careful in the future

Sincerely in Christ,
Marcus Grodi



Please pray for...

✠ Clergy ✠

✠ Roberto, a Presbyterian pastor in Brazil.

✠ A pastor in the Philippines who would like to come home to the Catholic Church.

✠ Todd, a Church of Christ pastor in the Midwest who wants to know the Truth.

✠ Matt, an Episcopal priest in the South who wants to return to the faith of his youth, the Catholic Church.

✠ John and his wife who, after many years working with Campus Crusade for Christ, desire the fullness of the faith in full-communion with the Church founded by Christ.

✠ Philip, a former Assemblies of God minister in Michigan who will begin to take RCIA classes this fall.

✠ Brian, an Anglican priest who wants to be fully Catholic.

✠ Tom, a former Presbyterian minister, in New York, that he may be able to effectively communicate the Truth to some of his fellow ministers in his

former denomination.

✠ Kevin, a former Church of Christ minister, in Kentucky, who is currently under considerable pressure from family and friends to abandon his journey to the Catholic Church.

✠ Brian, an Episcopal priest in Illinois who will soon be leaving his pastorate to, along with his

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. Each person mentioned has contacted us and is somewhere along their Journey Home. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs in general and specific of the CHNetwork, its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to :

CHN Prayer List,
P. O. Box 8290,
Zanesville, OH 43702.

You may also email your prayer requests to:

prayers@chnnetwork.org

We will use only first names to protect anonymity.

wife and three children, become a Catholic Christian.

✠ Randy, a minister in the United Church of Christ, in Illinois, who would like to meet a Catholic who is interested in teaching him true Catholic doctrine.

✠ Laity ✠

✠ Walter's wife in her illness, and for his daughter and son -in-law to come back to the Catholic Church

✠ Julie and Terry, their struggles, and the strength to see God in all aspects of life

✠ Jeff and his family in their housing and a continual openness to the calling of Christ our Lord in their lives

✠ Christine in her road ahead that she might be strengthened by His love at each hurdle on the road

✠ Peggy and Cheryl as they enter into fellowship of our Catholic faith

✠ Youth ✠

✠ Nick as he strives to understand Christ's call in his life

✠ All seminarians and those who teach within our Church

✠ An increase in vocations and strength to the Pro-life movement

continued from page 2...

my Presbyterian mentor on campus, a former Moderator of the General Assembly (the annual head of the denomination), not only prayed the Rosary once a week, but also had a secret hope that one day he would die a Catholic—not by leaving Presbyterianism, but that in his lifetime there would be a miraculous reunion.

That was enough. Between the former head of the Presbyterians being a quasi-Catholic, the Eucharist being something more than just a symbol (which I began to want), and the Pope never being toppled from his authoritative throne, it settled in deep that I had no choice. I found myself sitting on my apartment building roof, watching the sunset over the Golden Gate Bridge, and thinking of the view as analogous to my ministry career. I, after all, wanted to teach and preach, not be a priest. Far from joyful, my formal conversion became a reluctant duty. I couldn't see well beyond my personal vision, and didn't really trust God—after all, so much had been wasted in stumbling through a seminary career and ministry formation which I would now never use. I, of course, couldn't have been more wrong.

Since becoming Catholic on August 15, 1992 (the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, when I took her blessed spouse Joseph as my patron), I have married a beautiful Catholic woman. We are raising our four children in Southern California, and I have been blessed to be involved in many aspects of ministry. I teach in the Catholic School system. I have been a high school Campus Minister and am currently a Dean of Students. I do a regular radio program through St. Joseph's Radio, in Orange, teach classes, and get to speak around Southern California, even in such exotic places as Billings, Montana, Fargo, North Dakota, and Winnipeg, Canada. During the past few years, the radio has allowed me to meet and interview some of the living saints of our Church, including bishops, priests, and lay leaders who are

on the front line of bringing the fullness of the faith into reality, here in the United States.

One event early in my radio interview days has served as the most important development in my Catholic spiritual conversion. I was interviewing Fr. Benedict Groeschel for the first time, at the Southern California Renewal Conference in Anaheim. We had been engaging in a stimulating discussion of Reformation era philosophical thought (my technical director was beginning to look worried that it was getting too much for the audience), when Fr. Benedict stopped the conversation, looked at me, and warmly admonished me that I was still thinking like a Protestant; that I had all the intentions of a Catholic, but that my conversion, like many other Protestant converts, was still only partly complete. We continued the interview to its pleasant conclusion but his words changed my life. I had a second "conversion".

Becoming Catholic was not about discovering a right versus wrong series of reasoning (though that is part); it was about becoming one with the Body of Christ. Protestants love Jesus (I did!); but God wants more than faith in the love of Christ. Protestantism—at least the form of Protestantism I had experienced—while very good, is, therefore, incomplete. God wants more from me than pure reasoning; He wants total embrace, mind and body. We are called to embrace Jesus as his bride. There is a chasm of difference between the sinner's

prayer of evangelical Protestantism, and true union with God in Roman Catholicism.

Rick Howick is a Catholic high school Dean and a regular host of St. Joseph Radio Presents, heard Saturdays at 11:00 (Pacific Time). On July 25, 2005, he appeared as a guest with Marcus Grodi on the Journey Home program, EWTN.



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