



September 2012 Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Featured Resources	2
EWTN's <i>The Journey Home</i> Schedule	3
Marcus Grodi's Speaking Engagements	4
Welcome Brother Rex	7
<i>What Must I Do to Be Saved?</i> — Marcus Grodi	9



THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Love that Never Ceases

Jerry Cleffi

It was a hot July day in 1976 and I had just returned home for supper. It was still light out in the early evening and Yolanda, my girlfriend at the time, had come over. We planned to spend a quiet night at home with my family, but suddenly, I heard a scream. As I rushed down the stairs to see what had happened, I found my mom hysterical on the back porch. My dad had collapsed on the lawn. I cried out to him, "Dad! Dad! Dad!" but he was unresponsive. My father never regained consciousness.

He was fifty-six years old and, needless to say, my family was not prepared for this crisis. My father had changed careers just a few years previously; therefore, both financially and emotionally, this was a major upset for the family.

Wake Up Call

My father's death was a serious wake up call to me. Although I was twenty-six at the time, I had not done a great deal with my life after graduating from high school.

In 1968, I got involved with the drug and "hippie" culture of that era. I tried every form of getting high: marijuana, LSD, speed, and, finally, heroin. For eight years, I slipped deeper and deeper into this culture of "free love," only to discover that nothing was really free and that I had no idea how costly it would become.

By the time my father died, I was addicted to heroin and was living to get high. Although I did not look like your usual down-and-out drug addict (I still was employed, had a roof over my head, and had a very patient and loving family), everything was about to unravel.

God Is Always Up To Something!

Someone once said that God is always up to something, and Sacred Scripture tells us in Psalm 121:3, "Truly, the guardian of Israel never slumbers or sleeps." To my surprise, approximately eight months prior to my father's death, I had begun to date my future wife, Yolanda, with whom I would eventually have three beautiful children. Yolanda's family had moved to my neighborhood a few years earlier. They were the first Hispanic family in a predominantly Italian neighborhood of Newark, New Jersey. Yolanda was a beautiful young lady and we quickly fell in love. God would use these circumstances to bring both of us to Himself.

Shortly after we began dating, Yolanda began a new job with Prudential Insurance and became reacquainted with an old friend of her mother's, Josie, whom she had not seen in years. As they caught up, Josie began to share with Yolanda how she had become a born again Christian and invited Yolanda to visit the church she attended.

... continued on page 2

FEATURED RESOURCES

Authentic Versus Inauthentic Renewal

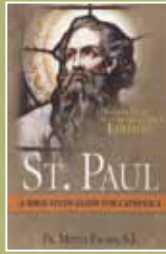


Fr. Benedict Groeschel's talk "Authentic Renewal" from the 2003 Deep

in History conference takes a look at the aspect of Christianity that unites Catholics and Protestants: devotion to Jesus Christ. He then uses the history of this devotion to suggest how to bring about authentic renewal in the Catholic Church today.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive an *Authentic vs. Inauthentic Renewal* CD.



St. Paul: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics — Fr. Mitch Pacwa, S.J.

Immerse yourself in the person of the Apostle Paul—heroic in his martyr's death—but so recognizably human in his conversion story and subsequent letters to the faithful. Gain fresh insights into your own personal growth potential through the Scripture of St. Paul:

- What does Paul's conversion have to teach me about how power is perfected through my weaknesses?
- How does his experience as an Apostle of Christ teach me about responding to my own vocation in life?
- How might I apply St. Paul's bold and creative approach to challenging today's cultural and social status quo?
- In what ways might I imitate his care and concern for the world?

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *St. Paul: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive an *Authentic vs. Inauthentic Renewal* CD and *St. Paul: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

...Journeys Home Continued...

That evening, Yolanda told me about her earlier conversation with Josie and the invitation to attend Josie's church. About six years prior, I had a similar experience when a friend invited me to his Baptist church. I had even responded to an altar call at my friend's church and became a born again Christian, but I did not follow through with that commitment.

Yolanda had been a devout Catholic most of her life and had only recently begun to question the Catholic Church and its approach to teaching the Scriptures. I had been baptized as an infant in the Greek Orthodox Church, since my mother's family was Greek. My father's family was Italian Catholic. Although we believed in Jesus, we attended church only on special occasions. God knew there was a void in both of our lives that only He could fill.

I felt desperate to change my lifestyle and escape my drug addiction before it was too late. Since the time I had visited that Baptist church, one thought had stayed with me through all the years of drugs and wild living: the only way I was ever going to be happy and free from drugs was by giving my life over to Jesus.

Yolanda and I took Josie up on her offer and attended Evangel Assembly of God Church on a Sunday in April 1976. That morning, we walked down the aisle toward the altar, knelt down, and prayed the sinner's prayer. We gave our hearts to Jesus in front of 500 people.

Josie took it upon herself to become our spiritual guide as we prepared for baptism, which would take place in a few months, encouraging us to attend church, and answering our questions. I was still using drugs and felt ashamed of this hidden lifestyle. As baptism drew closer, I felt the need to talk to someone, but I could not work up the nerve to expose my addiction.

A Hidden Lifestyle

Once we were baptized, Yolanda and I tried to participate in the life of the church, but the routine of church activities did not always fit into the schedule of a drug addict. Yolanda knew that I had been into drugs, but she didn't know how bad it was. When she finally found out the extent of my addiction, she told me to choose: drugs or her. Everything was falling apart: I had just lost my father, I was about to lose my girlfriend, and my lifestyle of addiction was about to be exposed.

After my father's death, Evangel Church was very involved in helping us through that difficult time. The women's committee even prepared food and served it to family and friends who attended the funeral. The evening of the funeral, I invited Pastor Tate over to my family's house. I wanted to speak to him alone, so he suggested we take a drive. In the car, I began to tell him of my involvement with drugs. After I had finished speaking, he pulled over to the side of the road, laid his hands on my forehead, and began to pray for me. I experienced a sense of peace, joy, and light that I could never fully explain. I also felt

...Journeys Home Continued...

a powerful desire to tell others of Jesus. When we arrived home, I could not wait to tell Yolanda what had happened. We went for a walk and she listened to what I had experienced with intent and excitement.

While we were walking, I felt as if my neighborhood had transformed into a mission field for God. As we would see individuals we knew, we would greet them and try to tell them about Jesus!

Even though Pastor Tate went out of his way to try and help me, I was still too close to my immediate temptations and quickly fell back into my old patterns. I had my first altercation with the law over drugs. I found myself in a holding cell facing charges and permanent incarceration. In the short time I sat in that jail cell, I knew that if I did not stop using drugs, I would eventually overdose or end up in jail for a long time. I remembered a friend who had gone into a program called Teen Challenge. This was a Christian program founded in 1958 by an evangelist named Rev. David Wilkerson who is known for a book he wrote, *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

I entered the Teen Challenge Program in October 1976 and I was a resident there for a year. For the first time since I began using drugs, I was totally cut off from family, friends, and most importantly, drugs. The goal of this program was to free an individual from any life-controlling problems.

A New Creation

The desire of the Teen Challenge Program was that each resident be “a new creation” in Christ. This was accomplished through intense discipleship, prayer, biblical counseling, and a family-like environment. The program’s motto was taken from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians: “So whosoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5:17-21)

What liberating words for any person to hear, especially for someone struggling with addiction. These words brought abundant hope to my heart and I believed God was speaking directly to *me!*

For the first time I could understand that Jesus loved me regardless of my past. Through His grace, I found myself in an environment where I could focus my energy and attention on Christ. This ministry of reconciliation and ambassadorship sealed into my heart that God not only loved me, but also could use me to spread the Gospel of His love and forgiveness. Never in all my life would I have dreamed so large, but St. Paul also wrote in Ephesians: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). God just loves to blow our minds!

God had His own plans for Yolanda. At about the seventh month of my stay at the program, we drifted apart and stopped writing to each other. Yolanda needed time to do her own soul-searching.

“Jesus 77”

During this time, God led Yolanda to an ecumenical, Gospel festival, called “Jesus 77.” She packed her gear and went camping at ... continued on page 4

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. Beginning this month, 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 each weekday 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!

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

September 3 15th Anniversary Program

JonMarc & Teresa Grodi, *Life-long Catholic & revert**

September 10

Dr. Norman McCrummen, *Former Presbyterian minister**

September 17

The Journey Home International *

September 24

Mark Averett, *Former Southern Baptist & Disciples of Christ**

*Schedule is subject to change.



DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCES

The Coming Home Network International would like to thank everyone who has been a part of our previous *Deep in History Conferences*. We would like to remind our members that unfortunately, for many reasons, the CHNetwork will no longer be sponsoring these annual conferences. We are most grateful to Franciscan University of Steubenville for co-hosting a memorable event last year.

Instead, we are exploring various alternatives to continue our commitment to becoming “deep in history,” to quote Bl. John Henry Cardinal Newman. We anticipate that this may involve expanded use of our in-house studio, and expanded resources on our website. We also hope to reinstitute our annual retreat for clergy members, and may consider a small number of regional parish events. More information will follow in future newsletters and on our website www.chnetwork.org.

MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

September 8–9, 2012

EWTN Family Celebration
Phoenix, AZ ■ 205-271-2989
www.ewtn.com/familycelebration

September 20, 2012

Theology on Tap
Dayton, OH ■ angela.swearingen@gmail.com

October 5, 2012

Archbishop's School Fund Dinner
Albuquerque, NM ■ 505-831-8120
Dolores Cordova ■ dc@archdiosf.org

October 10–11, 2012

Living Bread Radio Network
Youngstown, OH (10th) - Canton, OH (11th)
www.livingbreadradio.com

October 19–20, 2012

St. Bernadette Parish
Westlake, OH ■ www.stbernadetteparish.com
StBernadetteYearOffaith@gmail.com

...Journeys Home Continued...

this Gospel festival filled with live Christian music and special speakers — for her, it was three days of heaven on earth!

Like I said before, God is always up to something and, in the case of Yolanda and me, He *certainly* was. Yolanda was in New Jersey hearing from the Lord and, simultaneously, I was on a farm in Pennsylvania talking to God. By the time I completed Teen Challenge in October of 1977, God had turned our lives completely around, though we were still not communicating. A couple of months after I returned home, however, my grandmother died and Yolanda attended her funeral.

After the funeral, we began to talk and share some of our similar experiences about the Lord and what had transpired in our lives. We began to see each other on a regular basis again, and six months later, on April 16, 1978, we were married at the little Assembly of God Church in Nutley, New Jersey.

Called to Serve

I was working for the railroad and Yolanda continued working for Prudential Insurance. We began teaching Bible classes at the church and leading in worship (we had always loved music and singing).

We both knew that God had placed a call to His service in both of our lives. As a young Catholic girl, Yolanda always read about the saints and desired to emulate their characteristics and qualities. She had even seriously prayed about becoming a nun. Eventually, we began taking courses at Berean University of the Bible. After several years of studies, Yolanda and I were ordained as ministers of the General Council of the Assemblies of God and received the title of “Reverend” — a title and vocation we were both very proud to uphold, and humbled to have.

Already being so involved, our church asked us if we would consider becoming part of the staff. So along with leading worship, we served as Youth Pastors and Bible teachers. The youth group had grown extensively for a small church and the teens were very enthusiastic about spreading the Gospel. Soon, a Gospel band was formed and we began to take the music, singing, preaching, and joy of the Lord out to the streets. Yolanda and I had a firm conviction about God’s word in Isaiah: “so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:11).

The results were true to God’s word and did not return void. Street people were becoming aware of the truth that had changed *my* life: all things are possible if we can only believe in Jesus. St. Paul describes it in Philippians: “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:13) The street people needed extensive care outside of the church, and we began referring them to Teen Challenge-type facilities. Due to the high volume of people we were finding, there were not enough facilities available to take in all of our referrals.

We soon realized that it was far more difficult for the young women on the streets. After some research and much prayer we decided that we would renovate our own, staff parsonage into a house for women from the streets. Upon completing the three-month stay, they would be sent to existing, second-phase facilities to complete their care and discipleship. We called the house the Bethel Home for Girls. Eventually, we would receive referrals from all along the eastern seaboard. We even intervened into the justice system for some of the young ladies.

...Journeys Home Continued...



Church Planter

After a couple of years, we believed that God was calling us to become Home Missionaries and Church Planters for the New Jersey District of the Assemblies of God. Through the model of evangelism and discipleship, we developed Assembly of God churches in the cities as Urban Missionaries for almost twenty-two years. I would eventually become an assistant presbyter/bishop, overseeing some thirty-eight churches in the Northeast Section of New Jersey. Along with these responsibilities, I was a husband and a father to three wonderful children: Melissa, Elisabeth, and Andrew. However, these mounting responsibilities eventually took a toll on my marriage. Yolanda and I parted ways and she took the children and went to live with her parents a few towns away.

Reconciliation

The loss of my family was both devastating and humiliating, especially as a public figure and church leader. As I think back to those events now, I probably should have resigned immediately from my position. However, I clung to my ministry, feeling as though it was all I had left. This rollercoaster ride lasted for almost two years.

As the Lord would have it, on New Year's Eve, a week before our divorce was scheduled, Yolanda returned to me and we were in church that night as a family, celebrating the coming 1999. I can only attribute our reconciliation to much prayer from family, friends, and various church communities.

God eventually used this time of trial to lead both of us to a deeper relationship with Himself, each other, and His Church. When Yolanda came home, I knew it would take counseling and change for our marriage to be healed. I had prayed for the reconciliation of my family, but be careful what you pray for!

Closet Catholic

A few months after our separation, Yolanda gave up her credentials and ordination papers. I thought it was more because of our marital difficulties than any doctrinal concerns. I had no idea that Yolanda had come back to me as a closet Catholic, nor that God would use her to eventually rethink my views as well.

Over the next few months, Yolanda gave me daily doses of Catholicism. A new community visited my home every day through the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). People like Mother Angelica, Dr. Scott Hahn, Marcus Grodi, Jeff Cavins, and the priest with the white beard and gray robe, Fr. Benedict Groeschel. I would listen to just enough of EWTN to get into a good debate with Yolanda. Often, we would discuss the Eucharist and how this bread and wine would supposedly become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus.

The Eucharist & Unity

I could not dismiss Jesus' words, "this is my body, this is my blood." We are what we eat, and when Catholics partake of Jesus' Body and Blood, they become one with Him. As the Israelites ate God's manna in the desert, Catholics partake of the Body of Christ and join in His sacrifice at Mass. Jesus does not go again to the cross every Mass, but His one sacrifice is experienced at every Mass. ... 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/ 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 if you have any questions or concerns.

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

Checking account

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

Savings account

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

Credit card

Card number _____

Expiration date _____

Visa

MasterCard

Discover

AmericanExpress

Your information

Name _____

Signature _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____



KEEP IN TOUCH!

The CHNetwork would like to keep in touch with you via e-mail. Please go to 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.

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.

NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to family, friends, and church groups. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are Copyright © 2012 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.



...Journeys Home Continued...

Now, as a Catholic, at Mass I am reminded of my sinfulness, my need for grace, and the death and resurrection of my Savior. Sacred Scripture conveys in Philippians 2:12 that you are to "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Yes, I do believe that the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary was sufficient to cleanse me from sin and save my soul, but I am also convinced that as a frail human I need to humble myself before God and man. This is why we are challenged to ask the community of the Church to pray for us — along with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints — at every Mass.

The subject of unity also played an important part in my conversion to Catholicism. The literature I had been reading and the speakers on EWTN often referred to the plethora of denominations that professed Christianity since the Reformation. Even before I began exploring the Catholic Faith, two principles spoken by Jesus in the Gospels on unity weighed heavily on my heart.

Jesus said in John: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). Jesus also said in John: "...that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:21). The amount of divisions and differences in the thousands of Christian groups, sects, and denominations does not reflect the teachings of the Gospels.

It appears this teaching of love and unity is connected to how Jesus wants the Church to be viewed by those who are those outside the family of God. An important tool for evangelism is our love for one another and for God. If believers remain in a state of disunity, it can be viewed as hardheartedness or as a lack of love or forgiveness.

I Get By With a Little Help From My Friends

By the summer of 1999, I knew it was time for me to resign from the congregation I founded and where I had built a 1.4 million dollar facility. My family and I took some time off and visited the Jersey shore. I hoped perhaps this "Catholic stuff" would blow over and I soon would be back to ministry!

Yolanda brought a number of Catholic books to read over our vacation. Titles like *Rome Sweet Home*, *Crossing the Tiber*, and *Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic*. To make matters more interesting, the missionary complex where we were staying was one block away from a Catholic church. We began attending that Catholic church every morning during our stay and, by the time September rolled around, we were heading home with one foot in the Catholic Church and one foot in the Assemblies of God.

I had gained just enough knowledge about the Catholic Faith that I knew I couldn't pastor an Assemblies of God church or found a new one but I couldn't get up enough nerve to resign. Eventually, a door opened and I began working for the Motor Vehicle Inspection of New Jersey. I worked in the same community that I had pastored for twenty years. I saw many former parishioners and local ministers I knew. This was a difficult and humbling experience.

Friends In High Places

Our finances were difficult, but our family was together. One morning, Yolanda and I had a general discussion about the Blessed Mother and saints. After I left for work, Yolanda went to Mass at St. Francis church across the

...Journeys Home Continued...

street and committed our discussion to prayer. It was an exceptionally busy day at work; cars were waiting in line to be inspected. An elderly woman came into my line where the pass or fail sticker would be placed into the window. I could see she was nervous. As it turned out, her car passed the New Jersey inspection requirement and she was so grateful that she took my hand and placed a ten-dollar bill in it. Boy, did I need that money! Even so, I could not bring myself to take the money from her. As I attempted to return it to her, she motioned for me to look toward the dashboard of the vehicle.

I saw a figure on the dashboard — it was the Blessed Virgin! While securing the ten-dollar bill in my hand, she said, “Sonny, don’t worry. Mary will take care of me, and she will take care of you.”

I could not believe my ears! I had just been discussing this topic with my wife and God used this little woman to speak volumes to my heart.

I went home that evening and shared this incident with Yolanda. She found it humorous and commented, “Mary not only revealed herself to you, she gave you a ten-dollar tip.” What a magnificent way to be introduced to Mary!

I would come to learn that the Blessed Mother and the Communion of Saints are a cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us and intercede on our behalf. The family of God remains the family of God even after death. If I could ask the living to pray for me, then why not ask those who are now face to face with the Messiah? St. Paul states: “when we are absent from the body (as in death) we are present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). Catholics are not taught in the *Catechism* to worship saints, but to ask them to pray to Jesus *along with us* for our needs.

The year was coming to an end and I had gained enough conviction and love for the Catholic Church to realize there was now no turning back. My view of unity had taken on a new dimension and I truly believed that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus. I did not know where to turn or with whom to speak. I was not yet comfortable confiding in the local priests and I was living in a community that evangelized Catholics away from the Church! I felt a little like St. Paul when he was introduced to the Apostles, after his miraculous encounter with Jesus. I was worried that they would think I was not authentic in my conversion. At the time, I was not even sure myself! I discussed this with Yolanda and we prayed. Our community of faith at that time was EWTN. Over the next two months, we seriously asked God to lead us to someone who would understand our plight.

Fr. Benedict Groeschel

One day in prayer, it was impressed upon Yolanda’s heart to call Fr. Benedict Groeschel. I thought she was crazy. After all, he was somewhere in Alabama. Little did I know that his religious order in the Bronx was only a thirty-minute drive from our home. Yolanda was able to reach him and he invited us to his home the very next day. We felt like two kids: excited and nervous, wondering what we would tell him.

Fr. Groeschel’s kindness, gentleness, and understanding was like the balm of Gilead. We shared with him our journey up until that point and he shared with us two thousand years of the Catholic Church! In retrospect, those three hours felt like stepping back in time and visiting one of the Apostles.

... continued on page 8

WELCOME BROTHER REX TO THE COMING HOME NETWORK



Brother Rex Anthony Norris is the newest addition to the Coming Home Network support team. A convert from the Anglican tradition, he became a Catholic in

2000. Brother is a canonically recognized hermit who takes the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi as his inspiration for following Christ and His Church. Brother Rex is under the jurisdiction and supervision of The Most Rev. Richard J. Malone, Th.D., Bishop of Portland, ME. (*As this newsletter goes to print, Bishop Malone has been appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Buffalo, NY. A new bishop for the See of Portland has yet to be named by the Holy Father.*) Brother Rex lives in a hermitage in Maine where he devotes his time “to the praise of God and the salvation of the world through a stricter withdrawal from the world, the silence of solitude, and assiduous prayer and penance” (cf. Canon 603.1). Brother’s ministry with CHNetwork consists of intercessory prayer, spiritual direction, encouragement, and support to non-Catholic clergy on their journey home.

Brother Rex claims never to have had an original thought of his own but he regularly posts the original thoughts of other people at <http://littleportionhermitage.blogspot.com>.

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 for more information.

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Ultimate Fulfillment

While accepting Catholic dogma was a liberating transition, leaving the ministry was my greatest difficulty since this was my vocation and my livelihood. What I gained, however, was the Eucharist, the Communion of the Saints, and the Catholic Church's rich history of two thousand years.

I also learned never to put my trust in what I *do* as opposed to who I *am* and *in whom* (Jesus) I believe. I revisited a familiar friend, the Apostle Paul, and his words in Second Timothy: "and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me" (2 Tim 1:12). Second Timothy had been a special letter in my life, for I believe that the Lord had used it to burn into my heart a personal call to ministry (2 Tim 4:1-4). I sensed God saying to me, "Though you are going through a transition. I am still your Father," and as He said in Deuteronomy: "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you" (Deut 31:6).

On Sunday July 30, 2000, my whole family came into the Catholic Church. Yolanda and I celebrated the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage and Fr. Benedict Groeschel preached a homily aptly titled, "Welcome to the Assembly of God."

It has been over twelve years since this journey into the Catholic Church began and my *entire family* has been changed! I have met so many wonderful people and have been involved with a number of apostolates and religious orders. Yolanda and I have been privileged to enter St. Joseph's Seminary and Institute of Religious Studies in Dunwoodie, Yonkers, to work on graduate degrees. The two of us have had many opportunities along the way to share our journey.

I am thankful for my family's religious background in the Greek Orthodox Church and I learned a love for the word of God and developed fervor to spread the Gospel at the Assembly of God Church. But for being able to find my ultimate fulfillment in entering the ancient, Catholic Church of Peter and the Apostles, I will be eternally grateful to my Father in heaven, who continues to reach down to me with a love that never ceases. ■



GERARD CLEFFI and his wife, Yolanda, have three lovely children: Melissa, Elisabeth, and Andrew. After serving twenty-one years as an Assemblies of God minister, he and his family entered the Catholic Church in 2000. Gerard has worked closely with Fr. Benedict Groeschel, and the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. Gerald has co-authored two books with Fr. Groeschel titled *Life in Christ* and *Experiencing the Mystery of Christ*. Gerard is currently the Pastoral Associate for St. Antoninus Church in Newark, NJ.

BLOG

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Marcus Grodi

What must I do to be **SAVED?**

The following material is taken from Marcus Grodi's newly released booklet **What Must I Do to be Saved?**.

INTRODUCTION

A man boldly stepped out of the crowd and asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (Mt 19:16). This man was no ordinary man, but a “ruler” (Lk 18:18) of the local synagogue, or “archon” associated with the other religious leaders, Pharisees, and scribes. This meant that he knew his Jewish heritage and tradition.

This “rich young ruler,” however, may have heard a sufficient amount of Jesus’ discourses and parables concerning the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven to wonder whether the appearance and teachings of this “good teacher” signified some radical change in the order of things—whether there was a new set of requirements for gaining eternal life.

In another instance, a lawyer posed a similar question to Jesus, this time in the form of a test: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 10:25-28).

Jesus responded differently to each of these two seekers. Yet there is a similarity, at least in the eyes of many Christians, for both situations seem to emphasize that salvation is an individualistic matter: “What must I do...?” And the answers that Jesus gave seem to confirm this: in neither case did Jesus mention the necessity of membership in any religious community, the practice of any rituals, the reception of any sacraments, the submission to any leaders, or the adherence to any set of doctrines.

Even in another Gospel account, when the spokesmen for the crowd asked Jesus, “What must we do to be doing the works of God?”, His simple answer was, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (Jn 6:28-29). Again no mention of community, rituals, sacraments, leaders, or doctrine.

What He seemed to emphasize was faith *alone* in Him *alone* for every individual person *alone*.

JOHN 3:16

Most Americans have seen the image of a man, wearing a multicolored wig, standing in the grandstands of a football stadium, holding up a sign that states merely: JN 3:16. Is the man trying to tell the person with license plate number JN316 that his headlights are on? Hardly.

Most modern American Christians, at least, know that when they see this placard—or a similar message on the back of someone’s t-shirt or on the side of a barn—it’s there because some sincere Bible-believing Christian is trying to help some *individual* come to know Jesus and be saved. They believe that all that is necessary for salvation is for any *individual*—apart from any connection to any institutional church—to turn in a Bible to John 3:16, read the words of “the gospel”—“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”—fall on his knees, pray some form of “sinner’s prayer,” and, by the work of grace on his heart and mind, accept Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior. At that moment in eternity, the person is then saved. If the person never becomes a member of a church—if he is never baptized, never receives any sacraments, practices any form of liturgy, submits to any leadership, or believes any list of dogma—it doesn’t matter eternally: he has accepted Jesus, and is saved.

This idea of individualistic salvation seems to be a growing, if not the majority opinion, at least among modern American Christians. This is true even among those who are members of denominational churches,

... continued on page 10

who practice some set of sacraments or ordinances, participate in some form of liturgical worship, and hold to some credal statements. An underlying suspicion has emerged that, when all is said and done, all that is eternally necessary is faith in Jesus *alone*. Even though the sixteenth-century Reformers assumed that a person needed to belong to some church, hold to some creed, gather for worship, follow their leaders, celebrate at least two sacraments (Baptism and communion), and live by some set of rules, yet, the resultant divided denominational streams differ to such extent that the composite conclusion in this age of tolerance, at least among Evangelicals, is that all that is necessary for salvation is “Jesus and me.”

As an Evangelically convicted Presbyterian minister, I admittedly taught and preached that my form of Evangelical Calvinism was the clearest permutation of the Gospel message, yet I never believed or taught that one had to be a Presbyterian, or in fact anything, to be saved, as long as one had surrendered to Jesus Christ. What I did not realize, though, was to what extent this individualistic salvation was a purely modern assumption, and a dangerously truncated gospel.

It was difficult, among compatriot believers and pastors, to identify and agree upon what was missing in this simplistic version of the Gospel that is so pervasive across our country, broadcast on television and radio, preached from innumerable pulpits, and shared on park benches or in the African bush by well-meaning missionaries. I have come to believe, however, that a correct biblical as well as historical understanding of salvation in Jesus Christ involves a whole lot more than an individual’s intellectual acceptance and heartfelt prayer of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior; that salvation involves far more than a mere personal relationship between “Jesus and me.”

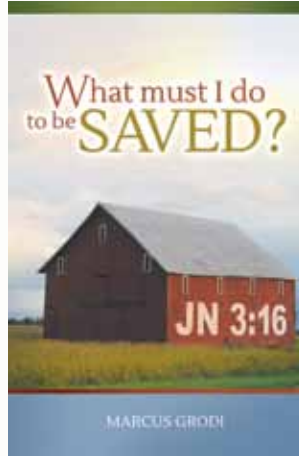
I realize that most Christian ministers would say they agree, yet in the indifferentism that by necessity exists in our modern Christendom of thousands of separate Christian denominations, I believe that this simplistic “Jesus and me” theology undercuts the core of what it truly means to be a Christian. Most critical-

ly, this may leave thousands of sincere, yet misguided souls lost in groundless presumptions—and it may leave those who have led them the “least in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:19).

■ What’s Missing From John 3:16

So to begin, let’s again consider that simple summary of the Gospel:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. — John 3:16



As concise and important as this verse may be, is it not obvious how inadequately it defines salvation if interpreted apart from its context or without sufficient explanation?

What does this verse preach *alone*? “Whoever believes in him...”—but who is “him”? Take, for example, the limitless opinions of who Jesus was and is: the meaning of His sonship; His relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit; the question of His divinity and humanity; or the claim that He was nothing more than a good but terribly deluded teacher. There’s not a whole lot of theology in this one verse. There’s no mention of church, sacraments, rituals, holiness, or ministers, or any of the things that most Christians take for granted as somehow “essential” aspects of any particular Christian tradition—the things that set them apart from other Christian traditions.

Assuming the traditional, creedal, and orthodox understandings of Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God, Second Person of the Trinity, Savior, and Lord, this verse then states that anyone who believes in Him “will not perish but have eternal life.” And so, does this mean that when a person says some form of believer’s prayer, he has arrived—that he will not perish but be saved, guaranteed of heaven? As an Evangelical Presbyterian pastor, I would have answered that if one day that person finds himself standing before the gates of heaven, and God asks why He should let him enter, all the person needs to do is point to Jesus and claim the salvation he has in Him “by grace through faith”—because at some specific moment, possibly fifty or more years before, he had accepted “Jesus as his Lord and Savior.”

■ A Biblical Interpretation of Discontinuity

Behind this assumption of individualistic salvation in Jesus Christ is a biblical hermeneutic or interpretation of discontinuity. Essentially, there was an original Plan A for salvation, followed by a new and different Plan B. The original Plan A of salvation, for the Old Testament Jews up until the death and resurrection of Jesus—before Christ freed mankind from sin and death, and before the Holy Spirit and grace was given to open hearts and minds for faith—was through works of the Law. In this Plan A, individuals had to earn their entrance into heaven through works, and it was to these Jews that Jesus targeted His mostly moralistic preaching and parables.

However, since this means of salvation was never truly possible, due to sin and mankind's totally depraved will, God provided a new Plan B in Jesus, which began after His resurrection. Salvation through "works of the law" was replaced by salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The laws and demands of the Old Testament ceased, and the New Testament Church emerged as a new thing, established out of necessity when the Jews rejected the Gospel and Christians were expelled from the synagogues.

Like most modern Christian ministers, I admittedly had a limited knowledge of how the Church of the first few centuries operated or worshipped. Assuming this biblical interpretation of discontinuity, I thus assumed that the Church (or churches) was a new beginning, a "new wineskin"—and not a direct continuity of the Jewish faith and covenantal Family of God. Like most, I presumed that in Jesus Christ, the New Testament was a fulfillment of the Old Testament, which denoted a distinct break between the Testaments: any similarities between Christian worship, ecclesiology, and praxis were purely unnecessary remnants that had not been adequately purged.

In What Must I Do to be Saved?, Marcus critiques this false assumption of discontinuity and demonstrates how, through a more trustworthy biblical hermeneutic or interpretation of continuity, we are "saved" as faithful individual members of the Family of God, the Catholic Church. Copies of this booklet can be purchased from the Coming Home Network at www.chresources.com or by calling 740-450-1175. ■

BLOG

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Prayer List

Clergy

- For Mike, a former Baptist minister in Virginia, and his wife, that they receive a favorable response from the marriage tribunal so that they may truly come home to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- For Don, an Anglican priest in the South, that he and his wife may be able to fulfill their heart's desire to come into full-communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- For Scott, a Disciples of Christ minister, that, as he prays and reads, our Lord Jesus would draw him ever more deeply into the fullness of His truth.
- For Larry, a Lutheran minister in Michigan, that he may be granted the grace to overcome every obstacle to his coming home to the ancient, holy, catholic Church.

- For an Anglican priest in Illinois, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to understand and accept the authority and ministry of the Holy Father in Rome.
- For a United Methodist minister in New Mexico, that he may follow the path God is showing him and return to the Catholic Faith in which he was baptized.
- For a Presbyterian minister in Ohio, that our Lord Jesus would grant him a way to provide for his wife and four young children so they they may become a Catholic family.

Laity

- For Patti, that the example of the saints gives her encouragement to go forward on her faith journey and be an effective witness to her husband.

- For Larry, that his questions and concerns about potentially becoming Catholic will be quieted and the Holy Spirit direct his steps.
- For Julie, that she is able to find ways to serve and build up the Body of Christ in her life as a Catholic Christian.
- For Tara and her family that the Lord bless them in their continuing journey as Catholics.

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.

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

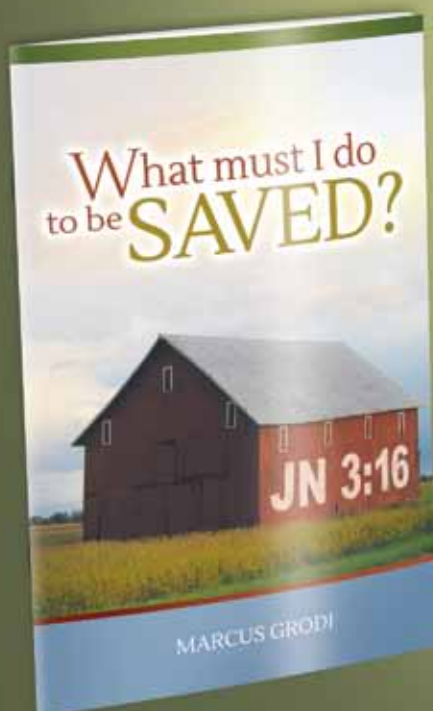
The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

EVANGELIZATION TOOLS



Introducing *What Must I Do to be Saved?*, an exciting new booklet by Marcus Grodi.

In this booklet Marcus explains why the simplistic, “Me and Jesus”, reductionist approach to Christianity is actually an unbiblical modern invention with no roots in the historic Christian faith! He focuses on the link and continuity between the Old and New Testaments, showing how the former is pre-messianic Christianity and the latter is post-messianic Judaism. Most importantly, this booklet powerfully answers the question: do we need the Church to be saved?

We encourage all CHNetwork members to use this booklet as an evangelistic outreach to family and friends. Quantity discounts are available. Copies of *What Must I do to be Saved?* can be ordered online at www.chresources.com or by calling 740-450-1175.

Other CHResources we encourage you to give away for evangelization purposes include:

