



August 2020 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Finding My Way*

By Dr. Cyprian Blamires

Up until that moment, I was a little bit bored by the music the Christian rock band was playing. But then, one of the musicians — lads scarcely any older than my seventeen-year-old self — stepped forward on the stage and started to talk. I was mesmerized, not because he was particularly eloquent but because of what he said. To put it simply, he talked confidently about his personal relationship with Jesus. He affirmed that anyone could have this relationship; all you had to do was to go to Jesus in penitence for your sins and ask Him to come into your life and take it over. From the moment you did this, you must base your life on Bible principles and make time to be with Jesus every day; then your life would be invaded by the Holy Spirit and changed forever.

This hit me right between the eyes because of how I was feeling at the time. I had been brought up in the Church of England and sang in a church choir, but I suffered from a deep inward tension. On the one hand, I found church rituals very tedious and church people very unappetizing — I was always pleased to escape at the end of the service. But on the other hand, the Gospels were speaking to me, and I was wanting to find a way to respond to this astonishingly powerful Figure who taught with such incredible wisdom, spread such joy and healing, and yet ended up crucified despite all the beauty of His character. I knew He was calling me, but the trouble was that I couldn't face church as I knew it. This lad up there on the stage was offering me a way forward, for he confidently announced that we didn't need to worry about church, since we could find Jesus in prayer and Bible study, and He would send the Holy

Spirit to fill us and transform us with His divine power and grace. All we would need then would be to hitch up to a "Bible-believing church" that would nurture and sustain our growth in faith.

Then something happened that really blew my mind; not just the one, not just two, but each of the four musicians took it in turns to step forward on the stage at different stages of the evening and repeat a similar testimony. Four young lads, all in love with God and wanting to share the Gospel! I was deeply moved. At the end of the concert, I made the decision to surrender my life to Jesus.

As I look back now, after forty years as a Catholic, I can see how God, in His mercy, has honored this offering that I made as a schoolboy at the prompting of evangelical Protestant musicians — but not at all in the way that I had anticipated. At that time nothing could have been further from my thoughts than

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

the Catholic Church, about which I was entirely ignorant. My father — a devout, committed, and highly intelligent Oxford-educated Anglican, a pupil of C.S. Lewis and a writer on theological matters — held the view that the Church of England was the true successor to the pre-Reformation Church in Britain.

I had been sensing and fearing a call to ordained ministry for some years, all the time suffering inner torment on account of my lack of interest in church as I knew it. Now I felt that a way had opened up. I didn't need to love the church, I just needed to love the Bible and look for Jesus there and in my private prayer. The rest could take care of itself. Because the Church of England was so central to English life — with its great cathedrals and parish churches, chaplaincies to the elite boarding schools and the hospitals and the armed forces, its claim to be in succession from the medieval church in our country — why not seek ordination there?

I did not, however, yet have the courage to face the ordination trail, so I opted to study languages (French and Latin) at Oxford when the time came, rather than theology. I threw myself into evangelical student activities and derived huge inspiration from some of the excellent preachers and Bible expositors of the day. I particularly remember a man named Da-

vid Watson, famous for having taken over a small church in York that was to be declared redundant, which he then turned into a local evangelical Mecca, reputedly attended by 900 on a Sunday. I vividly recall him preaching a week-long mission to university students; he could hold 400 of them spellbound. Nothing spectacular, no pizzazz, no showmanship; just a huge sense of quietly joyful conviction about the power of God and everyone's need for Him, delivered by someone skilled at the exploitation of rhetorical arts like variation in tone of voice, dramatic pauses, the use of anecdotes and illustrations, touches of humor — all perfectly legitimate parts of the preacher's craft.

Symptomatic of my state of mind at the time was the fact that, although as part of my degree I spent a year in France, I never went near the Catholic churches of the town, preferring to frequent a small Pentecostal assembly, where the preacher was something of a ranter. But it was a "Bible" church, and that sufficed. Upon completion of my degree course, I began theology studies at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford — named after the rebellious fourteenth-century cleric John Wycliffe. Because of his emphasis on the Bible, Evangelicals consider him to be a harbinger of the Reformation. Oddly, nobody told us anything about him in our studies and his name was rarely mentioned. We thought of

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SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.



A Look at the English Reformation CD

— By Marcus Grodi

In this talk from a *Deep in History* conference, Marcus Grodi looks at how for so many of us in the United States, our understanding of the Reformation is colored by the fact that our nation started out as a British colony. Our shared narrative leads many of us to believe that Martin Luther and Renaissance thinkers freed humanity from a dark, ignorant, and uncivilized oppression by the Catholic Church. Marcus invites us to reexamine that view of history, to look at the lives of Christians who lived during those centuries, and to get a more accurate picture of the role of the Catholic Church in society leading up to the 16th century.



Drawn from Shadows Into Truth:

A Memoir — By Fr. Ray Ryland

A fascinating autobiography in the spirit of St. John Henry Newman, *Drawn from Shadows Into Truth* is the story a poor Oklahoma farm boy who became a naval officer and then an Episcopal priest. It is a moving testament to the presence of Providence in the life of a man who was dedicated to pursuing truth. Fr. Ryland's quest for Jesus Christ and the one Church He founded is a spiritual and intellectual adventure, which eventually led him to become Catholic and then being one of the first men ordained a married Catholic priest under the Pastoral Provision. In addition to his autobiography, Fr. Ryland provides extensive explanations of the key points of Catholic doctrine that were of interest to him — and many others on their journey into the Catholic Church. It is a wonderful resource for those considering entrance into the Church or those who have recently converted.

\$35

Receive *A Look at the English Reformation CD* for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *Drawn from Shadows Into Truth: A Memoir* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *A Look at the English Reformation CD* and *Drawn from Shadows Into Truth: A Memoir* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Pope St. John XXIII: Apostle of Unity

By Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson

It is indeed a privilege to contribute this article to accompany the conversion story of Dr. Cyprian Blamires. His father, Harry Blamires, was a noteworthy Oxonian and student of C.S. Lewis. I remember him with much appreciation during my Oxford days. His *The Christian Mind* (1963) is deeply imbued with Lewis' thought, and it really deserves to be read by the next generation of Inklings.

Cyprian's work with the St. Barnabas Society has been of great help to many former Protestant clergy in the British Isles who have come into full communion with the Catholic Church. Some of the future clergy of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham in the U.K. found the St. Barnabas Society a veritable lifeboat in their transition. We are indeed grateful for Cyprian's labo(u)rs here.

The journey for many Anglicans to the Catholic Church really is a journey homeward. In so many areas of ecclesial life, we have been taught to think of Rome as *mater et caput* (mother and head) of all the churches. The account of Pope Gregory the Great's mission to the English in the Venerable Bede (especially in the opening of Book II of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*) always enchanted us. And the Catholic revival of the 19th century in Anglicanism, of which the Anglican John Henry Newman was such an integral part, awakened this yearning to restore the ecclesial communion broken at the time of the Reformation.

But it was not so much liturgical nostalgia and the yearning for the old Mass that principally motivated us, as many might think. It was, at a deeper level, about the teaching which found its expression in the decrees of the Second Vatican Council and the vision of Christian unity to which Pope St. John XXIII and Pope St. Paul VI gave expression.

St. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). Our Protestant friends sometimes tell us that this is what we've done by becoming Catholic, that we have subscribed to a system that tries to regulate everything in the Christian life. But, we reply, there is a blessed freedom in being Catholic. We learn that perfect freedom comes with being conformed to the will of Christ, and the Church gathered around Peter is most certainly His will. And we know the freedom which comes from our confidence that the Holy Spirit continually renews the Church, so that the Tradition never grows old and rigid and empty.

And here I submit that we have a particular debt to Pope St. John XXIII, for the gift of the Second Vatican Council. How appropriate that his feast day should coincide with his convening of the Council on October 11, 1962. The texts of Vatican II, for many of us, helped us to find our way to the Catholic Church. And this was very much his intention.

St. Paul's words to the "stupid" Galatians — that the only thing which counts is faith in Christ Jesus working through love (Gal 5:6) — bore fruit in the life of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. This simple man was called by Our Lord to advance the cause of

Christian unity so dear to His heart, not by conforming the Catholic tradition to the modern world, but by helping people to understand and encounter the living sources of Christian truth, and rejoicing to find that they share a common faith.

Particularly noteworthy for those of us who came from the Anglican Church was the moment when Pope John XXIII met with the Archbishop of Canterbury. It had been almost 600 years since the last meeting of Pope and Archbishop in 1397. On December 2, 1960, Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher called on the Holy Father in a private visit. Dr. Fisher was an Erastian¹ of the first order, who had insisted on the integral relationship of church and crown, and who up to that point had shown little love for things Catholic.

So why then did he go? His answer was that this simple Pope had warmed his heart. The visit had been difficult to arrange. The men of the Vatican were initially hostile and unwelcoming. Fr. Yves Congar, in his journal for November 14, 1960, wrote of the risk that the visit might arouse a very negative reaction in the Catholic hierarchy. And the spin machine was in high gear: *L'Osservatore Romano* would report it was only "a simple visit of courtesy." But for the hour that Pope John met with the Archbishop, a significant exchange ensued.

Archbishop Fisher would later give an account of their conversation in his *Touching on Christian Truth* (1971). The Pope spoke of his declaration that previous year, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, in which he specifically opened the door to the separated brethren. "Jesus' prayer, *ut unum sint*, is a comforting hope; it assures us that someday all the sheep who are not of this fold will want to return to it (60)." His appeal to his "separated brethren" was that the ecumenical council he had called would "stir your hearts and awaken you to what is really in your best interest (79)." "When we fondly call you to the unity of the Church, please observe that we are not inviting you to a strange home, but to your own, the abode of your forefathers (84)."

Archbishop Fisher replied to the Pope: "But it is not a question of returning but going forward together." When the Pope asked him what he meant, the Archbishop replied, "None of us can go backwards, only forwards. Our two Churches are advancing on parallel courses and we may look forward to their meeting one day (p. 187)."

And indeed, many of us thought this might happen in our lifetimes. Some here have had the privilege of kissing the very ring that Pope Paul VI gave to Archbishop Michael Ramsey on

1 Someone advocating for state supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs.

March 24, 1966, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome, which was the first official meeting of the Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury since the Reformation. That gift was once considered a sure sign that full communion lay just over the horizon. But it hasn't worked out the way Dr. Fisher hoped that it would. The Anglican Communion instead has moved in a different direction. And so some of us in conscience chose to come home. By the grace of God, we have accepted Pope John's invitation, while the lofty aspirations of ARCIC, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, have remained largely unfulfilled.

Becoming Catholic is certainly not about renouncing where we have come from. Pope Paul VI's homily on the occasion of the canonization of the 40 martyrs of England and Wales on October 25, 1970, insisted that Christian unity was at the heart of their witness: "There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church — this humble 'Servant of the Servants of God' — is able to embrace her ever beloved Sister in the one authentic communion of the family of Christ."

When I was received into the Catholic Church in 2007, I was given the counsel not to burn bridges but to seek the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). Don't think of yourself as a convert, I was told, but rather one of the first fruits of a fruitful tree. And so I put it this way in my resignation address to the Episcopal Church House of Bishops:

"From time to time it seems necessary for some to embark on these personal journeys as a reminder that the churches of the Reformation were not intended to carry on indefinitely separated from their historical and theological mooring in the Church of Rome ... I hope that you will not see this as a repudiation of the Episcopal Church or Anglicanism. Rather, it is the sincere desire of a simple soul to bear witness to the fullness of the Catholic Faith, in communion with what St. Irenaeus called 'that greatest and most ancient Church' (*Against Heresies* 3.3.2). I believe that our noble Anglican tradition ('this worthy

patrimony') has deep within it the instinct of a migratory bird calling, 'It is time to fly home to a place you have never seen before.' May the Lord bless my steps and yours and bring our paths together in His good time."

When Archbishop Fisher returned to London the day after his historic visit to the Pope, he said that his strongest memory was of "a camel which looked at me with the most ineffable scorn. A donkey smiles. Roughly speaking, all humanity is a donkey or a camel" (William Purcell, *Fisher of Lambeth*, p. 268). This enigmatic metaphor — drawing a contrast between a smiling Pope and a grim-faced Curia — was insightful. Blessed are the shepherds who seek to gather together Christ's sheep in the one fold. We of all people ought to praise the courage and faith of Pope John, who pressed forward with this mis-

sion the Holy Spirit gave him, to call an ecumenical council and guide it in a genuinely ecumenical direction.

One of the most important teachings of the Second Vatican Council is that those elements of holiness and truth found outside the Catholic Church do inevitably lead to Catholic unity (*Lumen Gentium* 8). It was with this conviction that Pope John created the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, "as a token of our affection and good will," so that the separated brethren may "find more easily the path by which they may arrive at that unity for which Christ prayed so ardently."

Note the irony here! Pope John's vision would ultimately bear its first fruits through the work of the Holy Office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where his fiercest critics were then to be found. The CDF has been the vehicle to effect our homecoming. Our Lord continues to surprise us! Pope St. John XXIII, we thank you for what you have given us. And we ask you to pray for us.

Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson served for 28 years in the Episcopal Church before his reception into the Catholic Church. He served as the first Ordinary of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, which Pope Benedict XVI created for those coming from the Anglican tradition. He now serves on the board of the Coming Home Network. ■



ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL RAMSEY
WITH POPE PAUL VI

COVID and Conversion

By CHNetwork staff

Each year, the Coming Home Network staff looks forward to hearing from men and women who have been received into full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. During Easter week, our inboxes are usually overflowing with joyful messages from newly-minted Catholics. This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, almost everyone had to wait longer to receive the Sacraments of Initiation and come fully home to the Church. As times improve, though, we are delighted to share with you some of the beautiful messages we have received from these recent converts. This year, all Catholics can share in a spe-

cial way with their joy and excitement since most of us were without access to the sacraments for a lengthy period of time. So let us rejoice together with these new Catholics and pray for the unity Christ calls us to in His Church! We are privileged to share some of the encouraging messages we've received with you in gratitude for your partnership with our ministry. May God bless each and every one of you.

From Chuck "Thank you for reaching out. My wife and I were confirmed and had our first sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion Saturday evening. We also renewed our vows

with our priest and had our marriage blessed. Our hearts are full ... There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that the Holy Spirit led me to the Catholic Church. I have loved God and His Word and had a longing for Him in my life since I was a child, and I feel like my life (and my life with Amy) has just begun [at 53!]. I am so thankful for ministries such as yours, EWTN, Relevant Radio, Marcus Grodi, Patrick Madrid, David Anders, Scott Hahn, Catholic Answers (the list goes on and on). What I felt in my heart and spirit for at least 20 years (the Lord's voice leading me to His Church) I had to reconcile in my mind. Once I was convicted that the Church is what it claims to be, I was deeply humbled at God's patience with me (I was so arrogant and prideful and thought I knew so much more than I really did. Once I opened my eyes to the reality of what the Church is, all of my anti-Catholic prejudices crumbled.) Most importantly, however, is I finally have a way to get rid of my sin and be nourished with the sacraments that our Messiah instituted. I noticed a powerful change in my life, a transformation of my inner self, just from attending Mass and seeking the truth by spending time before the Most Blessed Sacrament (this would have been in approximately 2014). So my journey has been a long one, but as I said, I feel that I have only begun with my First Communion last Saturday. Please pray for me and my wife that we will GROW in holiness and be all that God wants us to be for His glory."

From Andrew "I was officially received into the church on Pentecost. I am now a Catholic and have taken the Eucharist twice. What a blessing."

From Lizzy "I am now officially part of the Catholic family! My marriage annulment was granted also! Now my heart is hopeful that in 2 years I can enter a religious community ... if Our Lord wills of course. I am humbled by your remembering me! Thank you so much!"

From Ashley "Yes, I was received into the Church on Pentecost, and it was beautiful beyond the limits of words. My best friend was able to come from Minnesota, and my dad and college roommate, being both Protestant, came to my confirmation. It took me over nine pages in my journal to process that day!"

From Tres "I'm happy to inform you that I was brought into the Church last night. Thanks for all that you, Mr. Grodi, and the CHN has done to guide me to Rome."

From Cindy "I was received into full communion with the Catholic Church last Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, in a private morning Mass ... I am so filled with joy! There is a part of me that still wonders how this happened! It was the furthest thing from my mind just 18 months ago and now it's the closest thing to my heart. Life is filled with unexpected surprises!"

From Sam "I hope this email finds you doing well. I just had to write to you and tell you the great news. My wife and I were received into full communion with the Catholic Church last night! We had our sponsor, a couple of friends, and my son and grandkids present to watch us take our wedding vows as Catholics as well. We have been married 38 years but we just had to make it complete. That was our first Church wedding! There was a moment I just have to share with you. In prayer after I received Communion, I had the most peaceful yet energized visual. I entered through a door that opened up to a large room that had balconies on each side and full of the saints. They were welcoming me in: waving and cheering! I felt like I knew them. The night was rich in sacraments and a lot to absorb in one night. I just had to share with you and let you know that though it's been a long journey, my wife and I have finally made it home to the Catholic Church. Thanks to EWTN, the Coming Home Network, you for keeping in touch with me, and all the others who had the light of Christ shining from them that made me want to follow." ■

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Could you give \$25 a month or more to help support the CHNetwork as we help men and women come home to the Catholic Church?

The 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 this form 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.

Your information

Name

Signature

Address line 1

Address line 2

City/State/Zip

Phone number

Email address

☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$25.00 on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$_____ on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

☐ **Checking account** or ☐ **Savings account**

Bank routing number (9-digit number)

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Card number

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CHNETWORK RETREAT

Please consider joining us!

OCTOBER 12-15, 2020

CHNetwork retreat in Houston, Texas

Go to chnetwork.org, call 740-450-1175, or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org to learn more.

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www.chnetwork.org



THE
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ONLINE COMMUNITY



We have a great way for converts and journeyers to connect online! CHN's Online Community is the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE



Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters. We do ask for a \$35 yearly donation to help cover the production costs of the newsletter.

SHARE THE NEWSLETTER!

The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends to encourage them to join our mailing list. They may also request to receive our mailings by using the response card included with this newsletter. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are copyright © 2020 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 2 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Sunday 7 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Monday-Friday 1 AM ET

August 3

Dr. John Bergsma* (former
Christian Reformed Church
minister)

August 10

Melissa Zelniker-Presser* (convert from
Judaism and former non-denominational
Christian) (re-air from 8/14/17)

August 17

Rebecca Frech*
(revert and former
agnostic)

August 24

John Davidson*
(revert)

August 31

Rachelle Parker*
(former Churches of Christ)

September 7

Matt & Elisabeth Akers*
(former Anglicans) (re-air
from 2/19/18)

*Schedule is subject to change.

To access the full archive of past *Journey Home* programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home.

Joyful Journey Updates

From Margi, on the journey "What a marvelous journey these past 5 months have been! I am so grateful for beginning this walk back home to the Catholic Church... There have been certain bumps along the way, but He has provided such grace-filled answers through my RCIA leaders, through EWTN programming, Coming Home Q&A online, and my lovely *Magnificat*! I have been so blessed by His obvious accompaniment beyond anything I could have thought ... Thanks so much for your prayers and visible encouragements ... I can not thank the Coming Home Network enough for all you have done to help me answer my questions with such kindness and understanding! God has certainly drawn a special group of people together in this apostolate. Marcus Grodi has done a remarkable job with the Coming Home Network and *The Journey Home* program on EWTN! They both played a pivotal role in my decision! I know there are many good Evangelical Christians who would make the same decision, if they were confronted with the historical evidence!"

From Eduardo, a convert "I'm writing to you to let you know that after 22 years as an evangelical, 10 of which as a Presbyterian minister, I finally came back home to the Catholic Church ... We're incredibly happy amidst the turmoil that our lives are in right now. I'm officially unemployed and I'll go back to my hometown and live with my parents until I can find a job. My wife will live in her sister's apartment in Rio until she finishes residency. But all of these are small setbacks compared to the joy of coming back home and feasting with our Father and brothers. I converted to Christ when I was 16 and now, at 38, I have converted to Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I'd like to wholeheartedly thank you for all your help during this time. Know that your advice, prayers, e-mails, Skype calls and the like were not in vain. Praise God for your ministry. I hope I can give you a very big Brazilian hug someday, my brother. I also would like to thank CHN. Please let Marcus Grodi and the staff know that your ministry is very precious. I think I watched at least 20 *Journey Home*

programs this past year. Some of them more than once. Not only that, but the articles on the website were also very helpful. Now that I have come home I don't think my journey is finished. Actually, I think it has just begun! I know He will use me. Right now, I am seeking in prayer and waiting on the Lord. I have a *lot* to learn, so I'll keep counting on your resources. Please keep me in your prayers."

From Benjamin, a convert "I'm happy being a Catholic. Attending Mass every week gives me strength in my life. Confession makes me more serious about my behavior everyday. Also, I read the Bible and pray everyday, and I enjoy praying Rosaries. All my family members are attending RCIA now ... Please pray for them, so that they can understand God's grace in the Church and be willing to become parts of our Holy Mother Church." ■

SHARE SHARE YOUR STORY!

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

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Prayer List

Clergy

- **For Robert**, who believes that the Lord called him to preach and is struggling with what becoming Catholic will mean for him in terms of the ministry he has loved.
- **For a Methodist pastor** who is ready to resign his ministry and enter the Church but faces strong opposition at home, that the Lord will show him how to reach those close to him who at this point have no interest in even hearing his reasons for wanting to become Catholic.
- **For an Anglican priest**, that the Lord will bless his decision to become Catholic and through his decision will bless his wife and children who are open but not completely understanding what he is doing.
- **For Adam, a Baptist pastor** on the journey toward the Catholic Church, that he will find a way to convince close family members that he is still a Christian and that the Church isn't what they think it is.
- **For Bill, a non-denominational pastor** who is struggling with how to become Catholic and financially support his family at the same time.
- **For a Presbyterian pastor** in Brazil who is drawn to the Catholic Church but facing what seem to be insurmountable obstacles, that the Lord would give him wisdom and courage and continue to increase his love for the Church.
- **For John, a Pentecostal pastor** who is learning about the Church and attracted to it and asking a number of questions, that he might gain more clarity and be drawn ever more toward the Church.
- **For Joshua, a pastor** who is facing the most extreme opposition to his interest in the Catholic, that the Lord will give him grace to deal with this while continuing to grow in his love for the Church.
- **For a non-denominational pastor** who has come to the Coming Home Network looking for assistance in finding the truth in the

midst of so many Protestant denominations and sects.

- **For Michael, a pastor** who is falling in love with the Catholic Church and beginning to face the reality of what becoming Catholic will mean for his future and the future of his family, that the Lord will give him joy in the midst of a hard situation.
- **For Gregory** who is still in seminary preparing for the Protestant ministry but now wants to become Catholic and is struggling with how he will be able to be a minister if he becomes Catholic.
- **For a non-denominational pastor** who has questions for which he needs answers. He's drawn to the Catholic argument for authority but struggling with the claims of the Eastern Orthodox to represent the true historic faith of the Church.

Laity

- **For an Evangelical in Venezuela**, that his search for the truth may be guided by the Holy Spirit and lead him back home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Kevin**, that his parents may not be an obstacle to his journey to the Catholic Faith.
- **For John, an Anglican**, that he may discover with joy the fullness of the Faith in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church
- **For Ann** as she continues to learn and study, preparing to be received into the Catholic Church.
- **For a man in Texas**, that he may be guided by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ back to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- **For Holly** as she learns more about the Eucharist, that Jesus' Real Presence will draw her towards the Catholic Church.
- **For Thomas, an Episcopalian**, that the Lord would bless and guide his journey.
- **For James in Wisconsin**, that the Holy Spirit would guide his search for where God wishes him to be.
- **For a man in Canada**, that the love and grace of our Lord Jesus would grant him an understanding and acceptance of Purgatory.
- **For a Muslim who loves Jesus**, that he be given his heart's desire to be baptized and allowed to freely live as a Christian.
- **For Madison** to be able to find a good, supportive parish and for her to have a blessed RCIA experience this coming year.
- **For a Baptist in Texas**, that he may find grace and healing in the Catholic Church.
- **For Episcopalian in the south** to have clarity and peace as to how to move forward with her longtime interest in the Catholic Church.
- **For Casey in Texas**, that our Lord Jesus would grant him a hunger which is only satisfied in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For Claudia** as she seeks to understand the role of Mary and redemptive suffering.
- **For Cathy** as she seeks to know and love God more, that she will be able to come into full communion with His Church soon.
- **For a woman in England** and the many struggles she is experiencing in her desire to become Catholic.
- **For Jennifer** who loves being able to go back to church, that she will be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist soon.
- **For a Lutheran on the east coast** to fully heal from the pain she experienced previously in the Catholic Church and be able to come fully home.
- **For an Anglican in the south**, that her husband will also be drawn to the Catholic Faith and conversion.



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. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

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the nineteenth century as the great age of Evangelicalism and liked to dwell on the lives of famous missionaries like the Baptist John Carey (India), the Free Churchman Hudson Taylor (China), the Anglican Temple Gairdner (Egypt). Eric Liddell — the missionary athlete at the centre of the film *Chariots of Fire* — was the kind of person I venerated at this time.

I began to be troubled by certain things about Anglicanism during my theological studies. It increasingly bothered me that the Reformation had broken us away from the rest of Europe. The Catholic Faith was clearly a universal faith — it was believed and practiced all over the world. Although the Anglican Church claimed to be universal and had branches in many countries, I could not help noticing that they were predominantly in countries which England had colonized; the faith had simply followed the flag to places like Australia, New Zealand, North America, and the former African colonies. This seemed to me to be a problem even with Evangelicalism. I noticed that the Evangelical culture with which I was familiar was (in those days, at any rate) predominantly English-speaking. If I went the few miles across the Channel to France or Spain or Austria, there was nowhere for me, as an Anglican, to worship, unless I happened to be near a Chaplaincy for ex-patriots, and this seemed to me to cast doubt on the idea that our faith was truly universal.

In 1973, I took up the position of Assistant Curate in a London parish, and in the same year I married Trudi, a charming and delightful Belfast Protestant girl (who was to depart this life, sadly, in 2009). Though I was deeply attached to her personally and happy in her companionship, I found Northern Ireland Protestantism in general a real eye-opener. Evangelicalism was very strong over there, but I couldn't help noticing that there was something hard-edged and even aggressive about their deeply entrenched anti-Catholic view of the world. Some of my English friends just threw up their hands and disowned any connection with their fellow Evangelicals in Ulster — but how could we do that? They had the same beliefs that we had and belonged to the same spiritual movement. It seemed to me that we were being delusional if we tried to pretend that they had got it wrong. Perhaps it was they who had it right and we who were too weak and gutless in our faith. After all, their understanding of Evangelicalism would have made sense to our Victorian forefathers, whose missionary exploits and rousing faith we so admired.

One thing emphasized in my training was that good preaching and reading went together. Books would provide the arsenal of anecdotes and illustrations that the regular preacher needed; it made sense to focus on biographies and memoirs. I had a particular reason for being interested in the life stories of great men. I wanted to know how I myself could become a great man. Very simply, I wanted to leave my mark, to be remembered for my spiritual achievements, but I really didn't

know how to go about it. Anyway, I didn't have much money, so I tended to look for the cheapest volumes on the bookstore shelves. Among them, I found the occasional story of a Catholic saint or heroic figure, often one I had never heard of. I was always particularly interested in French books, because I had resolved when I finished my degree in languages that I would not lose that skill, but cultivate it and make sure I retained my fluency; the only way to do that was to keep on reading books in French. But inevitably, spiritual writings in French were Catholic.

Among the memorable Catholic books I was coming across at this time, one of those that stand out in my memory told the life of Father Damien, “the leper priest” (now St. Damien de Veuster). Having been ordained in Belgium, he chose to go to Hawaii to minister to a colony of leprosy sufferers. Predictably, he ended up dying of the disease himself. Why would such a man throw his life away like that? After all, he could have remained in Belgium as a parish priest and served his people heroically in the manner of a St. Jean Vianney. Surely he would have done much more good that way. But as I pondered his life, I couldn't help thinking of the saying of St. Paul, that we are called to be “fools for Christ.” Yes, Fr. Damien's “crazy love” led him to throw his life away for Jesus — but wasn't that an illustration of what St. Paul meant? I, on the other hand, wanted to love Jesus, but I wanted my love to be *reasonable*. Yet, as I meditated more on the nature of love, I thought about the crazy lengths to which people in love would go for the loved one — a theme of so many stories. Sometimes even for the sake of strangers — people jumping into the sea to help drowning persons or going into fires to help folk escape, only to die themselves. True love couldn't remain within reasonable bounds, and Jesus warned us about this in the Gospels. What He wanted was followers who would commit themselves wholly to Him, as the multitude of martyrs for the faith had done. I realized that I had domesticated my idea of discipleship; a comfortable home with a good dose of charitable and spiritual activity as my service to the Lord. Now I could see the beauty of the Catholic priesthood — which had already begun to come home to me through a reading of the *Diary of a Country Priest* by the French Catholic Georges Bernanos. The priests were celibate, not because there was anything wrong with marriage — far from it — but because they wanted to put Jesus above absolutely everything else, including many things that were actually good in themselves. I had always focussed on giving up the bad things for the sake of Jesus, but according to the Gospels, Jesus invited His followers to give up even good things out of love for Him. After all, fishing was a good and useful and indeed necessary activity. But He called them away from it.

As I began to make these new discoveries, I was losing faith in my own creed. I had accepted the idea of *sola Scriptura* — the Bible as the sole means of finding out the truth about God and the sole source of revelation — because it had enabled me

...Journeys Home Continued...

to solve my own problem, that of wanting to serve Jesus but disliking church. Unfortunately, I was having to face the hard fact that *sola Scriptura* led to endless fragmentation. New denominations were constantly appearing — simply because Scripture did not, in reality, speak for itself, as we liked to suggest — since people were actually forever squabbling about how it was to be interpreted. This wasn't just a matter of history; it was going on now, and it showed no sign of diminishing. Meanwhile, I couldn't help noticing that the Catholic Church was actually one — with one *Catechism* and one *Code of Canon Law* and one Mass and one head in Rome. We Evangelicals always professed to enjoy a mysterious inner spiritual unity that underlay all our (often bitter) external disagreements, but I was having to face the fact that this was a delusion. The harsh truth was that we were competing among ourselves on the ground of filling our pews. This was all too obvious to me as a cleric much concerned with attendance figures.

This loss of my Evangelical moorings was devastating. The only alternative to faith in the sole authority of the Scriptures seemed to be to make myself believe in the authority of the Church of England. But by then I had awakened to the deeply damaging consequences of the Reformation and seen that our claim to be in continuity with the pre-Reformation Church was hollow. Much later, I discovered a particularly powerful illustration of this, when I learned that, in some churches during the Reformation, the altar was actually ripped out and placed at the entrance to be trodden on as the threshold. How could the desire for a complete break with the past be demonstrated more powerfully? Not to mention the destruction of the monastic orders and the state plunder of endowments given by donors, not to the state but to God?

I had seriously considered going out as a missionary to Africa (and my wife would have been sympathetic to that, for — unlike me — she had actually been to Africa). But I visualized a married missionary turning up in an African village with Western trappings and luggage and expecting a comfortable home; and I compared it in my mind to the idea of a Franciscan turning up with his staff and his sandals and his bundle. I would be like an alien from another planet, whereas the Franciscan would be one of them. I know this is probably something of a travesty of the actual reality on the ground, but it was the principle that troubled me. I had learned of the incredible things done in Asia by St. Francis Xavier and others like him, and I saw that they could only do all this because they were celibates and could live simply and travel light.

I recall reading a biography of David Livingstone, the famous missionary and explorer, which described how he dragged his pregnant wife around Africa with him in an ox cart. This seemed to illustrate my point, and it had a particular resonance for me because my wife's grandfather had been a Presbyterian

minister in David Livingstone's home town of Blantyre in Scotland.

The celibacy of the priesthood may seem like a minor issue, but actually, for me, as a cleric myself, it had been one of the “crazy” stumbling blocks in the Catholic Church that I had never been able to understand. I was now learning more and more about the Church, and her teachings began to make more and more sense. I had to face the fact that, whereas the Church was built on the back of the sacrifices of the priests and religious, clergy in our denomination lived off the church and made a career out of it. One had only to look at the enormous old vicarages in so many Anglican parishes. They were being sold off in my day, and clergy were living much more modestly, their salaries had greatly diminished, but the approach remained the same. For myself, I had a working wife, and we lived comfortably. Where was the sacrifice? The Catholic priest led from the front, he showed by his example that you could confront the pains of ordinary life like loneliness and solitude, and triumph over them with the help of divine grace. The fact that some priests suffered burnout and found clerical life too difficult made no difference. It was the ideal and the model that counted, and many Catholic priests had succeeded in living heroic lives throughout the centuries.

I became increasingly fearful for my salvation. I was accustomed to speaking in my sermons about giving up everything for Christ, but what was I giving up myself? I even flirted briefly with the idea of leaving my beloved wife and going into a monastery — though without the least attraction to monastic life — as an act of pure penitence. At that time I was reading about saints of earlier times who for the love of Jesus had left marriages in order to enter the cloister.

I was becoming increasingly drawn towards the Catholic Church, but in the late 70s, the “convert cleric” was a rarity, and I knew no one who had taken such a drastic step. I took a high view of the promises I had made at my ordination, and the idea of turning back after putting my hand to the plough seemed disgraceful. Nonetheless, my mind was telling me — on the basis of my recent years of study and thinking — that the claims of the Catholic Church were true.

The church building in the parish where I was now working was a concrete monstrosity, but there was one thing in it I found very beautiful — a statue of Our Lady that a previous vicar had brought back from Austria. I used to spend time praying in front of her. I didn't talk to her, because that wasn't something we did. However, this thought kept forming in my mind as I gazed at the statue: it was as if Our Lady was saying to me, “I am here to call you to the place where I am truly honored.”

I knew where that place was.

I still had a long list of objections to Catholic teaching, but one by one, they all seemed to get answered. I still laugh at the

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rather spectacular way that God dealt with one of my last objections. It was this: surely the Catholic Church was in the pay of the Italians? All the Popes had been Italian for 400 years. I found the Church of England questionable, because it was too English — and middle class English at that — but wasn't I going from the frying pan into the fire? From an exclusively English middle-class institution to an exclusively Italian one? Well, one day I found myself attending a Mass, and at the end of it the priest said: "I have an announcement to make — we have a new pope! He has taken the name John Paul II. And he is Polish!" This felt like a personal message from God, telling me not to be such an idiot and to let go of my endless objections to His Church.

It was hard to contemplate abandoning the ministry to which I had publicly pledged myself. But I found comfort in the idea that I would still be moving forward on the same path of discipleship as before — just in a new and unforeseen direction. I wasn't planning to move away from Jesus, but to follow Him more faithfully — only to a place that had never figured in my plans. I had to assume that it figured in His.

I was received into full communion with the Catholic Church on June 17, 1979 by Cardinal Hume, Archbishop of Westminster, 20 years to the day before he died. My preparation had not been auspicious. I attended an instruction course run by a young priest who subsequently died very prematurely. This dear man was mainly concerned to imbue us with enthusiasm for Vatican II. While I had no axe to grind about Vatican II, I was far more interested in learning about the wonderful riches of the millennia-old Catholic tradition than about the pronouncements of a recent Council.

I was able to find social work employment that actually provided accommodation, which was fortunate because our son was born two months before I was received. To my complete amazement, I then discovered the existence of a Catholic charity whose whole *raison d'être* was to help ministers of religion who became Catholics in Great Britain and Ireland — in those days known as the Converts' Aid Society, now known as the St. Barnabas Society. They were marvelous to us at that time. Fifteen years later, I was to embark on a stint of twenty-three happy years representing them in parishes around the country and soliciting the support of the Catholic people. I must have met about 400 priests, at least, often spending the weekend with them, and it was a heartening experience. My greatest sadness at leaving the Church of England had been the loss of preaching opportunities, but now I was able to address Catholic congregations and give them a spiritual message as I shared with them something of the challenges faced by the convert cleric. I also met many of our beneficiaries and was able to offer encouragement and reassurance to them in their struggles out of my own personal experience.

I only took up the work with convert clergy because my hoped-for new career in academia had hit the brakes. After

being received into the Church, I had completed an Oxford doctorate in the history of ideas with a very famous philosopher and historian by the name of Sir Isaiah Berlin. This subject remained a consuming passion with me, and I was eventually able to complete a scholarly work connected with the atheist philosopher and law reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) after three summers of research conducted in — of all places — Geneva! Later, I was commissioned to edit *World Fascism: a Historical Encyclopedia*, writing 70,000 words for it myself and translating contributions by many other scholars from various languages. This stimulated me to learn more about the Nazi Holocaust and to nurture the ambition to write a book on the subject. I discovered that the leaders of the National Socialist regime were, to a man, enemies of Germany's Christian tradition, and especially of the Catholic Church. The more I studied the topic, the clearer it became that the sheer intensity of their hatred for the Jews was closely connected to their hatred for Europe's Catholic civilization, founded and centred on the people of Israel. In this they were tapping into a long tradition of resentment of the inherited culture among European intellectuals and cultural figures. Surely the least we can do for the millions of Jews so brutally murdered is to understand why it happened.

In 2002, twenty-three years after I had been received into the Church, I discovered the Secular Carmelites, a movement of lay people living the spirit of Carmel, but not in community. This has been an immense blessing for me. It is one thing to become a Catholic, it is quite another thing to discover what sort of Catholic one should be. In Carmel, I have finally found my answer to this conundrum. ■



DR. BLAMIRE is a historian and a translator who is currently writing a book to answer the question, "What was the reason for the extreme hatred of the German National Socialist leadership for the Jews?" He is also involved with doctoral supervision at the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham, England. A member of the Secular Carmelite Order (OCDS), he is active with them on the national as well as the local level.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

Please visit CHNetwork.org/converts to comment on and share this or one of hundreds of other powerful testimonies!

**Dr. Blamires contributed an account of his conversion to the book Path to Rome. It was originally written for the first edition in 1999 edited by Dwight Longenecker and it also appeared in the second edition of 2010, co-edited by Fr. Dwight Longenecker and himself. This present version differs from the earlier one, but both are true and they should be regarded as complementary — like the varying accounts in the four Gospels!*

The Coming Home Network International

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CHNetwork Retreat in Houston, TX

October 12-15, 2020

Coming Home Network Retreats are opportunities to meet (or catch up with) the CHNetwork staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion, prayer, and worship. Intended for both converts and those on the journey to Catholicism, whether lay or clergy, the goal is to promote Christian fellowship among the attendees, assist in discernment for those who are facing tough questions or decisions, and to encourage all in an ever greater walk with Christ.

For more information, please contact Ken Hensley at ken@chnetwork.org or go to

chnetwork.org/retreats/texas-2020.