



October 2020 CHNewsletter

“Discovering Lived Truth Through Newman”
By Deacon Scott Carson 1

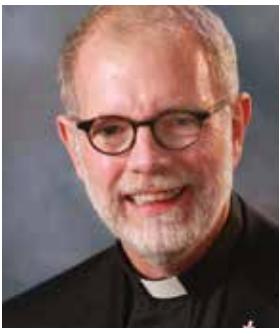
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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Discovering Lived Truth Through Newman

By Deacon Scott Carson Ph.D.

The tale of my journey into the Catholic Church is a tale of growth — spiritual growth, psychological growth, and, most importantly of all, growth in an understanding of and capacity for Christian love.

I began my journey as a non-believer, raised by a very skeptical mother prone to scientism, and now I find myself an enthusiastic Permanent Deacon for the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, with a calling to serve an academic community in that area. Much has changed in the intervening sixty years.

The home in Stow, Ohio, to which my parents brought me after my birth in 1958, was a mere two blocks from the local Catholic church, but to this day I have never seen the inside of that church. My parents were not only not Catholic, they were not even religious, except in that attenuated sense in which many people, then as well as now, felt obliged to profess some allegiance to vaguely Christian moral principles. That is not to say that they weren’t willing to live the sort of lifestyle that was consistent with religious belief as it was practiced in that time and place. My father was a manager for Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, my mother was what was formerly called a “homemaker,” a woman who stayed at home, taking care of the house and the children while her husband worked his job. My father’s side of the family was Presbyterian, my mother’s Southern Baptist, but when I was growing up, my parents themselves attended church only very rarely. Christmas and Eas-

ter were celebrated in a secular fashion, with trees, lights and presents, baskets, eggs and candy.

A recurring theme in my story is the role of women in my faith journey, beginning with my mother. I vividly remember my mother teaching me the words to the Our Father when I was only about five years old. But I do not remember praying the prayer afterwards, nor did I ever observe her praying it, so to this day, I remain thankful for what seems to have been a gift of pure grace — a prayer taught for no other reason than the handing on of a prayer. She could not have known how important that prayer was to become for me.

My sister, who is fourteen years older than I, began to develop a religious sensibility when she was in high school. She became a charter member of a new Presbyterian church in Stow, Ohio. My parents were evidently impressed by her zeal, because that was where they had me baptized when I was three years old. Church attendance as such, however, remained sporadic, and I have very few memories of that church.

In November of 1965, my father died, quite suddenly, of a heart attack, at the age of 48. I was seven years old. The loss of a parent can be very difficult at any age, but for a child

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

it leaves a gap that can never really be filled. My mother did not marry again, and my sister had already moved on to start life on her own, so my family had suddenly become the two of us. She had to get a job, so I became a latch-key kid. We moved around in those days, but we always lived within a block or two of my school, which made it easy for me to settle into a routine of going to school during the day and reading or (what was more likely!) watching television in the evenings.

My mother had married my father right out of high school, relying on his college degree in engineering to support their family. After his death, the limitations of the family model of the 1950s and 1960s and the rapidly declining earning power of the high school diploma were not lost on her. Although she worked very hard at difficult jobs that did not pay very well, she always saw to it that I was well educated and, perhaps more importantly, constantly encouraged me to develop and pursue intellectual interests. I had a fondness for reading and an intellectual curiosity about the world around me. Although my mother remained indifferent to religion, she had a profound sense of wonderment about the natural world that was itself almost religious, and certainly it was contagious: I became interested in astronomy and cosmology while in high school and devoured books about science that she happily bought for me. Really, just about any book was fair game for her; if I showed an interest in reading something that she thought was worth reading, she would get it for me.

Spiritual Awakenings

From 1968 until her death, my mother worked as a secretary at Kent State University, where she was able to take classes with

no tuition. She studied psychology and, to my surprise, religious studies. I don't know what motivated her to take classes in either of those disciplines, but she began to read books by Carl Jung and Teilhard de Chardin. I glanced at the de Chardin books, but when I was 13, I was more interested in *The Lord of the Rings*, which in the early 1970s enjoyed a large audience comparable to the more recent Harry Potter phenomenon. Like many young people of the time, I found myself deeply captivated by the world created by Tolkien. But the backstory, outlined in some detail by Tolkien in an appendix to the work, prompted me to think about larger themes than battles and magic rings.

My mother was familiar with Tolkien because his work was popular on college campuses at that time, and she and I would talk about some of these larger themes. One day, to my surprise, she brought me a set of C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. I enjoyed reading these volumes and was not so detached from religion as to miss the rather obvious Christian overtones of the work. I was moved by the nobility of some of the characters, and of course the main arc of the story, was in itself quite powerful. For the first time, I began to take seriously the thought that there might be more to being and existence than just the observable, natural world around me. Without guidance, however, my thinking about these larger themes was haphazard and without direction, more like the fantasy worlds I was reading about than any sort of systematic investigation into the transcendent. But it was during this period that I began to consider the possibility that there is much more to life than what meets the eye or ear.

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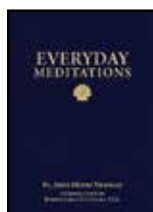


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Newman and the Early Christians

By Mike Aquilina

At the heart of St. John Henry Newman's conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism was his study of the early Christians, the Fathers of the Church. As an Anglican clergyman, he believed that they held the answer to his denomination's perennial problem — fragmentation in doctrinal and practical matters. Newman sought a purer reflection upon Scripture in the writings of the Fathers, an interpretation untainted by modern politics and controversies.

Newman read the Fathers deeply, and not merely to extract theoretical propositions. He wanted to enter their world — to “see” divine worship as they saw it, to experience the prayers as they prayed them, to insert himself into the drama of the ancient arguments.

He immersed himself in the works of the Fathers, so that he could recount their stories in his brief “Historical Sketches,” in his book-length studies and, later, in one of his novels. After decades of such labors, he concluded that, “of all existing systems, the present communion of Rome is the nearest approximation in fact to the Church of the Fathers Did St. Athanasius or St. Ambrose come suddenly to life, it cannot be doubted what communion he would take to be his own.”

An interesting thing had happened. His study of the Fathers of the Church had caused him to desire “The Church of the Fathers” (yet another of his book titles). He wanted to place himself in real communion with the ancients, with Athanasius and Ambrose. A notional or theoretical connection wasn't enough, and could never be. He wanted to move out of the shadows of hypothetical churches, based on a selective reading of the Church Fathers, and into the reality of the Fathers' Church.

Like St. John Henry Newman and his contemporaries, so many people today hold a lively curiosity about Christian origins. Many ordinary Christians would like to move beyond the rather petty preoccupations of today's tenure-track historians and documentarians (gender and conflict, conflict and gender). They would like to find their own imaginative entry into the world of the Church Fathers. They would like “Historical Sketches” that were vivid enough to see with an attentive mind's eye.

And what would we see, as we pored over the works of the Fathers? What would we see as we gazed through the window provided by archaeology of early Christian sites?

We would see many familiar sights and sounds, fragrances and gestures:

- A Church gathered around the Eucharist. This emerges most vividly, not only in the Scriptures, but in the generation immediately after that of the Apostles, the generation of the so-called Apostolic Fathers. The document called *The Didache* (circa AD 48) includes the earliest Eucharistic prayers. Clement of Rome (circa AD 67) sets out the different roles of clergy and laity as they come together for Mass. Ignatius of Antioch (circa AD 107) describes the Eucharist as “the flesh of Christ” and treats the Sacrament as the principle of the Church's unity. By the time we get to Justin Martyr (circa AD 155) we find a full description of the Roman Mass that's recognizable enough to be reproduced verbatim in the Church's *Catechism* today.

- A Church that practices sacramental Confession. The Fathers argued amongst themselves about whether the Church should be strict or lenient in dispensing penance — but none of them denied that this was the right and role of the Church and her clergy. The Fathers heard confessions. They pronounced absolution.
- A Church whose members make the Sign of the Cross. At the end of the second century, Tertullian spoke of the sign as if it were the hallmark of ordinary, everyday Christian living. Among his wife's beautiful qualities he mentioned the way she made the Sign of the Cross at night.
- A Church whose members bless themselves with holy water. The “prayerbook” of St. Serapion of Egypt (fourth century) includes a blessing for holy water. Eusebius (late third century) describes the familiar font at the entrance to a church.
- A Church with an established, sacramental hierarchy. St. Ignatius of Antioch shows us that, as the first century turned over to the second, the order of the Church was already well established everywhere. As he wrote letters to various churches, he assumed that each church was governed by bishops, presbyters, and deacons. He didn't explain this. He didn't argue for it. He just assumed it. At the turn of the next century, Clement of Alexandria also presented this order as traditional — an imitation of the hierarchy of angels in heaven.
- A Church that venerates the saints. This shows up in the graffiti on the walls of the Roman catacombs. It shows up in the art of the cemeteries of the Fayoum in Egypt. It shows up in many lamps and medals and signet rings. St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine wrote numerous homilies on the lives of the saints. The most ancient liturgies invoke their intercession. This is especially true of the Virgin Mary, whose prayers are included in canonical collections by the early third century.
- A Church that prays for the dead. In the 100s, devotional literature describes votive Masses celebrated at gravesides. The earliest tombstones in Christian Rome ask prayers for the deceased. The prison diary of St. Perpetua (North Africa, early third century) includes a vision of purgatory — whose existence is explained theologically by Origen (Egypt, third century). At the end of the AD 100s, Tertullian describes prayer for the dead as already an ancient practice!
- A Church with a distinctive sexual ethic and clear ideas about marriage and family. The early Christians stood almost alone in their refusal to acknowledge divorce, to engage in homosexual activity, to procure or practice abortion, or to use contracep-

tion. Their view of sex as sacred made them a laughingstock in the pagan world, where sex was cheap and degrading, and people were, accordingly, miserable.

That's just a glimpse of the early Church, but it's enough to make it recognizable as Catholic. Nor did the Fathers see their life as in any way opposed to Scripture. Scripture and Tradition coexisted in harmony because they had been received from the same Apostles. The New Testament shows us the Apostles writing letters, yes, but also observing rites, customs, and disciplines. Moreover, the Church of the Apostles pre-existed the New Testament and shows us that authority, for Christians, does not rest simply in the Scriptures.

"First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Pt 1:20). For the Fathers, interpretation belonged to the Church and her bishops. Polycarp of Smyrna took that lesson well from his master, the Apostle John. In the middle of the second century, he wrote: "Whoever distorts the oracles of the Lord according to his own perverse inclinations ... is the first-born of Satan." Polycarp's great disciple, Irenaeus of Lyons, made that one of the foundational principles of his multivolume work, *Against the Heresies*.

Newman knew that, standing apart from the Catholic Church, he was standing not with the Church of the Fathers, but rather with the heretics. So he came home, and his way — the Way of the Fathers — has been traversed by many non-Catholics since then. It's a good bet that many more will follow, rather soon.

As Saint John Henry Newman said, "it cannot be doubted" which Christian body the ancient Church most resembles. When we look to the "roots of the faith," we see today what Newman saw and acknowledged — though it made him an uneasy Protestant. If we continue our prayerful study, we hope to follow him further still — to the fullness of faith, blessedness of life, and happiness of heaven. ■

MIKE AQUILINA is the award-winning author of more than fifty books on Catholic history, doctrine, and devotion. His works have been translated into many languages. He has hosted eleven television series and several documentary films and is a frequent guest on Catholic radio. His website is fathersofthechurch.com. This article was originally published at www.earlychristians.org under the title "At the Heart of Newman's Conversion Was His Study of the Early Christians." Used with the permission of the publisher.

Newman's Time in Rome (November 1846 – December 1847)*

By Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson

On Oct 13, 2019, Pope Francis celebrated the canonization Mass for St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, the brilliant 19th century theologian and convert from Anglicanism, whom many believe is destined to become a doctor of the Church.

Newman's reception into the Catholic Church on Oct 9 (his feast day) in 1845, shook the foundations of the Anglican Church, and his journey to Rome the next year to prepare for Catholic ordination initially attracted considerable interest. But Newman had thought and prayed his way from Anglicanism to Catholicism in the relative solitude of his study, and his circle of Catholic friends was small. It was soon evident that in Rome he and his secretary Ambrose St. John would live in relative isolation. Newman for a time enjoyed a certain celebrity status but he doubted that anyone really understood him.

The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the center of the Holy See's missionary endeavors, received them and gave them rooms at the Collegio Propaganda near the Spanish Steps. There, Newman and St. John would become ordinary seminarians. But who was going to educate the most perspicacious theologian of his time? It is perhaps comforting to hear his friend St. John report that the lectures were boring and somewhat lacking as pedagogical models, and so Newman would often fall to sleep in class. (Thankfully this does not appear to have been held against Newman in the cause for sainthood!)

Newman was left largely to himself, to continue his brilliant studies of the Church Fathers. Rome's theologians had some doubts about his recently-published *Essay on the Development*

of Christian Doctrine. Newman's argument, that Catholic dogma was not, as it were, handed down from Mount Sinai but unfolded in a divinely-guided process of historical development in the life of the Church, was initially a very disconcerting idea for Catholic theologians hard-pressed to defend a tradition under siege from nearly every quarter. They naturally wondered about how sound this new convert really was.

So Newman, newly arrived from a different ecclesial world, was not well understood, and given his somewhat melancholic temperament, we are left with the distinct impression that his 1846-1847 academic year in Rome was certainly not about "making merry" over the return of a prodigal son of the Church (Lk 15:24). Newman, once the consummate insider of Anglican Oxford, is now an awkward and disoriented guest struggling to learn the customs of the house.

His first public act after his conversion, a funeral oration, was a humiliation, and the outcry even reached the papal ear. "We all need conversion," Newman had said, so offending a congregation used to florid eulogies that someone suggested he should be thrown into the Tiber. Pope Pius IX offered Newman wise counsel about his awkward attempt to convert the English at

*This article was originally published in *The Catholic Servant* September 2019 edition. Used with permission of the author.

that Roman funeral: "On such occasions honey is more suitable than vinegar." But he was able to keep a self-deprecating sense of humor, as when he dutifully records his first meeting with Pius IX, who seemed "very cordial and friendly," even though he had bumped his head against the Pope's knee as he bent to kiss the papal foot" (*Letters and Diaries*, XII,9).

His ordination retreat is extremely revealing. In his notes, I think that Newman has captured precisely what troubles the hearts of many former Protestant clergy who have approached the door of the Catholic Church — the surrender of personal autonomy, the loss of status, the difficulty and uncertainty of beginning again. Here are some representative excerpts:

- "So far as I know I do not desire anything of this world; I do not desire riches, power, or fame; but on the other hand, I do not like poverty, troubles, restrictions, inconveniences ... I like tranquility, security, a life among friends, and among books, untroubled by business cares ... In almost everything I like my own way of acting."
- Newman would often feel embarrassed and self-conscious, "like a person acting in a new and unfamiliar role." He had grown accustomed to a very public life as a mover and shaker in the Anglican Church. Now he seems to crawl along the ground when he wants to fly. He laments the loss of friends. "I feel acutely aware that I am no longer young, but that my best years are spent, and I am sad at the thought of the years gone by; and I see myself to be fit for nothing, a useless log."
- Newman is acutely aware that he has lost the "natural and in-born faith" he had as a young man. "Now I am much afraid of the priesthood, lest I should behave without due reverence in something so sacred." His faith in the efficacy of prayer and his confidence in the Word of God seem to have departed from him at precisely the time he needed them most. "The increasing years have deprived me of that vigour and vitality of mind which I once had and now have no more ... My mind wanders unceasingly; and my head aches if I endeavor to concentrate

upon a single subject." (Tristram, Henry, ed. *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 245-248.)

It was the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola that brought him precisely to the point he needed to be. As he knelt before the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, in St. John Lateran on May 29, 1847, to receive ordination in the Catholic Church, some 43 very productive years lay ahead of him. But first, in order to receive this indelible mark from Christ and the Catholic Church, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature with all its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24).

Those who have made similar journeys to the Catholic ministry are well aware that this is not a simple transition. There are many points of convergence between the separated churches and the Catholic Church, but there remain substantial differences as well. Perhaps there is no better a reminder of the profound difficulties of reconciling divided Christian communities than the experience of those who cross these frontiers as individuals. And so Newman's canonization was a time of rejoicing for those who care deeply about Catholic unity. St. John Henry Newman is an intercessor "who has been tempted in every way that we have," but who nevertheless pressed forward with great faith toward the new life of full communion. Every one of us has been profoundly affected by the witness of this man, and we truly owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Newman's contribution to the Catholic Church is simply overwhelming. The beneficial changes he helped bring to the discipline of Catholic theology transformed the Church's outlook and gave her a confidence to engage the world that resulted in some of the most significant accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council. Some have called Newman one of the most influential fathers of Vatican II, and in this we are reminded of St. Hilary of Poitiers sixteen centuries earlier, the exile who brought back the best part of the Eastern Christian tradition to enrich the Catholic Faith in the West.

Continued on page 7 ➤

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



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Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Saturday 6 PM ET

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

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October 5

Dr. Bud Marr* (former
Evangelical Protestant)

October 12

Nathan Wigfield* (former Presbyterian)

October 19

Jennifer Kern* (former Presbyterian
and non-denominational)
(re-air from 2/12/18)

October 26

Dr. Kenneth Parker* (former
Pilgrim Holiness Church)

November 2

Deacon Scott Carson
(former Episcopalian)

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

There are many who share Newman's own experience of finding the Catholic Church by searching deep within their own tradition. "The more you tried to be good Anglicans, the more you found yourselves drawn in heart and spirit to the Catholic Church" (*Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*, p. 292). This is that wonderful principle at work, where those elements of sanctification and truth found within other ecclesial communities lead inexorably toward Catholic unity (*Lumen Gentium* 8). We all have a part to play in this unfolding vocation of the Catholic Church, however modest it may seem to us, to draw all of the good things of God's creation into perfect communion with Christ the Head. By stirring up and contributing those gifts of faith and service that the Holy Spirit has already infused in us, we contribute our part to the catholicity of the whole Church. This character of universality is the goal to which the Catholic Church strives constantly (*Lumen Gentium* 13).

To speak of Newman's enduring ecumenical significance may seem strange when considering a man who changed his allegiance so dramatically and who described his old relationships as "the parting of friends." But we have the gracious assessment of Edward Pusey, who had once been Newman's most important colleague for the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism but could not in the end follow him. He called his friend's conversion "perhaps the greatest event which has happened since the Communion of Churches has been interrupted." And the reason why? "If anything could open their eyes to what is good in us, or soften

in us any wrong prejudices against them, it would be the presence of such an one, nurtured and grown to such ripeness in our Church, and now removed to theirs" (Liddon, H.P., *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, II, 461).

Newman himself was unwilling to accept that this should be the end of the story. Cardinal Avery Dulles summed up Newman's position so clearly: "Those who receive the grace to recognize the unique claims of the Catholic Church have a duty to act. If they do not act upon the knowledge granted to them, they are in serious danger of losing their souls" (*Newman*, p. 121; see *Lumen Gentium* 14). Many now argue that the ecumenical movement has set aside this manner of speaking, that the way of personal conversion must be handled with great discretion, to be described as simply the private exercise of conscience. Obviously I must demur

on this point, firmly believing that genuine ecumenical progress requires prophetic actions that are resolutely ordered toward the Church Our Lord founded on St. Peter.

Thank you, St. John Henry Newman, for following so faithfully that kindly light which brought you home. Pray for us! ■

Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson served for 28 years in the Episcopal Church before his reception into the Catholic Church in 2007. 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.

“There are many who share Newman's own experience of finding the Catholic Church by searching deep within their own tradition.”

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 a Lutheran pastor** who has made the decision to become Catholic but has a few remaining questions, that he will find the answers he needs.
- **For Paul, an Anglican priest** who needs to find work so that he can resign his priesthood to enter the Catholic Church.
- **For Derek, a Protestant pastor** investigating the possibility of becoming a Catholic priest if he should resign his ministry to enter the Church.
- **For Charles, who has been a Protestant pastor** since he was very young and loves the ministry but now knows that the Lord is calling him into the Catholic Church, that the Lord would help him as he explains this to his wife and eventually his congregation.
- **For Will**, who desperately needs to find a way to support his family as he seeks to become Catholic, that the Lord will show him the way and provide something for him.
- **For Jeff, a non-denominational pastor** who is convinced that Catholicism is true but is also convinced that the Lord truly called him to shepherd the flock he has been given, that the Lord would show him the way forward.
- **For a Church of Christ pastor** struggling with the reality that becoming Catholic will mean leaving his pastoral ministry.
- **For Michael, who works in campus ministry** and feels drawn to the Catholic Church, that his wife will come to share his desire to become Catholic.
- **For Pierre, a former Reformed Baptist seminarian** who has just recently entered the Catholic Church, that the Lord will continue to lead him and show him the next steps for his life.
- **For an Eastern Orthodox priest** who is drawn toward the Church but cannot imagine leaving what he believes to be his vocation to ministry.

- **For Aaron**, who wants to become Catholic and is struggling with how he will support his family if he does.
- **For a non-denominational pastor** who has fallen in love with the Catholic Church but whose wife is strongly opposed, that he will find a way to share with her what he is learning and correct the misconceptions she has about the Catholic Faith.
- **For Dave, an Anglican priest** on the journey who is looking into the Pastoral Provision and Ordinariate in the hope that he might be able to become a Catholic priest when he enters the Church.

Laity

- **For an Anabaptist in the United Kingdom**, that the Spirit of God would help him move forward on his journey.
- **For Jan** to connect with a good RCIA program and find local support for her journey.
- **For Harrison, a Lutheran**, that he may discover that, contrary to diluting the faith of the Apostles, the Catholic Church has preserved the faith handed down once for all.
- **For Amelia**, that she will be able to return home to the Catholic Church.
- **For an Independent Baptist in North Carolina**, that his father's heart may become open to his journey to the Catholic Church.
- **For John, an Eastern Orthodox**, that through his prayers and study he may be guided to full unity with the Catholic Church.
- **For Christina** to have clear direction as to how to proceed with her faith journey.
- **For a Jewish brother**, that he may accept his Messiah, the Lord Jesus, and the Church which He founded.
- **For a woman who is a member of the Assemblies of God** and is interested in returning to the Church, that she will find good support to help her come back.
- **For Colin**, that he will have the opportunity to more enthusiastically pursue his faith journey and longtime interest in Catholicism.
- **For George, a Reformed Baptist**, that his continued study of the truths of the ancient Faith may lead him to full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For a Baptist in Utah** who has continued to learn about the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide her heart and mind.
- **For Susan**, that she will find good support and encouragement in her journey and in her personal life.
- **For Stephen, a member of Calvary Chapel**, that, as he digs into the Bible and Church history, he may discover the fullness of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Jesus.
- **For Charissa** who is very drawn to the Church but doesn't quite know the next steps to take, that the Holy Spirit will guide her decisions.
- **For an Evangelical Presbyterian in California**, that the journey which began on the Camino de Santiago may lead him home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Sarah** who feels like she is in limbo with where to go to church, that she will be able to overcome the obstacles preventing her from exploring the Catholic Faith.
- **For Colin, a non-denominational Christian**, that the Holy Spirit may grant him an open heart and mind to accept the truths of the Catholic Faith.
- **For Lynn and her husband** to be able to find a faith-filled, orthodox priest to instruct them and receive them into the Church.
- **For Stephanie** to have the words and grace to know how to communicate well her desire to become Catholic to her family.
- **For a Southern Baptist**, that, through the grace of Jesus, his wife may become open to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

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.

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

Spiritual journeys, if they are to be fruitful, ought not to be undertaken alone or in isolation. This is an insight that only slowly dawned on me as I began my own journey alone and in isolation. The Christian religion is a communal religion, a way of life that is practiced by a family that stands ready to help one another. I first began to see this when I was in college. Because of my mother’s employment, I, too, was able to attend Kent State University at very little cost. There I met a young woman to whom I became deeply attached, and she was a serious Christian — the first such person I had known close-up. It was from her that I began to learn the rudiments of what it means to believe in the Christian God. She was a Methodist, and I attended church services with her, but not on a regular basis — I simply was not all that interested in the services. But I found myself becoming ever more interested in the details of the religion. Because I was majoring in Classical Studies and learning Latin and Greek, I bought for myself a copy of St. Jerome’s translation of the Scriptures, known as the *Vulgate*. Trying to read it was more an exercise in translation than theology, but combining that reading with discussions about religion more generally, which I was now having with the Christian students got me to thinking that transcendent realities might be more important than I had imagined. At this point, though, my interest in religion was still very theoretical and not very spiritual.

I eventually went on to graduate school in classics. My goal was to earn a Ph.D. and teach Latin and Greek at the college level. This meant leaving home and basically starting a new life in a new place. I moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where I enrolled in the University of North Carolina. I was used to hanging around with academics, but this was academics at a whole new level. I went from being a “big fish in a little pond” to being a “little fish in a big pond.” The other graduate students in my department came from high-powered educational backgrounds — schools such as Yale, Harvard, Princeton, or Berkeley. I felt overwhelmed. But the other graduate students were very kind, and many of them were Christians and even Catholics.

At first, my interactions were mostly with students from other departments, because I was living in a dormitory for graduate students from all over the university. There I met another young woman to whom I became very attached. She, too, was a Christian — an Episcopalian. I was not at all familiar with the various denominations of Christianity, so I had no idea how different an experience it would be to go to church with her. The first time I attended with her, however, I could see that I was in a very different sort of environment. I was struck by the decorum of the liturgy, the beauty of the music, and the dignity and reverence of the words and gestures. I was drawn to this experience with feelings that were both compelling and yet unfamiliar to me. I was not entirely sure why the experience appealed to me, but I believed at the time that it was not a merely subjective reaction to an aesthetic experience.

Digging Deeper

I was then blessed to make the acquaintance of a person who would become for me the first, and probably the most important, spiritual director for my journey. The associate pastor for student ministries at the Chapel of the Cross Episcopal Church was the Reverend Fr. Robert Duncan. He was a dedicated, faithful, and spiritual man, full of honesty and kindness, wit and wisdom. He had begun a program at the Chapel of the Cross called the Anglican Student Fellowship, a student group that met on Wednesday nights for Eucharist and fellowship. As far as I could tell, all the members of this group regarded Fr. Duncan with the highest esteem and saw him as a charismatic and remarkable leader. From my viewpoint, he was that and more; he was extremely intelligent in a gentle way, a person who could lead you to see things about yourself that you might otherwise be unwilling to see, and who could motivate you to aspire to higher and better things. He was always available for conversation about religious matters and it was from him that I learned about the Church Fathers and the development of Christian theology.

Getting to know the Christian students in my department, I also had informative conversations with the Catholics. I was working towards my Ph.D. degree, writing a dissertation on the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, and in my conversations with the Catholic graduate students, I discovered just how much Catholic theology was grounded in the thinking of Aristotle. It was at this time that I began to explore the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian and Dominican priest whose work was markedly influenced by ancient Greek philosophical principles, especially those of Aristotle. This reading, and my conversations with Fr. Duncan, persuaded me that I should commit myself to following Christ, and in 1981, I formally entered the Episcopal Church.

Troubled Waters

In spite of the fact that I found so much about the Episcopal church congenial, some nagging questions began to emerge for me as I continued to explore the theological foundations of the faith. In particular, I began to have serious doubts about the reasons for the separation of the Church of England from Rome under Henry VIII. In fact, most of the objections to Roman primacy from the Church of England and the Protestant Reformers struck me as politically, rather than theologically, motivated. Roman theology struck me as sound, both historically and philosophically. Moreover, I was not all that sure that the differences between Roman practice and the sort of Anglicanism I was involved in were all that great. In short, I began to feel that, if I had nothing to “protest,” I ought not to be a Protestant.

With Newman, I was happy to call the Anglican tradition the *via media* — the “middle way” between Catholicism and Protestantism. I thought of Anglicanism as a happy medium until I actually started delving more deeply into the works of John Henry Newman. There, I learned that Newman, later in life, saw his conception of the *via media* as mistaken — a conclusion he

...Journeys Home Continued...

reached after doing extensive research on the early Church Fathers.

Although Newman had given an account of his conversion in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, it was not that account that influenced me the most. Rather, it was his more technical work, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. This book explained, with remarkable clarity, how Christian doctrine, planted by Christ Himself in the Apostles, grew and developed through time, almost like a living organism. I found it impossible to believe that infallible teachings could ever change over time. If something is infallibly true at one time, it will necessarily be infallibly true

at all times — but it is very clear that our understanding of The Way that is the life and experience of the follower of Christ has evolved in many ways since the beginning. To account for this, Newman showed how the doctrines of the faith adapt to circumstances without changing their essential, substantial content. So, for example, it is clear already in the texts of the New Testament that there are three central figures that must be accounted for in our faith — a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit — but the more complex understanding of those three figures as distinct Persons of a Unitary Trinity was not present in a *direct* and *explicit* way in those texts. Rather, it had to be made explicit over time, eventually finding concrete formulation in the Creeds and in the writings of the Fathers. The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, did not simply appear out of nowhere. It was already implicit in the complete and perfect Revelation that is the life of Christ, but it took the teaching authority of the Apostolic Tradition to discern it, to clarify it, and to present it to later generations of believers in a way that would be accessible in a variety of cultural contexts.

The more I pondered Newman's account of the development of doctrine, the clearer it became to me that the Apostolic Tradition had been preserved intact in the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, and that the political motivations that I suspected were behind much Reformation criticism of Rome were actually innovations.

In Newman's account, the Magisterium of the Church is like a living organism, something that grows and develops without changing its essential nature. This insight was, for me, a profound influence, but it was not the only one. The Church, as an institution, consists of her members, the individual persons who make up the Body of Christ on earth. In addition to the attraction I felt to the theology of the Catholic Church, I also found that the Catholics in my circle of friends constituted a kind of familial

community, the beauty of which was difficult to resist. One of these in particular, Lisa Jacobs, was to become a very close friend and, eventually, my wife. Lisa had not been raised in a religious family, but when she came to Chapel Hill to study classics, she was already planning on entering the Catholic Church at Easter the following year. She was preparing for the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), and as I accompanied her on her own journey, I was deeply impressed by her faith, which seemed to me pure and authentic, grounded in a simple and joyful love of God. If my theological conversion had been aided by Newman's thought, my spiritual conversion was aided by Lisa's moving example of a heart freely given to God. By the time Lisa was received into the Church at Easter of 1983, I had decided that I, too, ought to join the Catholic Church.

Real Assent

I took instruction from a Catholic priest in Chapel Hill, and on the Solemnity of Saint John the Baptist (June 24, 1983), was received into full communion with Rome. Although this was a big step for me, it was really just the beginning. Earlier, I noted that my first steps on this journey were largely “theoretical and not very spiritual.” This,

I think, is the bane of many academics: too much head, not enough heart. In spite of Lisa's example, I was still journeying in a largely theoretical way, and as I began to take my first steps along the *via Romana*, it was Newman who came to my rescue.

After finishing my Ph.D. in classics, I taught for a few years but was restless and unsatisfied with my work. My interest in philosophy had been growing all along, and it occurred to me that I would rather work on philosophical topics full time. So I quit classics and went back to graduate school, this time at Duke University, where I earned a Ph.D. in philosophy. In the course of my studies, I had occasion to read Newman's *magnum opus*, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. This is his most technical work, dealing as it does with a field philosophers call “epistemology” — the systematic study of knowledge itself: what it is, how it is obtained, what its objects are, etc.

Someone may object: “But wait! you said there was already ‘too much head, not enough heart.’ How can a book like this help you now?” Newman draws an important distinction in this work between two ways we can assent to something with certainty, and this distinction helped me immensely. We can assent to ideas “notionally,” or we can assent to them “really.” Notional assent is the sort of mental assent we give to general ideas and concepts, such as “All human beings have equal dignity.” The

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certainly we feel about this kind of assent comes from proofs or logical demonstrations. Real assent, in contrast, is that sort of mental certainty we obtain by experiencing something directly for ourselves, independently of anyone's proofs or logical demonstrations. As a philosopher, I was already familiar with many attempts to "prove" the existence of God by means of logical demonstrations. St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, and many other writers offer such proofs. But believing in God is not as simple as finding a logical demonstration of His existence. There are plenty of those, but there are also plenty of atheists. Logical proofs might sometimes compel something like notional assent, but they cannot compel real assent.

What I have discovered in the years since my conversion is that belief in God — full-bore, radical belief of the sort demanded of the disciple — is not something that one can *learn* from a textbook, but rather is something that one must *experience*. I have learned many things *about* Christianity in the years I have been on this journey, but I am still learning precisely *what it is to be a Christian*, because I am still living The Way. I compare this growth in real assent to matrimony. Lisa and I were married in July of 1989, and I can attest that on the day of one's wedding, one feels a delight that is probably unmatched by any previous sense of delight. On that particular day it may be difficult to imagine one's love for one's spouse growing any greater or deeper. After thirty years of marriage, however, I think I am not the only married person to have discovered that love does indeed grow ever deeper and more profound with time. As much as I was enamored of my wife on the first day of our married life together, I would not trade what I have with her now for that first-day infatuation. On our wedding day I certainly *believed* that I loved my wife; now I *know* that I do, and I know it from a kind of direct experience that I could not possibly have had that first day.

So, too, with faith in Christ and the love to which we are called as followers of Him. When we first come to believe, we are in some sense "infatuated" with the Church — her teachings, her liturgies, etc. Over time, however, as we grow in faith, we come to see that something else is demanded of us. It is not enough to *love* the Church's teachings, one must *live* them, for when it comes to the sort of love that is demanded of us, to love is to live in a certain way.

This was brought home to me in a dramatic way a number of years ago, when I had to have surgery for a torn retina. I was terrified that I was going to lose my sight, and the surgery I needed seemed pretty scary, too — a lose-lose sort of situation. But, thankfully, it went well. My surgeon had expert skills and she had lots of help in the operating room. Indeed, one nurse actually held my hand throughout the procedure, giving me a sense of calm that even the sedatives could not produce. After my recovery, which was complete, I pondered the fact that so much good was done in that room on my behalf. I pondered also the fact that, had I not needed help, that good would not have been done. In His providence, God is able to bring good out of what is otherwise bad. This underscored for me the extent to which we

need one another: we are here *for others*, not only to help those who are in need, but to be helped by others when we are in need ourselves. This is the great mystery of self-sacrificial love: our lives are not our own, they are not *for us*, but *for others*. In this way, we are icons of Christ Himself, who gave Himself utterly and completely for our sakes, expecting nothing in return.

So, in order to live that sort of life more fully, I entered formation for the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, and was ordained a Deacon in December 2016. The canonization by Pope Francis, on October 13, 2019, of John Henry Cardinal Newman, confirmed that path for me. His patronage is particularly relevant to my work as a professor of philosophy, because contemplating his life and works keeps constantly before my mind the necessity of letting things develop: time is grace. Working with college students is a pretty good way to model the faith and at the same time to learn patience, empathy, and even self-sacrifice. I now *live* my love in a way that I could not have done before — either because I did not have enough experience and, hence, not enough empathy, or because I had not been given the opportunity to give myself to others. One learns this same lesson from parenthood, I suppose. Lisa and I have two children, Michael and Olivia, to whom we have given nearly half of our lives, expecting nothing in return. Most parents learn that, if you attach expectations to your love, then you are not only looking for disappointment, you are also not really loving. But this can be a difficult lesson to learn, especially for parents with overly high expectations. Loving children for exactly who and what they are can take time and experience. This journey, therefore, is one that is ongoing — indeed, it ends only with death, when we are no longer merely journeying but have arrived. Aristotle once remarked that we should count no one happy until he is dead, because only then will we be in a position to look back over the whole course of a person's life to see whether he had lived well. For the Christian, the only way to determine whether we have lived well is to look over the whole course of our lives to see whether we have *loved* well. ■



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