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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Discovering the Beauty of the Truth

By Matthew D'Antuono

"Our team of elders met, and they decided unanimously to make you an elder." I had wondered why my pastor wanted to get together with me one-on-one, and now I knew. How was I going to tell him that I couldn't accept the position as an elder in our non-denominational church because I was convinced of the truth of Roman Catholicism? Instead, I told him that I was thinking about studying philosophy and wasn't sure how long my wife and I would be in the area, but I would think about it and get back to him. Later, I wrote a letter that explained my convictions and asked my pastor not to make public the real reason for my refusal of the office. I was still working at a private Christian high school where my contract had not been renewed because I was converting to Catholicism.

The small council of school board members had called me in for a conference after I returned my contract with my own statement of faith instead of agreeing to those prescribed by the school. I was treated respectfully, but was ultimately told I was not being hired back for what would have been my fourth year. They asked me not to make my conversion public because a couple of months remained until the end of the school year.

To make the situation even more difficult, my wife, Emily, had stopped working to stay home with our two foster children, and she still wasn't sure about how she felt towards my conversion. Unfortunately, I had not told her everything I was discovering about the Catholic Faith until I was almost completely convinced: quite a bomb to drop on the daughter of Protestant ministers. I was almost as surprised as she was that Catholicism turned out to be true.

I grew up in a nominally Catholic home in New Jersey and received all the Sacraments of Initiation. While

we attended Mass weekly, my education in the Faith did not go beyond eighth grade, and I learned more about Catholicism from newspaper headlines and cartoons than anything reliable. My parents divorced when I was in high school, and my father subsequently told me that he was an atheist.

During the fall of 2001 and my sophomore year in college, I suddenly had the urge to learn more about what I thought was my Christian faith and, not knowing the difference, got involved in Bible study and meetings in a very large interdenominational ministry on campus. It was here that I entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and I devoured Scripture and all the good books I could get my hands on. I quit drinking and began evangelizing my teammates. I led my mother and siblings out of the Catholic Church to one that I thought was more Bible-based.

After my sophomore year, I worked as a deckhand on the Block Island Ferry in Rhode *Continued on page 2* ➡

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

Island, my parents' home state before they moved to New Jersey for my father's Broadway acting career. During my hours of free time on the ferry, I read, among other books, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, where I found a lot of Scripture references to books of the Bible that seemed to be missing from *my* Bible. If I had really thought about it, this would have bothered me, but I put it out of my mind. But this issue of the Old Testament canon would come back to haunt me.

I also spent quite a bit of time on the phone with Emily, whom I had met the January before at a social event for our campus ministry. I was smitten with Emily, with my newfound faith, and with learning ever more about the Bible.

In the middle of my senior year, as Emily and I were planning our wedding and our year of ministry with her parents after graduation, I received an e-mail from a Catholic who had pulled my address off our ministry website. His e-mail was short and to the point: he simply wanted to know why I didn't hold to the traditions of the Church, as Scripture instructs (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Sensing that he was trying to convert me, I wrote a long response, and so began an e-mail exchange that spanned ten months and consisted of over 40 e-mails, each one more than two pages in length. My debate opponent, Trent Beattie, now writes for Catholic publications. I like to think that I helped him to hone his writing skills ... and his patience.

Unfortunately, we were speaking different languages. The main problem was that my "Protestant lenses" were so fastened to my face that it was impossible for me to imagine that I might be interpreting Scripture wrong or that I was "interpreting" Scripture at all. I assumed that my understanding of the Bible was the obvious and only understanding. As a result, I came away thinking that Catholics were heretics, because the Church taught that we are not saved by faith alone, and it accepts the teaching of the Magisterium as authoritative.

However, there was one thing that Trent pointed out which shook me a bit. He claimed that the Church Fathers were unanimous in affirming the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He cited, as one example, a quote from Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* (5:2): "He declared the cup,

a part of creation, to be his own blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body." By this point, Emily and I had graduated (B.S. Physics), married, and were working with her parents and another couple with a ministry in New Jersey for college and professional athletes. I asked one of my mentors about this quote from Irenaeus, and he replied that the Church Fathers spoke so symbolically that we shouldn't interpret them literally. Again, if I thought that through, it would have really bothered me, but I let it go. This issue, too, would come back to haunt me.

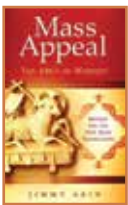
In the spring of 2005, my in-laws, my wife, and I had the opportunity to audit a class taught by Dr. Peter Kreeft on the philosophy of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. I knew that Kreeft was Catholic, but I respected him because I had read an interview with him on the problem of evil and knew that he was well-respected by many Protestants. When we met him, I began asking about what Catholics believe regarding faith, works, and salvation, and he bridged the linguistic gap between Protestantese and Catholicese. He explained that Catholics often use "faith" in a narrow sense and "justified" in a broad sense, as James uses the terms in his Epistle. Essentially, "faith" refers to mere belief and "justification" means sanctification. Protestants almost always use "faith" in a broad sense, which encompasses full trust and obedience and "justified" to mean merely forgiven. After this first interview, I no longer thought Catholics were heretics, but I still had a long way to go before I actually respected Catholicism. One important lesson I learned from this was that I had to evaluate Catholicism, or any system of thought, based on authentic sources, and I could not necessarily trust information on Catholicism from people on the street, ex-Catholics, Protestants, or the press.

After that spring, my wife and I took jobs teaching at a private Christian high school, which, ironically, is the same high school from which Peter Kreeft graduated, but I continued to read philosophy, C.S. Lewis, and G.K. Chesterton — a dangerous combination for anyone who wants to hold on to his Protestantism.

It was in this stage of life that I fell in love with philosophy and started learning how to think critically about things like the nature of the

Continued on page 5 ➤

FEATURED RESOURCES

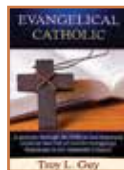


Mass Appeal — By Jimmy Akin

A concise, informative explanation of the Mass. In *Mass Appeal: the ABC's of Worship*, Jimmy Akin masterfully walks you through the Mass from beginning to end, explaining precisely what is happening and — more importantly — why. After reading Akin's work, you'll see, perhaps for the first time, precisely how all the pieces of the Mass fit together to create a single, coherent whole. It's a perfect gift for someone going through RCIA or any Catholic wishing to gain a better understanding of the Mass.

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Evangelical Catholic — By Troy Guy

Evangelical Catholic is an in-depth apologetic of the Catholic Faith. Written by a former Protestant who once strongly believed that the Catholic Church's teachings were contrary to the Bible, Troy Guy presents the biblical and historical evidence that eventually led to his conversion. *Evangelical Catholic* is written for anyone seeking to understand the Catholic Faith, with a particular emphasis on the obstacles that Protestants question. This book demonstrates that the Catholic Church is the one Church Jesus established 2,000 years ago and invites us *all* to discover.

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Luther: The Rest of the Story

PART V: THE ROAD TO CHAOS

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

Between the years 1513 and 1516 Martin Luther came to his new view of the doctrine of justification — *sola fide*, justification by faith alone.

Not surprisingly, as Luther began to teach his new view and expound upon it in tracts and books, he increasingly came into conflict with the Church. Finally, in April of 1521 he was called to recant his views before an imperial tribunal bearing the historically ironic title, “the Diet of Worms.”

This is where the classic standoff took place.

The Birth of Sola Scriptura

Now, on one level the issue was how Catholics were to understand the doctrine of salvation. On a more fundamental level, however, the issue was that of authority.

The Church said, in essence, “You’re wrong!”

To which Luther responded, in essence, “No, you’re wrong! My teaching is in accordance with Scripture!”

To which the Church responded, in essence, “No, what you’re teaching conflicts with Scripture and with the authoritative teaching of the Church” and demanded that he recant his views.

Luther faced a watershed. What did he believe about *who has authority* to speak for God? Did the Church have authority when, having examined the light of God’s revelation in Scripture through the lens of Sacred Tradition, it rendered formal ruling on an issue of faith or morals? Or did authority reside somewhere else?

He really only had two options:

He could abandon his position: “Well, I thought I was reading Scripture correctly, but I guess I must not be. I’ll have to go back to the drawing board on this issue of justification.”

Or ... he could reject the authority of the Church and its Tradition and stand alone on what he *believed* Scripture to be teaching.

We all know what he chose:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Holy Scripture or by evident reason ... I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis: my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant ... God help me!

At that moment, *sola Scriptura* was born: *the belief that Scripture is the sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the Christian and for the Church.*

The Right of Private Judgment

Now, think this through with me.

What is the practical implication of saying that Scripture will serve as the Christian’s sole infallible rule for doctrine and morals?

Well, if there’s no real “authority” on earth outside of the Bible, then ultimately won’t it be *up to each Christian to decide* what he or she believes the Bible to be teaching and thus what the true teachings of the faith are?

That’s right. The practical implication of *sola Scriptura* is the right of private judgment in matters of the Christian Faith.

Now, Catholics have always enjoyed the right of private interpretation, but as a “limited right.” We’re free to study Scripture and attempt to understand its meaning. But we do this within the framework of what the Church has already formally defined as true.

As an example, I’m free to study the Gospels and maybe even come to brand new insights about the nature of Our Lord as both God and Man. But if I come to the conclusion that Jesus wasn’t divine at all, as a Catholic I can know that *I* am wrong, rather than the Church!

Borrowing an analogy from Peter Kreeft, Catholics are like children in a playground. We’re free to swing and slide and throw theological sand in each other’s eyes and have all the fun we like. But there’s a fence around the playground that keeps us from wandering out into the street and being run over by some passing theological fad.

What Luther and the other Reformers did was take this “limited right” and make it an “*absolute right*.”

“Unless *I* am convinced!” Luther said.

In other words, when it comes down to it, Luther essentially said, “I don’t really care what popes have said or the Tradition has said! I don’t particularly care what Church councils have determined! It doesn’t matter to me what the authoritative teaching of the Church has been. Popes and councils can say what they will. My conscience is captive to the Word of God, which is my basis, and unless I am convinced...”

And think with me: this makes perfect sense — if Christ did not establish a Church on earth with the Spirit-given *ability* to pronounce *authoritatively* on the true teachings of Christianity, then what is left but to say that each Christian has the right to *decide* ultimately for himself?

And this is what happened.

Beginning with Luther, Christians within the various Protestant traditions came to think of themselves as possessing the right to decide for themselves what they believed the Bible to be teaching and to live in accordance with that teaching — without being *bound* by any authority on earth.

John Calvin said it like this:

We hold that the Word of God *alone* lies beyond the sphere of our judgment ... Fathers and Councils are of authority *only in so far as they accord with the rule of the Word*” (Quoted in *A Reformation Debate* (ed. John C. Olin), p. 92.)

Now, this may sound like humility in practice. But here’s the problem: who is going to determine what the “rule of the Word” is? The Bible is not going to suddenly speak and say, “Here’s the correct interpretation!” Who is going to decide?

Well, Calvin will decide.

In other words, when you think it through, what Calvin is really saying here is this: “Fathers and Councils are of authority only in so far as *I determine* that what they teach is in accord with what *I have determined* the Bible to be teaching!”

Luther, who always had a way with words, put the principle even more succinctly: “In these matters of faith, to be sure, each Christian is for himself pope and church” (Sungenis, *Not by Scripture Alone*, p. 363).

The Unraveling of the Church

Now, here the tragedy begins to unfold.

The moment Luther began preaching *sola Scriptura* and the absolute right of private interpretation, immediately there was an *explosion* of interpretations and, with this, an explosion of divisions within Protestantism. The result was immediate chaos.

This is simply an historical fact. It could have been predicted. In fact it *was* predicted — and not simply by Catholics! Luther himself foresaw what would come of his teaching and example.

There will be the greatest confusion. Nobody will allow himself to be led by another man's doctrine or authority. Everybody will be his own rabbi; hence the greatest scandals (quoted in O'Hare, *The Facts About Luther*, p. 209).

As the Protestant movements began instantly to splinter and division and chaos ensued, Luther complained:

There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads. This fellow will have nothing to do with baptism; another denies the Sacrament; a third believes that there is another world between this and the Last Day. Some teach that Christ is not God; some say this, some say that. There is no rustic so rude but that, if he dreams or fancies anything, it must be the whisper of the Holy Spirit, and he himself a prophet (Ibid, p. 208).

Luther lived to see those he had personally instructed in the faith reject his teaching and run off to preach their own doctrine.

How many doctors have I made through preaching and writing! Now they say, "Be off with you! Go off with you! Go to the devil!" Thus it must be. When we preach they laugh When we get angry and threaten them, they mock us, snap their fingers at us and laugh in their sleeves (Ibid, p. 207).

(Of course the young Martin had done exactly the same thing. But how embarrassing!)

Luther even admitted that the chaos was *directly related* to the rejection of the Catholic Church's authority.

Since the downfall of Popery and the cessation of excommunications and spiritual penalties, the people have learned to despise the word of God. They no longer care for churches; they have ceased to fear and honor God ... After throwing off the yoke of the Pope, everyone wishes to live as he pleases (Sungenis, p. 365).

There is nothing really surprising here. In fact, the logic seems quite inescapable: You have (a) the ridicule and rejection of the authority of the Church; (b) the insistence that Scripture is the believer's *sole* infallible rule of faith and practice; (c) the bold assertion that when it comes to the interpretation of Scripture, each Christian serves as his own Pope and Church, and ... Should anyone with a brain be shocked when you wind up with individualism, with subjectivism, and with as many views as there are interpreters?

How could it be otherwise?

Luther Out-popes the Pope

So what did Luther do? Did he scratch his head, furrow his brow and think to himself, "Hmm, maybe I've made an error here and should rethink my position. Maybe there has to be *some authority* in Christ's

Church above that of the individual and his interpretation of Scripture." Did he? The truth is: Luther certainly *did* question himself.

But what did he finally do? In response to the chaos and fragmentation unleashed by his own preaching of *sola Scriptura*, he turned around and began to prohibit his followers from exercising the private judgment he continued to insist on for himself.

One of my mentors in my early study of Catholicism was the well-known apologist Jimmy Akin. Some years back Jimmy wrote a wonderful little article titled, "*Sola Scriptura: Theory or Practice*." In this article, Jimmy quoted at length from historians Will and Ariel Durant on the *response* of the Reformers to the division brought about by their preaching on the right of private judgment.

The quotations are enlightening, to say the least.

It's instructive to observe how Luther moved from tolerance to dogma as his power and certainty grew In the *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility* (1520), Luther ordained "every man a priest," with the right to interpret the Bible according to his private judgment and individual light Luther should have never grown old. Already in 1522 he was out-papaling the popes. "I do not admit," he wrote, "that my doctrine can be judged by anyone, even the angels. He who does not receive my doctrine cannot be saved." Luther now agreed with the Catholic Church that "Christians require certainty, definite dogmas, and a sure Word of God which they can trust to live and die by." As the Church in the early centuries of Christianity, divided and weakened by a growing multiplicity of ferocious sects, had felt compelled to define her creed and expel all dissidents, so now Luther, dismayed by the variety of quarrelsome sects that had sprouted from the seed of private judgment, passed step by step from toleration to dogmatism. "All men now presume to criticize the Gospel," he complained, "almost every old doting fool or prating sophist must, forsooth, be a doctor of divinity." Stung by Catholic taunts that he had let loose a dissolvent anarchy of creeds and morals, he concluded, with the Church, that social order required some closure to debate, some recognized authority to serve as "an anchor of faith" Sebastian Franck thought there was more freedom of speech and belief among the Turks than in the Lutheran states.

And it wasn't just Luther. In Strasbourg, the Reformer Martin Bucer "urged the civil authorities in Protestant states to extirpate all who professed a 'false' religion; such men, he said, are worse than murderers; even their wives and children and cattle should be destroyed."

Luther's disciple, Melancthon, "recommended that the rejection of infant baptism, or of original sin, or of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, should be punished as capital crimes He demanded the suppression of all books that opposed or hindered Lutheran teachings."

Reigning as a veritable king in Geneva, Calvin

was as thorough as any pope in rejecting individualism of belief. This greatest legislator of Protestantism completely repudiated the principle of private judgment with which the new religion had begun. He had seen the fragmentation of the Reformation into a hundred sects, and foresaw more; in Geneva he would have none of them. There a body of learned divines would formulate an authoritative creed; those Genevans who could not accept it would have to seek other habitats. Heresy again became [both] an insult to God and treason to the state and was to be punished by death (*The Story of Civilization*, volume 6, p. 420-425 and 472-3).

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/share-your-story to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

Towards Fruitful Dialogue

By JonMarc Grodi, Chief Operating Officer

"Towards Fruitful Dialogue"	A
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A few months ago, we received an intriguing message and invitation from Troy, a member of the Coming Home Network. Troy comes from a Baptist/Evangelical background and was in contact with us before entering the Church at Easter of 2017. Since becoming Catholic, Troy has begun to share his experiences and his journey with others through his website, DiscoverHisChurch.com, in his book *Evangelical Catholic* (to order this book, please see page 2), and in conversations with friends and family.

Troy wrote to us because, as the result of one of these conversations, he was going to be meeting with a dozen Protestant pastors to share and discuss his reasons for becoming Catholic! As Troy prepared for the meeting, he decided to contact the CHNetwork to ask for our prayers and ask if anyone on staff might be able to attend the event and help to engage the other attendees. I talked with Troy and was able to work things out so that I could join him at the meeting.

The morning of the event, the pastor of a Methodist church hosted the meeting and, sure enough, we were joined by 10 other pastors from a variety of local churches. After coffee was served and introductions made, Troy dove into an excellent presentation of some of the main reasons he became Catholic. While he received some of the expected pushback, he also fielded some great questions and led a productive discussion. After a couple of hours of remarkably fraternal and collegial discussion, we broke for lunch and continued to socialize. Eventually, we all exchanged business cards, thanked and affirmed one another for the discussion and for our respective ministries, promised to keep each other in prayer, and departed.

Since then, Troy has informed me that there will likely be further meetings with this group and thus asks for our continued prayers.

It was extremely encouraging and gratifying to see Troy, who himself was able to receive resources and fellowship from the CHNetwork on his journey, now carrying out his own outreach. We are grateful that he thought to draw upon the CHNetwork again for prayer and support in his ministry. This is one of our great hopes: to be able to encourage Catholics in their living-out and sharing the faith with others. Thus, being able to take part in this event with Troy was a real treat. In addition, however, I came away with a number of reflections and ideas that I wanted to share with you.

Relationships: This whole amazing event came about in part because of authentic Christian relationships that Troy formed and respected in the midst of his spiritual journey. After becoming Catholic, he had the opportunity to share his story with a good friend, because of their friendship he was able to be truly heard by that friend, and his friend, knowing Troy's faith and in-

tegrity, was moved to set up this remarkable opportunity for Troy to share his journey.

Unity As a Motive for Authentic Ecumenical Dialogue:

One central aspect of Troy's presentation that set the tone and direction of the whole ensuing dialogue — was his emphasis on Christ's prayer for unity "that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:22-24). Troy emphasized to this diverse group of pastors (representing Methodism, Presbyterianism, Baptist, and others) Christ's call for unity and the disunity in Christianity, which he recognized and which sparked his own journey. Disunity among Christians is a scandal to the world and is an open wound that we shouldn't grow numb to. It should drive each of us to greater personal conversion, humility, prayer, and attempts at authentic and purposeful dialogue with our separated brothers and sisters.

Baby Steps: One topic that Troy focused a good deal on was the apostolicity of the early Church — how the early Church was functioning before the Bible was even fully put together and relied on the authority of the Apostles and their successors. While our meeting actually blossomed into a very good discussion on the nature of the Church and the importance of apostolic authority, we weren't able to go much further than this during this (hopefully first) meeting. For Troy and I (and probably you), the implications of the apostolicity of the early Church to this discussion are obvious, and I at least wrestled a bit with how hard to push forward here. In the end, many of the implications had to remain unexplored (for now), but I realized that that is ok. Seeds were planted, relationships built, and as I noted, Troy has reported that further meetings are being planned.

We must share our faith with people — give them the information with which to inform their conscience — but it is always easy (for me at least) to want to jump to conclusions, to pointedly and aggressively rush people to the implications that we ourselves already accept. We can let our own impatience and desire to control the outcomes of a conversation keep us from really listening to the other person, understanding where they are coming from, and recognizing the promptings of the Holy Spirit in how to speak to (rather than past) them and their particular journey.

Continued on page B ➡

The Holy Spirit at Work Even Among Our Divisions: As noted, while we continue to share patiently and pray faithfully, we

I return from the experience with much to ponder, but most importantly I come away encouraged regarding our and *your* work in the Coming Home Network. As a network of people like Troy — faithful Christians who came to embrace Catholicism but who have a deep understanding and appreciation for their fellow Christian brothers and sisters — we have a unique and powerful role in building up the Body of Christ. Thank you for your continued prayer and support in this “apostolate of reunion.” ■

Who do you nominate to be our next staff interview?

Joyful Journey Updates

We would like to share with you a few encouraging updates and anecdotes from CHNetwork members. Thank you for helping us to assist converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church!

FROM GORDON, A FORMER BAPTIST LAY MINISTER:

God bless you and CHNetwork. It was through the EWTN and *The Journey Home* that God led me into the Catholic Church . . . I can't help much, but I share with many others the existence of CHNetwork so they can be helped and encouraged too. I am well and God is very good.

FROM RALPH, ON THE JOURNEY: I continue to be blessed by the CHNetwork in many ways. It truly has been a key part of my journey toward the Catholic Faith. CHNetwork has been a wonderful resource and is always a "go to" place for me when I have questions regarding Catholicism. I put great trust in you folks. Thank you for all you do. Rest assured that I give thanks for you and pray for you often.

FROM TONY, A CONVERT: I just finished reading a great article about *The Journey Home* on the National Catholic Register. The one thing that "leaped off the pages" to me was a realization that many who are interested in the Church don't have any experiences with practicing Catholics. The appeal of the show to me was that it helped me "meet" so many people of different backgrounds from agnostic/atheists to seekers of a variety of faiths and religions. The Coming Home Network was my "Masters Course in Comparative Religion," and it brought me home to the fullness of faith!

FROM A FORMER NON-DENOMINATIONAL PASTOR AND MISSIONARY: I'm sure I wouldn't be where I am today if not for EWTN TV and, specifically, *The Journey Home* program. Thank you, and all the CHNetwork staff, for their prayers for me, and the encouragement you have

given me when I needed it. Sometimes it was like a kick-in-the-pants, but that was what I needed. God bless you all!

FROM CAROL, A RECENT CONVERT: Again, let me thank you for your encouraging emails, the information and support on the CHN's website, and *The Journey Home* program for helping me so much!! Watching others find the faith and then showing what they were doing with it inspires me . . . I cannot wait to see where God leads me from here. I trust Him and invite Him to use me for His glory and bringing others to His Church.

FROM SARA, ON THE JOURNEY: My faith journey is progressing and full of grace! . . . I've been a Christian as long as I can remember, but the things I've learned in the last months are extraordinary. I had no idea I was missing so much. I'm delighted.

FROM DAWN, A RECENT CONVERT: I am falling more and more in love with the Catholic Faith! There is so much to discover and learn, and I never get tired of reading about it. God is good! Thank you so much for checking on me. I shared with the current RCIA at my church how much the Coming Home Network impacted my life and supported and encouraged me on my journey. I also told them about your retreat! . . . Thank you again for everything! ■

TAX LETTER

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janna@chnetwork.org or 740-450-1175 ext 102

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Michael, a Baptist minister, that the Lord Jesus may guide him in his discernment to become Catholic and possibly a priest.
- For Bob, a minister in Minnesota, that the Holy Spirit would bless and guide his RCIA formation.
- For a Lutheran minister in Indiana, that the Holy Spirit would guide every aspect of his journey home to the Catholic Church.
- For a non-denominational lay minister in New Jersey, that our Lord Jesus would give him a hunger to receive him in the holy Eucharist.
- For Jeff, a minister in Texas, that his feelings of emptiness may give him a desire for the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church.
- For an Eastern Orthodox priest in Kenya, that Our Lord would fulfill his desire to enter into full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For Paul, a minister in Illinois, that by God's grace, he may overcome his doctrinal difficulties and the opposition of his wife in his journey home.
- For an Episcopal hospital chaplain in Virginia, that God may guide him as he discerns in which direction God would have him go.

Lay

- For Henry, who comes from a Church of Christ background, that the Lord would give him the grace to overcome all his misgivings about the Catholic Church.

■ For Laura's sister who has left the Catholic Faith, that she and her children be touched by the Holy Spirit's grace and feel called again to the Eucharistic table.

■ For Jodi who is in RCIA, that her uncertainties and struggles be resolved as she moves forward with her faith journey.

■ For a Pentecostal who has questions about the Catholic Faith and is considering meeting with a priest to gain clarity about her concerns.

■ For Rachel who is a new convert and is struggling to adjust to life as a Catholic, that she make good Catholic friends.

■ For a former Muslim, now an atheist, who has reached out to us on account of his seeking faith.

■ For a man who is leaning towards Eastern Orthodoxy but is still drawn by Catholic devotions and writings.

■ For Kat who is having a hard time understanding why we need the Church when we can just have Jesus.

■ For Cindy who has health problems that make it difficult for her to get to church but is still hoping she will be able to become Catholic.

■ For Ellie who doesn't understand the Catholic teaching about salvation, that the Holy Spirit guide her heart and mind as she seeks a deeper walk with Him.

■ For a woman in Canada who says she has given up believing in any religion and isn't sure who God is anymore.

■ For a former Mormon who is having to learn a lot about the basics of Christianity as she moves towards becoming Catholic and is having a lot of opposition in her journey.

■ For Roger who is prayerfully considering how best to move forward with his journey and is particularly concerned about the impact it would have on his family and those he ministers to as a lay leader at his current church.

■ For Gary who is attending an Assemblies of God church but is still intrigued by Catholicism and listens to EWTN regularly.

■ For Vicki who went through RCIA but was disappointed with her experience of Catholicism at the local level, that she continue to be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance in her life.

■ For Mary Jo who is a Baptist on the journey, that she find good support and encouragement as she pursues her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For Kate, that her husband become more open to Catholicism to allow her to proceed with her journey.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

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



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Wednesday 1 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-Thursday 12 AM ET

February 5
 Kendra Clark*
 Former Mormon

February 12
 Jennifer Kern*
 Former Presbyterian (PCA) and non-denominational

February 19
 Matthew and Elisabeth Akers*
 Former Anglicans

February 26
 Mark Neugebauer*
 Former Messianic Jew

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

**Schedule is subject to change.*

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

human person, existence, morality, and God. I also realized that, perhaps, Catholicism couldn't be that crazy after all, since clear-headed writers and teachers such as Chesterton, Tolkien, and Kreeft were Catholic, and Lewis, though not Catholic, adhered to some doctrines that were more Catholic than Protestant, like the Eucharist and purgatory.

In fact, it was Lewis's description of purgatory that helped me to accept it as at least possible because I had previously thought purgatory was where people earn forgiveness for unconfessed sins — an idea that obviously contradicts the truth that forgiveness cannot be earned. (Where I got that strange notion is beyond my memory. Our phantom sources and their resulting unconscious biases are our worst enemies in the pursuit of truth.) But when I learned that purgatory is a “cleaning station” before entering the purity of heaven and that there is nothing in Scripture that directly contradicts this idea, I accepted it as a possibility, although highly improbable, because I did not see it clearly taught in Scripture.

That “possible but improbable” stage did not last very long. Philosophy struck again. As I read Plato and Aristotle, I was forced to grapple with the nature of identity, humanity, and ethics, and I realized that I will not be perfect at my death but will be perfect in heaven. Therefore, it makes sense that there is an interval of some sort where I go from an imperfect, not completely virtuous state, to a state of perfect virtue. All of this, of course, is with the assistance of divine grace, without which we are literally nothing. Purgatory, it turned out, was actually not improbable.

With this newfound understanding of our created nature and virtue, the sacraments made more sense to me as well. Sacraments are means of grace, where God communicates His divine help toward our sanctification. Again, I did not think it was true, but the idea made sense in theory.

The issue that took me further on my journey than the other issues was the teaching on Transubstantiation. I ran into a couple of places where Lewis makes reference to the reality of Christ's Presence, and I came to realize that none of my arguments against the Catholic dogma came directly from Scripture. Instead, my argument was based on “reason” along with a figurative interpretation of Christ's words in John 6 and at the Last Supper. I had no positive statement from Scripture which stated that the bread and wine do not become the Body and Blood of Our Lord. As for “reason,” the metaphysical description was completely consistent, at least as consistent as the Incarnation, which was even more mysterious. I was forced to realize that Scripture alone could not settle for me the right teaching about Communion.

So, I decided to see what the Church Fathers taught on this issue. It only made sense that I should look to generations of Christians who immediately succeeded the Apostles for some guidance. I was faced again with the quote that Trent had put in front of me, as well as the unanimous testimony of the other Church Fathers, and this time I was reading them in context and with some philosophy under my belt. If Chesterton, Lewis, and philosophy were like sledgehammers to my Protestant mindset, the Church Fathers were a wrecking ball — as so many converts have already testified.

But, thought I, why trust the Church Fathers at all? Why should I place my faith in them? Wasn't that tantamount to violating *sola Scriptura*, the most important of all exegetical principles? And then it hit me: why *sola Scriptura*? Isn't *sola Scriptura* itself a method of interpretation? And where is *sola Scriptura* taught in Scripture?

I began looking into the arguments for *sola Scriptura* and found some arguments from outside of Scripture and very few, not very good arguments from inside of Scripture. The arguments from outside of Scripture violated the principle of *sola Scriptura* and, thus, were inadmissible, but the ones from inside of Scripture were based on what looked to me like “reading the principle into” the passages, like the often-cited 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which does not teach *sola Scriptura* when read carefully. In those verses, Paul does not say that Scripture is sufficient for theology and dogma. Instead he says that Scripture is useful for activities that make a man thoroughly equipped for good works. In context (and I have learned that context is always very important), Paul had referred twice in that same letter to his oral teaching as the norm for sound teaching (1:13; 2:2), so he could not have been teaching *sola Scriptura*. In the end, I found *sola Scriptura* to be an extra-biblical principle and, therefore, self-refuting.

Now, I was a hermit crab without a shell. I considered myself a denominational agnostic, but I was searching. The one thing I knew I had to focus on was truth. Joining a church or denomination based on anything else would be intellectual dishonesty and a sin against reason. My reading of the Church Fathers made Catholicism look like it had a good shot at truth, but I still had one last issue in mind: Mary. The doctrine of her sinlessness, in my mind, contradicted Paul's declaration in his Epistle to the Romans that all have sinned (3:23).

It was now a year after our first class with Dr. Kreeft, and I happened to be auditing another class, this time on Plato and Aristotle, so I asked Dr. Kreeft about this apparent inconsistency. He simply pointed out that Paul could not have meant that every single human being has sinned, because Jesus Himself was a human being. Since there was at least one implied exception to that passage for Jesus, room was created for other possible exceptions, like Mary.

With all of my logical objections swept aside, I was still not convinced. There were a lot of interpretations of Scripture out there. What separated one from the others? Ultimately, I knew that it came down to one thing: authority. Who or what had the authority to teach the truth about God, Jesus, and the Bible?

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...Journeys Home Continued...

It was during this same spring of 2007 that Emily and I took in our first two foster children, whom we adopted three years later. Emily decided to stay at home with these children while I continued to teach math and work as a class-level dean at the Christian school. I still had not told Emily much about what I was discovering. Life was stressful, and I was still somewhat unreasonably confident that Catholicism would turn out to be false, so there wasn't much need to inform her of the details. In the summer of 2007, I enrolled at a nearby university to begin work on a second bachelor's degree, this time in philosophy, and I started work that very summer as a part-time student.

In searching for perspective and continuing to read Chesterton, I happened upon an essay of his which describes the Christian religion as a procession that has statues and scrolls and canopies and other religious items. In the context of this simile, the Protestant Reformation consisted of snatching away only some of the scrolls and condemning the rest as nonsense, which made less sense than condemning the whole procession. But the proper place for the scrolls is in the procession, in the context from which they came. This picture made a lot of sense in my mind. I just had to find out if it was accurate.

Since the Church teaches the authority of the Pope, I thought it would be easy to find a contradiction between two Councils or papal statements. Then I would be able to write off Catholicism and get on with the rest of my search. But alas (or perhaps I should say, "Hallelujah!"), despite two thousand years of writings and dogmatic teaching from the Magisterium, I found no contradictions.

Throughout this time, I was also finding arguments from Scripture for a lot of Catholic teaching, but most importantly for the role of the Church in teaching authoritatively, like the two passages in 2 Timothy

already mentioned, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, and 1 Timothy 3:15. The latter calls the Church the "pillar and bulwark of the truth."

I was forced, again, to consider the Church Fathers. Time after time, I was faced with affirmations from them about Church teachings: the Pope, the authority of the Magisterium to interpret Scripture, the Eucharist, the role of Tradition, the Mass, and even the Old Testament canon. In fact, I discovered that the New and Old Testament canons were agreed upon at the same councils (the Councils of Hippo and Carthage), and the Old Testament canon was that of the Roman Catholics. Regarding the role of Tradition, Irenaeus (again!) even goes so far as to say, "What if the Apostles had not in fact left writings to us? Would it not be necessary to follow the order of tradition, which was handed down to those to whom they entrusted the churches?" (*Against Heresies* 3:4:1). I distinctly remember reading St. Justin Martyr's description of what Christians did on Sunday mornings and thinking to myself, "That's the Catholic Mass! They really didn't make it up; they've been doing it for 2,000 years."

As I wondered more about the issue of the Old Testament canon, it occurred to me to wonder about the New Testament canon. I tried to base everything on the Bible, and I was trying to figure out how to correctly interpret the Bible, but where did the Bible itself come from? How did I, personally, know that the New Testament canon included the right list of 27 books? It dawned on me that I was almost completely reliant upon the Church Fathers and early Councils. Every time I pick up the Bible, I am trusting the witness of those first generations of Christians. Without their writings, there would be no way to distinguish between the books in our New Testament and the New Testament Apocrypha. So, as a Protestant, I implicitly put all my trust in the Church Fathers for the New Testament itself, but I rejected without reason their testimony regarding just about everything else. A Protestant could argue that the Church Fathers got it wrong because their teaching contradicts Scripture, but I realized that this was not true; they only contradicted the *Protestant interpretation* of Scripture, and Protestants did not have a coherent way of ascertaining the canon without the Church Fathers. Chesterton's image of the procession came back in full force. For anyone, not just Protestants, to accept all the books of the New Testament as God-breathed, but not be Catholic, was inconsistent.

I had now found biblical, historical, and logical support for the teachings of the Church, and as I saw how all of these teachings fit together, I began to see, bit by bit, the beauty of Catholic dogma. Most impressive of all was how everything radiated from and pointed to Jesus Christ. All of the sacraments, saints, morality, and rituals had appeared to be obstacles to Jesus, but I found that they were all signposts or glass windows that were gifts from Jesus, revealing something more about Him, and ultimately pointing back to Him. Every aspect of the Church, including its teaching, is a lens to be looked through to the very source of everything good, true, and beautiful: God Himself, who is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in One. My critique of all the externals was like blaming the road sign for not being the destination.

The last step for me came when I had to decide what to do about going to church. I thought that I could be Catholic in my theology but still go with my wife and kids to our current church. After all, it was "non-denominational," right? I knew that they still taught and held to an interpretation of Scripture that was at odds with what I considered true. But that was not enough to force me into a Catholic church.

It did not take long for me to realize how utterly foolish it was of me to believe Catholic teaching, and therefore believe that Jesus Himself

WHAT IS THE CHNETWORK?

The Coming Home Network International was established to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, discover the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

Through the one-on-one outreach of our pastoral staff and volunteers, our monthly CHNewsletter, regional retreats, social media, and the online community forums and groups at our website CHNetwork.org, we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



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...Journeys Home Continued...

is literally, truly, concretely present in the Eucharist, and yet stay away from the Catholic Church physically. The awesome concreteness of our faith hit home for me, and I had to go where Christ was.

This, of course, meant explaining it all to my unsuspecting wife. I don't remember how I began the conversation, and I don't remember how the conversation ended, but it was awkward. I heard my wife expressing the stock objections to Catholicism with which I had once agreed. But I had now learned a whole new way of looking at those things, and it was hard to convince her. She was not as theologically interested as I was, anyway; she wanted to see Catholics with a vibrant faith before she could consider conversion.

So, in the fall and winter of 2007 and 2008, we found a community of Catholics who actively shared their faith and seemed to have genuine relationships with Jesus. Not long after, our marriage was convalidated; I went to Confession, and I received the Eucharist for the first time with at least a modicum of understanding regarding Whom I was receiving. In the spring of 2010, my wife finally joined me at the table of Our Lord.

Since then we became involved in RCIA and a mom's ministry in our parish. We fostered and adopted another sibling pair and, after being told that we were infertile and would most likely not have children apart from artificial interference, we had three biological children while ignoring the advice from the fertility doctor. That adds up to seven kids in our family.

My next concern, in the early spring of 2008, had to do with my job. I knew there were people of other Protestant denominations teaching at the school, but no Catholics. So, I asked the principal about the possibility of Catholics teaching there. He said that, unfortunately, they could not have Catholics on staff. When it came time to sign our contracts for the next school year, I included my own vague statement of faith. Soon afterwards, I was called in to a small council of board members. The results of this discussion were related at the beginning of this story.

It was not easy dealing with the loneliness of leaving our non-denominational church community or trying to answer the myriad of misunderstandings and warnings that our friends and family expressed regarding our conversion. Many of those conversations simply went unfinished for the sake of our relationships with those people and some involved tears and strained voices. But all the while, Emily and I ached for those we knew and loved to experience the same beauty and depth we had encountered in Catholicism. Several years later, my mother returned to the Church.

Thankfully, the Lord has provided me the opportunity to teach high school physics, an occupation that I have come to love and which places

me in a unique position as an example of the harmony between faith and science. I also have the opportunity to run the philosophy club and discuss philosophy with my students as we explore the foundations of scientific thought. After finishing my B.A. in Philosophy, I earned a M.A. in Education, and I am working on a M.A. in Philosophy at Holy Apostles College and Seminary.

In an effort to share the beauty that I have discovered in Catholicism, I have written several small works. Some are available on Amazon.com. Two introductions to philosophy, one of which is a brief, informal introduction to philosophy for Catholic teenagers, will be published this spring through En Route Books and Media. I share and defend my faith on YouTube (DonecRequiescat and Whoa Quotes), and our family makes weekly Gospel reading and reflection videos for children (MisterD418). Several people have come to me, after learning about my conversion, to learn more about Catholicism, and some of them have started the process of "coming home." It has been a pleasure to walk alongside these friends as they discover the beauty of Catholicism. As one of them recently said to me about his own experience, "I am constantly falling more in love with my Catholic Faith." For me, that is an ongoing truth. ■



MATT D'ANTUONO is a physics teacher who lives in New Jersey with his wife and seven children. He holds bachelor's degrees in physics and philosophy, a master's degree in special education, and is beginning work on a master's in philosophy. He has self-published three small works on Amazon.com, and posts videos about physics, philosophy, and the faith on his three YouTube channels: DonecRequiescat, Whoa Quotes, and MisterD418. Two more brief introductions to philosophy will be published this spring. He was raised in a nominally Catholic home and had a conversion experience in college before re-searching and returning to the Catholic Church. Matt was a guest on The Journey Home on January 15, 2018. His program can be viewed at www.chnetwork.org.

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

► "Luther: The Rest of the Story" continued from page 4

So let's get this straight. Luther and Melancthon and Calvin initiated the entire revolt against the Church's authority on the principle of the absolute right to private judgment: "Unless I am convinced" and "Only the Word of God lies beyond the judgment of the individual!"

But when it became clear that this principle led to theological and ecclesiastical chaos, they did what? That's right. They took firm control and began to systematically deny this right to everyone but themselves.

In other words, as Mr. Akin concluded,

All that "Here I stand, the Word of God compels me, I can do no other" stuff had to be interpreted narrowly. "I can do no other," meant, "I can do no other." It did not mean you could do something other if you felt the Word of God com-

pelling you. You had to do what I said because I was the one the Word of God had compelled.

Jimmy has a wonderful sense of humor.

Conclusion

There's really no escaping the reality that *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment have led inexorably to theological chaos and the destruction of the Church's unity. And within Protestantism, it continues to do the same.

So how do Protestant pastors deal with this problem? How do they preach *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment while maintaining unity in their churches?

It's an interesting question, but to answer it we'll have to pick up at this point next month. Stay tuned! ■

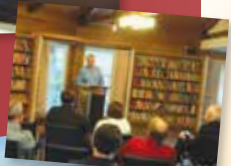
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