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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Passion for Truth

By Mike Peters

“You’re about to do *what?!?!?*” I was shocked that my roommate and good friend was planning on leaving our fervent, Bible-based, and “Spirit-filled” church for what I thought was a dead religion, Catholicism. When he told me this stunning news, I had been a campus minister with a non-denominational charismatic church for over four years, and my friend had been one of the more fervent and dedicated students. Like me, he had undergone a radical transformation through this group of believers that, as we thought, were following Jesus like the first Christians did.

Why would anyone in their right mind turn to a church that, as I viewed it, was spiritually dead? I had grown up in a Christian home, but my early experience had convinced me that liturgical worship did not lead people to the kind of life-changing encounters with God that I would later experience. I was baptized as an infant and confirmed in the Episcopal Church when I was in middle school. Although my parents took us to church every week, neither I, nor most of the other people at that church, seemed to even think about the Lord during the rest of the week. When I went off to college, I stopped attending church regularly. I would sometimes go to a Sunday evening service, but usually I attended because I felt bad about my sinful college lifestyle.

During my senior year, in the early 1990s, I had an adult conversion experience that came about primarily as the result of reading the Bible. I had had a discussion with an anti-Christian friend who sneered, “If Christians really believed the Bible, how come they never read it or do what it tells them to

do? If they call Jesus ‘Lord,’ why don’t they obey Him?” Since I knew I was vulnerable to his criticism, I began reading the Scriptures. The truths that confronted me there led to my heartfelt conversion.

The next year, I went to graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and got involved with several evangelical campus ministries where people were very committed to living out their faith. In fact, the first event I attended with them was an all-night prayer meeting! I would later serve for eight years as a campus minister with this ministry, five years at UNC-Chapel Hill and three years at Duke University. Although that all-night prayer meeting was only an annual preparation for a student conference, I thought it was such a good idea that, after I became a minister, I encouraged groups of students to join me in praying through the night twice per month.

This particular ministry was also committed to diligent study and teaching of the Scriptures. They encouraged me to read

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Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

through the entire Bible once per year. After doing that two times, I felt that I was deriving such incredible benefits from the practice that I started doing it twice per year. By God's grace, I have continued that discipline, even after becoming Catholic, and have now read through the entire Bible over 45 times.

My only exposure to the Catholic Church at this time was helping to equip our students to lead people out of it and into a church we felt was more faithful to the Bible. One of our most frequently-used tracts was designed by an ex-Catholic and was touted by our leaders as being very effective in helping Catholics get "saved." What the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said about anti-Catholics was definitely true of me: "There are not over a hundred people in the United States who hate the Roman Catholic Church; there are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church."

I also had some exposure to Catholic doctrines when I began going to an evangelical seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, in 1996. My systematic theology professor, a man whom I greatly respected, acknowledged that Protestants agree with Catholics on over 90 percent of the faith. However, he quickly added that the parts we disagreed about were so serious as to be "fatal." In my church history class, I had the great privilege of reading many of the early Church Fathers and important theologians from the first 1,500 years of church history: St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas (although of course we did not refer to them as "saints"). We focused mainly on their teachings that fell within the 90 percent of the faith that we held in common, but you can imagine what a shock it was when I later discovered that the Fathers were very "Catholic" in the remainder of their doctrines. It was difficult to accept the idea that all of these great theologians could be so easily duped

into believing many doctrines that we Protestants considered to be unbiblical and heretical.

Inconsistencies aside, I had many wonderful experiences as an evangelical, and I am deeply grateful for all that I learned during those 12 years, such as the commitment to prayer and the study of the Scriptures. In fact, I wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Thomas Howard, a well-known evangelical who converted to the Catholic Church in the 1980s, when he said that evangelicalism is a wonderful nurse to prepare people to be handed over to the Church.

Another thing that I am thankful for from my evangelical years is the strong commitment to the truth and the importance of submitting to the Lord. Because of these teachings, I would later have the resolve and the willingness to make the very difficult decision to quit my comfortable job as a minister and to trust the Lord to provide for my family, which at that time included three children, all under the age of five.

I only began to study the claims of Catholicism in 2001, after two students from our ministry, both of whom had attended those all-night prayer meetings, became Catholics. My friends might have been zealous in their faith, but I assumed they must not have known much theology since they believed that the Catholic Church might actually be the fullness of Christianity. I turned to Peter's admonition to "always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have." These friends had not been to seminary, so I naively thought that it would be a simple matter to show them the gross doctrinal errors that they were embracing. I felt confident that they would turn away from this deception once they read Luther and Calvin and other contemporary theologians in the stack of books that I was supplying them. I also agreed to read a few of their books, but only because I was fully persuaded that it would be easy to point out the errors in their teaching.

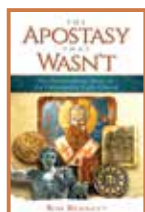
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Former Southern Baptist Rod Bennett used to believe that the Catholic Church was the result of the "Great Apostasy." However, as he was led to read the works of the earliest Christians, he realized that the early Church actually resembled Catholic beliefs and traditions!



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# Baptism and the Fathers of the Church, Part 2

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

In Part 1, I described how I came to see that the unanimous testimony of the early Church thoroughly supported a Catholic and sacramental view of Baptism. But what about sacred Scripture?



In his *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, the great Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan summarizes the early Church's view of what occurs in Baptism. The early Church believed, Pelikan explains, that Baptism effects "the remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit."

Being a Baptist minister at the time who, along with Baptists everywhere, held to a purely symbolic view of Baptism, this realization rattled my theological bones.

I immediately turned to the New Testament. I wanted to read it again in the light of what I had seen in the early Church Fathers, to read what it had to say about Baptism as though for the first time. I wanted to see if, by viewing the pertinent passages through the lens of Church Tradition, I might not see something I missed before.

## Water and Spirit in John's Gospel

I began with John 3:3-5, a passage the early Fathers insisted was about Baptism and that Baptists insisted was about anything but Baptism. "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to Nicodemus, "unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Was Jesus talking about Baptism in this passage?

Baptist theologians generally dismissed this passage by saying that Jesus is simply contrasting natural birth with spiritual rebirth, saying we must be born naturally (born of water) and then born again spiritually (born of Spirit). There's nothing here about Baptism.

Catholic writers encouraged me to examine the context of Jesus' words within the Gospel of John, and when I did it seemed nearly impossible to imagine Jesus *wasn't* talking about Baptism when He spoke of the need to be "born of water and the Spirit."

To begin, only 40 or so verses prior to this, in chapter one of John, we find described the baptism of Jesus, during which the Spirit descended and remained on Him (John 1:32-34). In the parallel accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke we learn that at the same time a voice from heaven was heard: "This is my beloved Son."

Interesting. In Our Lord's baptism the same three ideas are present that we find in John 3:35. There is water. There is Spirit. There is this idea of being declared a son of God (born again?).

Moving forward into the second chapter of John, we find Jesus performing a miracle in which He transforms the water in six vessels used for Jewish purification rites into wine. In Hebrews 9:9-10 these ceremonial washings are referred to as "baptisms." Again, interesting.

So, the theme of Baptism appears in John 1. It appears in John 2. Finally, immediately following Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, what do we find? John 3:22 tells us, "After this Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and *baptized*." It turns out that this is the only place in all four Gospels where Jesus is described as baptizing.

In other words, John 3:3-5 is bracketed *on all sides* by stories about Baptism. This is its literary context within John's Gospel.

In the light of this — and especially considering Jesus' own baptism where the themes of water, Spirit, and divine Sonship appear together as they do in John 3:3-5 — is it really possible, I thought, to not see that Jesus was making reference to Baptism when He said that a man must be "born of water and the Spirit"?

## Water and Spirit throughout Scripture

But this was just the beginning. I was encouraged to see that the themes of "water" and "Spirit" and "new life" appear together repeatedly throughout Scripture.

For instance, what do we find in the very story of Creation but the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters to bring forth life (Genesis 1:2). Water. Spirit. New life.

Speaking of this passage, St. Theophilus of Antioch, writing around AD 181, related it immediately to Baptism:

Moreover, those things which were created from the waters were blessed by God so that this might also be a sign that men would at a future time receive repentance and remission of sins through water and the bath of regeneration.

In the story of Noah, we again find these themes occurring together. For a second time waters cover the face of the earth, and for a second time, God sends His Spirit to cause the waters to recede and new life to appear. "And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided" (Genesis 8:2). The Hebrew word translated here as "wind" is the same word translated "spirit" in Genesis 1:2.

In 1 Peter 3:20, St. Peter likens the Christian's passing through the waters of Baptism to Noah and his family passing through the waters of the flood. Water, Spirit, and new life.

In the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, we find these same themes appearing together once again. The Israelites have left Egypt and become trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian armies. Moses stretches forth his staff and suddenly a "wind" comes from God (same Hebrew word) and blows across the waters, dividing them so that the children of Israel can pass through on dry land.

In 1 Corinthians 10:2 St. Paul tells us this was the Israelites' "baptism" into Moses. Through the waters, separated by the Spirit of God, the Israelites left behind their life as slaves and embarked on their new life as free children of God. Water, Spirit, and new life.

In 2 Kings 5, Naaman the Syrian is instructed to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times in order to be cleansed of his leprosy. He complains that Elijah hasn't given him something more impressive to do but finally humbles himself to perform this simple act of faith and is healed. God uses this washing with water as the occasion for a miraculous cleansing that He performs by His Spirit.



Writing around AD 190, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, commented on this miracle and connected it with baptism:

“And [Naaman] dipped himself . . . seven times in the Jordan.” It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [this served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes, even as the Lord has declared: “Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God” (Fragment 34).

## Water and Spirit in the New Covenant

The idea of ceremonial washings is, of course, all through the Old Testament. There were a number of these “washings” (Hebrews 9:9-10 refer to them as “baptisms”), but as the author of Hebrews tells us, these were “not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.” He describes them as a matter of “external regulations applying until the time of the new order” — the New Covenant in Christ.

It’s when the Lord establishes His New Covenant that He will actually accomplish by His Spirit what the ceremonial washings of the Old Covenant merely foreshadowed.

In light of the theme of water and Spirit bringing forth new life, which I now saw woven throughout the fabric of the Old Testament, I must admit it really hit me to read again Ezekiel’s description of the promised New Covenant:

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezek 36:24-27).

## Baptism in the New Testament

It was time to read on through the New Testament to see if there were any other passages that might support the Catholic teaching that in Baptism sins are washed away, the Spirit is given, and we are made sons and daughters of God (born again).

I came to John 9 where Jesus sends a man born blind to wash in the Pool of Siloam. After he washes, he comes back able to see.

I read on and came to Acts 2. The New Covenant has been established in Christ’s Body and Blood; the Jewish feast celebrating the ingathering of the first fruits of the harvest arrives (Pentecost), and the Spirit descends on the Apostles. Peter preaches; his hearers are cut to the heart and cry out, “What must we do?” Peter then responds, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the remission of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

The question came to me for the first time: Is Peter saying that remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit are received *in Baptism*?

I read on and came to Acts 19, where Paul encounters some disciples in Ephesus. He asks them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and when they answer, “No, we have not even

heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” Paul responds with the strangest of questions: “Then what *baptism* did you receive?”

Does Paul, I wondered, see the gift of the Holy Spirit as connected *with Baptism*? Is this what is implied here?

I read on and came to Acts 22, where the devout Ananias says to Saul of Tarsus, “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

At this point I was almost wondering whether I had ever even *read* these verses before! Did Ananias believe — like all the Church Fathers! — that sins are washed away in Baptism?

I read on and came to Romans 6, where Paul says that in our baptism we were buried with Christ and raised to new life. It’s clear from the context that he believes something actually *happened* to us in our baptism that freed us from slavery to sin so that we might walk “in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

I came to 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul says Christians have been baptized by one Spirit into one body and all given one Spirit to drink.

Finally, I came to 1 Peter 3:21, a passage confusing to most evangelical Protestants. Peter is speaking about how Noah and his family were saved through the waters of the flood. And then he says,

And this water symbolizes baptism that *now saves you* also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I noticed a connection with something Peter had said earlier in that same epistle. In chapter 1:3 he speaks of how believers have been “given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Here he speaks of Baptism saving them “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

In Peter’s mind, it seems that Baptism and the new birth are related. Peter seems to be saying that as Noah and his family were saved through the waters of the flood, so we are saved through the waters of Baptism — not because there’s something magical about the water or the outward rite. Rather, it saves us; we are born anew through the power of Christ’s Resurrection (the Spirit!) as we pledge ourselves to God by this act of submitting to Baptism.

## Conclusion

Now, as an evangelical Protestant, at this point I was still wrestling with myself. On the one hand, there was a voice saying: “These passages don’t *prove* that the New Testament is teaching a sacramental view of Baptism. There are other ways in which each of these passages can be interpreted.”

On the other hand, I had to admit that somehow the Apostles spoke in ways I, as a Baptist preacher, would never have spoken.

Why is it, I wondered, that if I had preached a million sermons I would never have thought to say what Peter said in Acts 2: “Repent and be baptized and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”? In fact, I had never heard a single evangelical pastor use words like that. We called people to “believe in Christ.” We called them to “accept Christ as Savior.” No one ever said, “Repent and be baptized, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!” *Why?*

Why is it I would *never* have thought to say to anyone, “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins”?

Why is it that if I had met someone who had not received the Holy Spirit, it would never have crossed my mind to respond, “Hmmm, what baptism did you receive?”

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## Ten Signs You Might Be A Catholic Convert

By Matt Swaim, Communications Coordinator



As anyone who's entered the Catholic Church as an adult can attest, there's a level of culture shock that comes along with conversion that's hard to explain to a "cradle Catholic." And while converts may, over time, learn all the de-

votions, vocabulary, and quirky customs that can go along with Catholic culture, some of us will always speak with a slight Protestant accent.

With that in mind, here are ten signs that you might be a convert to the Catholic Faith:

1 If you're used to having your robust voice drowned out during hymns, but find it now sticks out like a sore thumb at Mass, you might be a convert.

2 If you've ever pronounced a saint's name or theological concept wrong because you've only ever read it in a book and never heard it pronounced out loud, you might be a convert.

3 If you only recently realized that headlines like "Trinity Crushes Aquinas" or "St. Ignatius Comes Back To Stun Cardinal Gibbons" are actually referring to sports scores, you might be a convert.

4 If the hardest part about planning a weekend trip to visit family is figuring out how and when you're going to escape and go to Mass, you might be a convert.

5 If you're used to sermons that last an hour, and a 10-minute homily makes you wonder if you missed something, you might be a convert.

6 Even though it's a parish festival or fish fry, if you're still unnerved by the fact that they're selling beer on church property, you might be a convert.

7 If you've ever contested the lightness of a penance with your confessor, you might be a convert.

8 Even though you know the Mass is deeply Scriptural, if it still bothers you that nobody brings their Bible to church, you might be a convert.

9 If whenever you see a priest or nun in the grocery store, you get a little starstruck and are tempted to ask for their autograph, you might be a convert.

10 If people think you're super holy, when really you just happen to have read a lot of books, you might be a convert.

Thank you to the CHNetwork family, and especially "cradle Catholics," for helping us converts come home and be at home in the Catholic Church!

# CHNetwork Retreats

Join Marcus Grodi and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson for a time of fellowship and prayer with converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church. Visit [CHNetwork.org/retreats](http://CHNetwork.org/retreats) for more information or to register.

OCTOBER  
15-18, 2018  
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REGISTRATION  
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If you have questions about this retreat, feel free to contact us: 740-450-1175 | [retreats@chnetwork.org](mailto:retreats@chnetwork.org)

Limited spots available!

## REGISTER TODAY!

## SIGNPOSTS!

Do you love *The Journey Home* program and videos about conversion by converts? Then be sure to check out our short Signposts videos where converts share reflections and insights about how they originally came to know Christ and the many ways He led them to the Catholic Church. Visit our website [chnetwork.org/signposts](http://chnetwork.org/signposts) to watch insightful videos with guests such as Peter Kreeft, Rod Bennett, and Mike Aquilina.



## Joyful Journey Updates

**This past Easter, over 65 CHNetwork members were joyfully received into the Catholic Church. Below are some encouraging updates and anecdotes from these new converts and also other CHNetwork members. Thank you for helping us to assist converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church!**

**FROM SHERRY, A NEW CONVERT:** "Yes, I entered the Church at Easter Vigil along with my son who was baptized and confirmed. God is good. I'm so appreciative for everyone who had a role in my journey and in particular . . . the Coming Home Network. I reached out tentatively when I just felt the slightest of urgings to 'check out becoming Catholic now.' You were gracious, kind, and supportive without any pressure or expectation. I felt such genuine understanding that it was confirmation to me that this was going to be a safe place to ask questions, share my story, etc. Thank you for that."

**FROM ROBIN, A NEW CONVERT:** "Yes, I was [received into the Catholic Church]!!!! It was the best thing that ever happened to me. Or the culmination of the best thing, which was taking the first step toward a full understanding and acceptance of our wonderful, amazing, and TRUE Catholic Faith. I can't tell you how very grateful I am for the gift of my reception into the Church . . . I feel so much . . . [a] part of the real, organic, living Body of Christ in the Church!"

**FROM AMBER, A NEW CONVERT:** "I am so happy to be Catholic!! Thank you for your encouragement over the last couple of years. The Coming Home Network has been instrumental in this process."

**FROM DENISE, A NEW CONVERT** "Yes, 4 others and myself joined at the Easter vigil . . . It was one of the most wonderful, meaningful

events of my life. I really do feel like I've come home . . . I love this network because there are others who, like me, that must translate Catholicism through a Protestant brain. I am excited to learn more and hear the stories of others. I appreciate the support and prayers."

**FROM JILL, A NEW CONVERT:** "I just wanted to drop you a short note to let you know that . . . I entered the Church at the Easter Vigil. I am overjoyed to be a member of the Catholic Church now!!! Thank you for all of your support over the last 2 years. May God bless you and everyone at the Coming Home Network."

**FROM SARA, A NEW CONVERT:** "I hope you will express to those who work behind the scenes at the Coming Home Network how thankful I am for their prayers during the past year. I was very apprehensive and nervous last year stepping into Catholicism, even though I was confident I was being led clearly by the Holy Spirit. I know that the prayers that were said on my behalf helped me to listen and be led by the Holy Spirit. When I look back I see God's hand! I've been a pray-er all my life, but one of the first things I learned this past year was how to pray regularly. My prayer life has become rich and fulfilling. And so many friends to talk to! For 24 years as a Lutheran I said in the creed, 'I believe in the communion of saints' and I had no idea what that meant! Now I experience that blessed communion!" ■



## ESTATE PLANNING



Experts recommend that you review your will or trust every five years. The next time you review your estate plan, could you consider making a provision for the Coming Home Network to receive

a percentage of your estate? That way, even when you're in heaven you'll still be doing good on earth — helping to bring hungry souls into the Church. Your estate planning advisor can help you do this. Thank you!

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THE  
**COMING HOME**  
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INTERNATIONAL

## 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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**CHNetwork**

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The Coming Home  
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**www.chnetwork.org**

## SUPPORT 25 YEARS OF THE CHNETWORK!

Could you give \$25 a month to help support the CHNetwork that, for 25 years, has helped men and women come home to the Catholic Church?

The CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to [chnetwork.org/donate/](http://chnetwork.org/donate/) or complete this form and mail to:

**CHNetwork** Attention: Ann Moore  
PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) if you have any questions or concerns.

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For the wife of a minister to be able to connect with a local priest about her long-standing desire to be Catholic.
- For Michael, a Baptist seminarian, that he may embrace the authority of the successor of St. Peter.
- For a United Church of Christ minister, that she may find employment that will enable her to enter the Catholic Church and that her daughter will be healed of her illness.
- For Frank, a minister in Arizona, that he may be able to find different employment enabling him to return to the Catholic Church.
- For a Seventh-day Adventist minister in Europe, that he may embrace the truth of the holy Catholic Faith.
- For Justin, an Anglican seminarian, that his wife may also be drawn to the Catholic Faith.
- For an Eastern Orthodox subdeacon, that he may return to full communion with the successor of the Prince of the Apostles.
- For Ben, a Baptist seminarian, that his prayers and reading about the Catholic Church may bring him home to the Church founded by Jesus.

## Laity

- For Cindy, that she have clarity and peace as to the direction of her faith journey.
- For Kathy, who is trying to sort through the conflicting voices within the Catholic world which are confusing to her as a new convert.
- For Debra, who is studying the *Catechism* and planning on beginning RCIA, that she continues to grow in her faith life.
- For Dawn who has had a number of struggles, that she not be discouraged in her journey as she continues watching EWTN and learning more about the Catholic Church.
- For a woman in New Mexico who is struggling understanding indulgences, that her studies will give her peace with this Catholic teaching.
- For Lynn, that she be able to meet with a local priest so she can move forward with her interest in Catholicism.
- For a Pentecostal in Pennsylvania to be able to find answers to her concerns about the Catholic Church.
- For a woman who became Catholic last year but isn't attending Mass on account of concerns over Catholic doctrine, that she have the grace to return to the sacraments and find answers to her questions.
- For Vicki, as she reads Catholic material, that she be able to overcome her fear and hesitancy over reconnecting with a local parish.
- For Judith, who is struggling with Catholic beliefs, that she have clarity in the direction her journey should take.
- For Catherine and her husband to be united in their faith journey.
- For Sarah and her husband, that they be able to move together towards discovering the Catholic Church and that the Eucharist will draw them fully home.
- For Jackie, who after discovering the Catholic Church through EWTN, is now curious about the Catholic Church and is searching for something more in her faith.
- For Gary who is considering returning to the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit guide his steps.
- For a convert in England who has lots of struggles and questions about Catholicism on account of things her non-Catholic friends have told her.

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.

## 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, Thursdays 2 PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Sunday 7 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

#### August 6

Jeremy Tate\* (former Presbyterian Church in America)

#### August 13

Dr. Barry Carey\* (former Oneness Pentecostal and Anglican)

#### August 20

Austin Ruse (former Methodist)

#### August 27

Bill Gent\* (former Baptist and Evangelical Free)

\*Schedule is subject to change.

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home).



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

I was surprised to find out that much of the Bible that I so dearly loved made more sense from a Catholic perspective. Although I could list dozens of verses that really had an impact on me, the one that I could never explain is where St. Paul states that the Church of the living God is the household of God and the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Since I wanted to continue in the ministry and did not want to bring division into my family, I tried with all my might to find somewhere in Protestantism where the Church functioned practically as the pillar and bulwark of the truth, but I came up empty. For years, I had essentially taught that the Bible is the pillar and foundation of the truth, but somehow I had never grasped the significance of this Scripture verse.

Friends who had grown up Catholic kept insisting that they had never heard anything about the Bible. According to their accusations, all they heard were traditions, and they were never taught the Word of God. One of these friends is now one of the most vehement anti-Catholics that I know. He told me that the Church did not encourage the reading of Scripture. I reminded him that each Mass is saturated with sacred Scripture, but the falsehood of his accusations really stood out when I researched what the Church actually teaches about sacred Scripture. I found the following paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They are in a section entitled “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church”:

**131** “And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life.” Hence “access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful.”

**132** “Therefore, the study of the sacred page should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too — pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place — is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture.”

**133** The Church “forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful ... to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

Given these challenges to my Protestant faith, I began to search for the truth voraciously. From 2001 through 2006, I read over 200 books about the Catholic Faith, with about 50 of them being Protestant critiques of Catholicism. I also read countless articles and written debates from various websites. In addition, I listened to audio debates, each two to three hours long, between top Catholic and Protestant apologists. I especially liked the debates because I got to hear both sides present their position and respond to the other side. I was so determined to find answers that, most days, I would study and pray in the pre-dawn hours before rushing off into the day.

The primary issue I wrestled with was authority: specifically, the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. The first issue I looked at in detail was one of the planks of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*. The first Catholic book I read was a 600-page critique of this doctrine entitled, *Not By Scripture Alone*. At first, I was offended by this title since it seemed to put God’s Word in a negative light. However, one of the contributing authors stated early on that he loved Scripture and described how his whole life had been dedicated to studying it for five or six hours a day during his eighteen years as an evangelical and six years as a Catholic. He loved it so much that he would do anything to make sure that he was not teaching any doctrine that the Bible was not actually teaching. Does the Bible teach *sola Scriptura*, or does it exalt the authority of Scripture but also recognize the necessity of maintaining apostolic tradition as interpreted by an authoritative Church? Is this same Church also necessary to arrive at the proper interpretation of the Bible? While poring over dozens of books, I had to grudgingly admit that the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is not, in fact, taught by the Bible. How ironic!

I then began to study the idea of Tradition and was surprised that I had overlooked the importance of such verses as 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where Paul exhorts believers to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” Here he even distinguishes between the oral Traditions that were delivered by word of mouth and the epistles that would later become part of the New Testament. Paul also commended those in Corinth “because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2). One reason I had overlooked what the Bible says about tradition was my habit of using the New International Version (NIV). In *Not By Scripture Alone*, contributing author Dr. Philip Blosser, a philosophy professor and a graduate of one of the bastions of Reformed theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, quoted at length from a Reformed scholar about how the NIV “de-Catholicizes” Scripture. All traditions that were condemned, such as “traditions of men” in Matthew 15, were accurately translated as “traditions.” However, when the same Greek word was spoken of in a positive sense, such as where Paul commands us to hold to traditions and commends believers for maintaining them, the NIV translators deliberately mistranslated it as “teachings.”

Other issues related to authority that I studied in great detail were the authority of Peter and the papacy as well as the role of ecumenical councils in proclaiming and defending the truths of Scripture. The biblical model of resolving doctrinal disputes is given in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. There we see the crucial role of Peter and the Apostles, as the council could declare that “it is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us” (Acts 15:28) in handing on for observance the decisions reached by the Apostles (Acts 16:4). Simon Peter had previously been called blessed by Our Lord when he accurately discerned, by the Father’s revelation, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is then re-named and given this amazing promise from Jesus: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Books such as Steve Ray’s *Upon*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

*this Rock* and a scriptural handbook on the Papacy entitled, *Jesus, Peter, and the Keys* helped convince me of the unique role of Peter and subsequent popes.

This mention of “keys” reminds me of a great statement about how many other questions and misunderstandings are resolved once we are convinced of the authority of the Catholic Church and her God-given role of teaching as the pillar and bulwark of the truth. A convert in England named Arnold Lunn had a tremendous insight when he wrote: “The Catholic key certainly unlocked most locks, and if the key stuck in a few locks, perhaps the fault was not in the key but in my use of it.” I found that when Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom exclusively to Peter (Matthew 16:19), He was bestowing on him a unique privilege that was to be passed on to his successors. Isaiah 22 provides the Old Testament background for how the idea of keys representing an authority that had already been passed down for hundreds of years before Isaiah lived. When I became convinced of the authority of the Catholic Church, many of the other issues, like devotion to Mary, were resolved.

I studied from every conceivable angle all the major issues, such as justification and whether it was by faith alone, the Eucharist, the other sacraments, and Mary. I was distressed when I saw that the only time Scripture uses the words “faith alone” is when James taught that man is “justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). No wonder Martin Luther seemed to hate this book, implying that it did not have the same status as other books in the New Testament.

When I considered the Eucharist, I was forced to admit that, as a “Bible Christian” who firmly held to the literal meaning, I was not taking passages such as John 6 in their literal and obvious sense. Jesus’ original audience took His words literally. Yet He did not rush after them to explain that He had only meant these words symbolically. When Our Lord spoke to His followers at the Last Supper, He did not say, “this represents my body” or “this will remind you of my body,” but “this is my body.”

Mary was another huge obstacle to me as well. I was greatly helped by Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman’s teachings as he pointed out what the Church Fathers had taught about Mary as the “new Eve.” Since he had previously helped me understand how doctrines develop with his masterful *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, I once again had to admit the truth of Newman’s statement that “to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” Certain Scriptures, such as Luke 1, were also instrumental. There we see that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the Virgin Mary, saying, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” Then Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Finally, in her great *Magnificat* at the end of Luke 1, Mary declared that “henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for

he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” Had I ever hailed her as full of grace? Did I acknowledge that she is blessed among women? Or was I like the generations of Protestants who accepted these Scriptures as God’s truth but in practice did very little to acknowledge and call Mary blessed? I found that all of the Marian doctrines were not so much about Mary alone or exalting her for her own sake, but about protecting the truths of who her divine Son really is or what our ultimate destiny is. The doctrines about Mary are an acknowledgement of all the great things that God had done in her, this most blessed of women who was chosen to be the mother of our God and Savior.

I also had a number of interesting encounters while trying everything I could to avoid converting. I went to hear one of the finest historical theologians in the world, “Dr. G,” who wrote a history of Christianity that was one of my assigned textbooks in seminary. According to the Dean of the Duke Divinity School, this author also wrote the definitive three-volume series on the history of Christian thought. “Dr. G” had taught at seminaries in Puerto Rico and Latin America, so I knew that he was familiar with the Roman Catholic claims. Since he was an expert in historical theology, I thought he would be the perfect person to disprove Newman’s statement about being deep in history. I approached him and told him that I was a Protestant minister who was seeking to avoid conversion to the Catholic Church. I was shocked when he asked me why I was resisting. I stammered out something about having been taught that the Catholic Church was wrong on so many important doctrines and asked if he could suggest some books that I could read. All he said was that I should never resist my conscience and that he would not recommend any books for me. Needless to say, this unexpected answer was not exactly the response that I had hoped or prayed for.

I met with one of the professors at the Duke Divinity School who knew quite a bit about Catholicism. He had recently been named “Theologian of the Year” by *Time* magazine and had previously taught at Notre Dame. Although he was more liberal than authors I normally turned to, I assumed that he would be able to suggest some good books to read. This professor was convinced about the truth of many Catholic teachings, yet he still remained a Protestant. When I met with him, he freely confessed that the Catholic Church was right about almost everything but that did not mean that I had to become a Catholic. Then, sadly, he quoted a Catholic priest who had stated that if anyone was considering converting to the Church, he should spend at least a year in a parish; then he would think better of it. Later on, during my first year in a Catholic parish, I found the opposite to be true.

So I tried a friend from seminary who I thought could help me. I remembered from my seminary days that he had been particularly vehement in his denunciations of Catholicism. He had grown up in a committed Catholic home, and his brother even founded a Catholic religious order. When I called him, I was surprised that he did not attack Catholicism. In fact, although he was now a Presbyterian pastor, he acknowledged that the Catholic Church did make very strong arguments. Imagine my shock when he called

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

me a few months later and said that he was resigning his pastorate and being received back into the Catholic Church!

As it became more and more clear in my mind where the Lord was leading me, I still needed a confirmation of that discernment and turned, as had been my habit, to fasting. One of the pastors of our church approached me and asked me to pray for him since he was about to begin a 40-day fast from all foods. I had always had a yearning in my heart to do this when hearing of other Protestant ministers who fasted for such long periods of time. Since I was at that time praying fervently about when and if the Lord wanted me to enter the Catholic Church, I asked the Lord for the grace to be able to join my friend on that fast. I thank God that He drew me to such a wonderful season of prayer and intimacy with Him.

During the first four years of my journey when I was reading and asking questions about the Church, I was surprised by *truth*. The fifth and last year when I began attending Mass, I was surprised by the *presence of the Lord*. I particularly remember being completely overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord during the second Mass I had ever attended in February 2004. The tears were flowing freely as we recited the Creed and confessed belief in a Church that was “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” I had found Christ’s true Church in the most unlikely and unexpected of places.

Without a doubt, the most difficult part of this whole decision was the fact that my dear wife, Michelle, did not feel that God was calling her into the Church at the time. In fact, the reason my discernment period to enter the Church was extended was because we were not in agreement, and it was causing stress on our marriage. We were both Protestant campus ministers; we had been married for only a year, and she was pregnant with our first child when I began reading my way into the Church. I explained to her that there was only one person in the world that I would rather avoid hurting than her, and that was God Himself. She understood and came to the Easter Vigil in 2006 when I officially entered the Church, but it was extremely difficult for her. For 11 years, we experienced the pain that Our Lord must have felt in the

centuries after the Protestant Reformation when Christianity was split into thousands of different denominations. At one point, a few years after my conversion, I asked my wife to sit through the RCIA program for inquirers, which she did. However, that was not the Lord’s timing, but mine. I am extremely grateful, however, that God does have perfect timing. He later prompted her to give the Church another look, and with great celebration, she and our five children were received into the Church at the Easter Vigil of 2018.

Since my entry into the Catholic Church, it has been an amazing 12 years of powerfully experiencing the grace of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Lord has graciously made up for any small sacrifice I may have made for Him. I have seen firsthand the beauty of a Church that functions as a pillar and bulwark of the truth, not only in her teaching, but also in leading and helping the faithful to live holy lives. For these and countless other reasons, I agree wholeheartedly with the great quote from G.K. Chesterton about why he converted to Catholicism: “The difficulty of explaining ‘why I am a Catholic’ is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true.” ■



*A graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, Mike Peters spent eight years as a full-time campus minister. Since being received into the Church in 2006, he has been working in the insurance industry and for the last seven years, as a Medicare Benefit Consultant. He leads the Adult Education Ministry and is a speaker for the RCIA program at St Joseph’s Catholic Church in Jacksonville, FL. Mike was a guest on The Journey Home on June 4, 2018. Go to [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org) to watch his program.*

Continue the **JOURNEY**

Please visit [CHNetwork.org/converts](http://CHNetwork.org/converts) to comment on and share this or one of hundreds of other powerful testimonies!

### ► “Baptism and the Fathers of the Church, Part 2” continued from page 4

Why would I never in my entire lifetime as a Baptist minister have said, “Baptism now saves you”?

Sure, one might not be able to “prove” on the basis of Scripture alone that all of this evidence added up to the Catholic teaching on Baptism. But what I had said to myself, after being confronted with the unanimous teaching of the early Church on Baptism, was not that I would accept the Catholic position if I could somehow “prove” on the basis of Scripture alone that their position was correct.

What I had said was that given the weight of the early Church’s testimony I would accept the Catholic teaching *unless it was absolutely certain that it was contradicted by the teaching of the New Testament*.

Could I say that? Not even close. Not even close.

And even though this was just one measly little doctrine, it changed the way I thought about everything. I used to think only

of the question: “What do I see Scripture teaching about this?” It was clear to me now that this would no longer be enough.

I remember imagining that I could parachute back into the early Church. Faced with Ignatius and Justin and Tertullian and Cyprian and Barnabas — faced with the universal Church’s understanding of Baptism as a powerful sacrament in which sins are remitted, regeneration takes place, and the Holy Spirit is given — would I have been willing to separate myself on the basis of my private interpretation of Scripture? Would I have been willing to say, “Well, you can’t prove that your interpretation is correct. There are other possibilities” — and on that basis start my own church?

To ask the question was to answer it. ■



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