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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## A Restless Heart Finds Rest in the One True Church

By David Rakowski

As an adventurer at heart, I suppose it makes sense that, of all places, I found rest in Central Asia. It was in Kazakhstan that I faced a critical question in my Christian walk: "What were the origins of my faith?" Upon exploring the extraordinary tapestry of Christendom for myself, I chose to bring my Protestant faith home to Rome.

Though a schoolteacher by profession, my deepest dream since childhood was to see the world. Canadian by birth, by age 27, I had travelled through over 30 countries on five continents and learned five languages. I had also experienced various places of worship, such as Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches; a Jewish synagogue; Sikh gurdwaras; Sunni Muslim mosques; a Zoroastrian gajarati; and Hindu and Buddhist temples. Religious discussions with people I met gave me a global perspective on spirituality in general and Christianity in particular.

Yet perhaps because I had already "accepted Jesus into my heart" back when I was in university, God's call to become Catholic surprised me. It began with a quest for truth. A candid review of history had convinced me that there had to be something much grander than my individual faith.

### My Backstory

When I was a child, my family belonged to the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW). We thought that ours was the only true Christian faith and that we alone would be saved. Baptists, Anglicans, whoever, were all phonies. Catholics were especially bad — they followed "tradi-

tion." Later, we became "just Christian" after judging the JW organization's credentials for ourselves.

We didn't want to get bogged down in "tradition" and just wanted a "simple faith." At university, where I studied politics and history, I desired to maintain my spiritual independence. Occasionally, I visited an evangelical non-denominational church.

When I moved to England for work in 2011, I had the pleasure of visiting many cathedrals and ancient places of worship throughout Europe. I felt humbled by the history of these places, and the experience opened my eyes to Christians worshipping God differently from what I was used to.

Nevertheless, after returning to Canada, I joined the church of my undergraduate days. Though I don't doubt my convictions at the time, in hindsight I recognize the immaturity of my decision. In my mind, it was either Jehovah's Witnesses or non-denominational "just Christianity" — nothing else registered. I really had no idea what Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox Christianity was.

Entering graduate school in Toronto, I discovered that two of my roommates were Christians, and they really impressed me with their

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Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

knowledge; one of them was even a PhD student in theology. So I hit the books to catch up and discovered names like Martin Luther, John Calvin, C.S. Lewis, and Ravi Zacharias as well as terms like free will vs. predestination, original sin, and *sola Scriptura* (Latin for “Scripture alone”). This was my first baby step towards appreciating the meaning of “Protestantism.” Was I, then, a Protestant? I thought of myself as “just Christian.” So what, exactly, was a Protestant?

At the time, I thought quoting Scripture like a boss was the sign of a real Christian. So I ditched the milk and went for the solid food. But a keen reading of the Bible uncovered another can of worms: How did Scripture provide all the answers if there were thousands of different readings of it by thousands of different denominations? In hindsight, St. Augustine’s reputed words would have clarified things: “If you believe what you like in the gospels and reject what you don’t like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.” But I didn’t want to believe myself; I wanted truth.

The critical question hadn’t struck me yet, but others continued to assail me. What happened to the 1500 years of Christians who had lived and died for their faith before the Protestant Reformation ever occurred? Why did we sing “I get on my knees” in church whilst standing and waving? How could my JW relatives believe all others were damned even after they had “accepted Jesus into their hearts” and been baptized? In reaction, I stopped going to church altogether. I would just study my Bible at home and become a super Christian.

Whoever heard of a Protestant who didn’t know what he was protesting? My understanding of the history of Christianity went as follows: Jesus > Paul > 16th century rediscovery of Jesus. And my understanding of the Reformation went no deeper: The Catholic Church had obviously been a corrupt sham, and departing from it was obviously the right thing to do. Ironically, I had to travel east to dig deeper.

### Kazakhstan and a Different Christianity

I knew I was in for the adventure of a lifetime in 2014 when I packed my bags for Kazakhstan and my first teaching position. Part of that adventure was seeing Christianity from a radically dif-

ferent perspective. Surprised by the sight of Protestant churches in my Central Asian town, I made a point of attending. I noticed their faith was practiced more devoutly than back home and often celebrated differently — even within the same denomination.

An expatriot friend of mine was once rebuked at church for wearing expensive clothing. I’d seen church members arguing because one man had waved his hands too high during a song (considered ungodly). Some churches required their women to cover their heads and wear long skirts. And we also washed each other’s feet at Easter. None of these things were in evidence back home. I pass no judgment on either these churches or the ones in Canada, but the cultural differences made me reconsider the question of unity.

It might come as a surprise that there are Christian churches at all in Kazakhstan. Yet the officially secular country is a melting pot of faiths, and according to the Kazakh government, about a quarter of its population identifies as Christian. It further states that Catholic monks had visited its steppes as early as 1245, over half a millennium before the Russian Orthodox Church arrived — and even longer before the Protestants. These facts made the broader chronological timeline of Catholic and Protestant traditions more tangible for me.

Another insight I encountered in Central Asia fascinated me even more: churches that are neither Catholic nor Orthodox are widely considered sectarian. I noted that Eastern Christianity, unlike its western counterpart, had never experienced a schismatic reformation. Furthermore, their liturgy was much closer to that of the Catholic Church than to anything Protestant. There are a dozen or so ethnic Orthodox Churches, while Western Christianity had splintered into thousands of denominations. What had happened to the unity to which Jesus had called us?

There was a Catholic church in my town in rural Kazakhstan, and in all my travels I had never been to one; my intolerance ran deep. When a couple of friends invited me there, I was surprised that I felt more comfortable there than I had ever felt in any Protestant church. It was peaceful and awesome, and I felt no pressure to pos-

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### Deep in Scripture CD

In this *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi is joined by Catholic apologist Gary Michuta as they discuss “Where Did the Bible Come From?”

### Why Catholic Bibles Are Bigger, revised 2nd edition — By Gary Michuta



Some differences between Catholicism and Protestantism can be tricky to grasp, but one of them just requires the ability to count: Catholic Bibles have 73 books, whereas Protestant bibles have 66 — plus an appendix with the strange title Apocrypha. Protestants claim that the medieval Catholic Church added extra books that had never been considered part of the Old Testament, either by Jews or early Christians. Catholics say that the Protestant Reformers removed those books, long considered part of Sacred Scripture, because they didn’t like what they contained. In *Why Catholic Bibles Are Bigger*, Gary Michuta presents a revised and expanded version of his authoritative work on this key issue. Combining the historical record from pre-Christian times to the Patristic era to the Reformation and its aftermath, he traces the canon controversy through the writings and actions of its major players.

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# A Baptist Minister's Journey to the Eucharist,

## PART I: FACING THE FATHERS

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

For years, as a Protestant pastor, I believed that what Catholics refer to as the "Holy Eucharist" was a simple meal of remembrance and recommitment and proclamation — and nothing more.



I don't mean to say that it wasn't important, or meaningful, because it was. I use the words "nothing more" only to emphasize that as an Evangelical, I did not believe that a miracle of any sort was taking place in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, where bread and wine were becoming (in any sense) the Body and Blood of Christ.

Jesus had said, "Do this in *remembrance* of me" (Lk 22:19). St. Paul had written, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In the thinking of essentially every Christian I knew, the Lord's Supper was a time for calling to mind what Our Lord had suffered for us, giving thanks, recommitting our lives to Him and, by the use of bread and wine, proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes again.

Of course we believed Jesus was "with us" in the breaking of the bread — but not in any sense substantially different than He is with us all the time. The bread and wine were mere symbols, the bread "depicting" Christ's broken Body, the cup His shed Blood.

Now, certain implications followed from this view.

One of them (obviously) was that I didn't believe a priest was needed to celebrate the Lord's Supper. I didn't believe *any* ordained minister was needed. There was no reason this simple, symbolic meal of remembrance could not be celebrated anytime, anywhere, and by any gathering of believers. It was fairly common in the evangelical circles I was familiar with for young adults and even teenagers to celebrate the Lord's Supper at youth camps and retreats, using whatever elements they had available — even potato chips and Coca Cola if nothing else could be found.

### Calvin's Conception

At some point along the way, John Calvin tossed a wrench into the machinery of my thinking about this issue. I became intrigued with the idea that the Lord's Supper might be what Calvin referred to as a "means of grace."

Calvin believed that in the Lord's Supper, Christ is not merely remembered and proclaimed, but rather is *present* in a special "spiritual" sense and that He gives Himself to us as "spiritual food" in communion. He spoke of Christians in communion as "feasting" upon Christ our Passover Lamb, as "partaking" of Him.

Now, Christ is the only food of our soul, and therefore our heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that, refreshed by partaking of him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XVII.1).

Of course he was eager to emphasize that this was a spiritual feasting and not anything like what Catholics believe.

At any rate, I was intrigued by this idea.

I knew there were a number of New Testament passages that could be read as at least *hinting* at the notion that something more than mere remembering and proclaiming might be going on in the

Lord's Supper (passages we'll be coming back to later in this short series), and so I suspected Calvin might be right.

At the same time, I didn't think his view could be established with *certainty* from the data of the New Testament alone.

Attempting to lead my congregation, but without clear conviction, I began to approach the Lord's Table more seriously — just in case Calvin was right! (It sounds lame, I know!) I taught my people that the Lord's Supper *may* be more than remembering and proclaiming, that in communion we *may* be partaking of Christ spiritually, that a miracle of some sort *may* be taking place, and that the Lord's Supper *may* be a special means of receiving God's grace.

I advocated making the Lord's Supper a regular part of our Sunday worship rather than celebrating it once a month, as had been our previous practice. Most everyone seemed to like the change. Reverence for the Lord's Supper increased as it came to be seen as being equal to the Sunday sermon in importance.

### The Early Church Fathers

And then, another wrench was tossed into the works.

I learned that an old friend from seminary days had gone over to the dark side and become Catholic. I listened to his conversion story and still remember wincing when I heard him speak of receiving Christ in the Eucharist, "Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity."

The idea was so entirely foreign to me. It was foreign to the evangelical world in which I had learned the faith and in which I lived and ministered. But it was not foreign to nearly a billion Christians from the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions. In fact, my old friend claimed that this doctrine of the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist had been the faith of the Church from the beginning.

I began for the first time in my Christian life to read the early Church Fathers and really *listen* to what they had to say.

I had been tossing back and forth the question of whether the Baptist view of the Lord's Supper or the Calvinist view was correct. Now I was being told that *neither* was the historic view of Christians. I wanted to know if this was true. What *did* Christians in the earliest centuries after the Apostles believe about the Lord's Supper? Was there a common belief and, if so, what was it?

### Atheists, Libertines, and Cannibals

I discovered that in the early centuries of the Church, Christians were accused of many things. They were accused of being "atheists" because they rejected the gods of the Greek and Roman pantheons.

Because Christians "loved one another" and were known to "greet one another with a 'holy kiss'" they were accused of engaging in sexual orgies.

A third accusation hurled against the early Christians was that they practiced cannibalism. After all, it was known that in their clandestine meetings the Christians gathered behind closed doors to celebrate a secret meal during which they would actually eat the flesh and drink of the blood of a human being.



In AD 170 the Christian apologist Athenagoras wrote a book titled, *A Plea for the Christians* in which he sought to answer these charges. He notes that the pagans were accusing Christians of celebrating "Thyestian feasts." The term comes from Greek mythology and the story of Atreus, who, motivated by revenge, kills the children of his brother Thyestes and serves them to him for dinner.

I must admit that once I began to read the early Church Fathers and witness the kind of language they regularly used to describe what they referred to as the Eucharist (meaning "thanksgiving"), I could understand why such mistaken ideas might have arisen in the minds of non-believers at the time.

For instance, I read the letters of St. Ignatius, bishop of the church in Antioch. Around AD 107-110, Ignatius was condemned to die in the arena in Rome, fed alive to wild beasts. On his way to Rome, he wrote letters to seven churches scattered throughout modern-day Turkey.

In his letter to the Church in Smyrna (6-7), he mentions certain heretics, who he clearly conceives as being outside the fellowship of the Church. Here's how he describes them:

They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which was offered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.

In the same letter, St. Ignatius refers to the Eucharist as "the medicine of immortality."

The "flesh of our Savior"? The "medicine of immortality"? This was language I would never have thought to use to describe the Lord's Supper."

But this was just one of the Fathers. I read on and came to St. Justin Martyr, the first of the great defenders of the Catholic Faith. Around AD 150, he also described the Eucharist:

For not as common bread or common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was *made* incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food that has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnated Jesus (*First Apology*, 66).

Again, I had to stop and think. Food that is *made* into the Eucharist? What's that all about? Food that is made into the Eucharist *by the Eucharistic prayer* and by the *change* of which our blood and flesh is nurtured? What? A prayer that "changes" bread and wine and "makes" it into the Eucharist? Never had I heard an evangelical pastor speak like this of the Lord's Supper.

This saint and martyr sounded like a Catholic.

I read on and came to St. Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyon. Writing around AD 180, he described the Eucharist in similar terms:

Just as the bread from the earth, receiving the invocation of God, is no longer common bread but the Eucharist consisting of two things, the earthly and the heavenly, so our bodies, receiving the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible but have the hope of resurrection to eternal life (*Against Heresies*, IV, 18).

Okay, I thought, so Irenaeus sounds Catholic, too!

St. Ignatius sounds Catholic. St. Justin Martyr sounds Catholic. St. Irenaeus sounds Catholic. Here are three of the most important Christian leaders and teachers of the second century, and they *all sound Catholic!*

I read on and came to Tertullian. Writing around AD 210, he explains even as in Baptism our souls are actually and truly washed clean, even as in Confirmation our souls are actually and truly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, so in the Eucharist, he writes, "the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ that the soul likewise may be filled with God" (*Resurrection of the Flesh*, 8).

I read on and came to Cyril of Jerusalem. Around AD 350 he wrote in his *Catechetical Lectures*:

[As] the bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the invocation of the Trinity ... [are] simply bread and wine, after the invocation the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ (19:7).

Now, I could go on multiplying quotes from a number of other early Church Fathers. What I found was that it wasn't just *some* of them who used this kind of language when speaking of the Eucharist. *All* of them did!

They all spoke as though a miracle was taking place in the Eucharist, that when the words of consecration were spoken over the bread and the wine, these were changed into the Body and Blood of Christ and that this is what Christians receive when they receive Communion.

It seemed that in early centuries of Christian history there was no one who believed what I believed about the Lord's Supper.

Here are the thoughts that went through my mind:

*If the Apostles taught their churches that the Lord's Supper was nothing more than a simple meal of remembrance and proclamation, how could these early Church Fathers have gotten so far off? And so quickly? And so universally? How? St. Ignatius was a disciple of the beloved Apostle John! St. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was himself a direct disciple of John! How could this happen?*

## But What Does the Bible Teach?

I was eager to leap back into Scripture and re-read everything the New Testament had to say about the Lord's Supper in light of what I had discovered in the Fathers.

Had these great saints and martyrs simply dreamed up the ideas expressed in their writings? Had they misunderstood the teaching of the Apostles and turned what was meant to be merely symbolic into something Jesus and His disciples would have shuddered to imagine? If I could travel back in time to those early centuries of Church history, would I insist that the Evangelical Protestant view of the Lord's Supper was correct and that Ignatius and Justin and Cyprian and Ambrose and Augustine and all the rest were, not to put too fine a point on it, out to lunch on the issue?

My instinct as a Protestant was to respond: "But all that really matters is what the Bible says about the Lord's Supper!" On the other hand, was it possible that there was more support for the teaching of the Fathers in the Bible than I knew? How certain was I that the doctrine of the Real Presence was unbiblical?

This was a puzzle I had to solve. I was sick of teaching my congregation "maybe this, maybe that!" I wanted to know what I was to believe and to teach.

(Stay tuned for Part II.) ■

### We Interrupt This Program...

By Marcus Grodi

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The great Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, once said: "The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's 'own' or 'real' life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life — the life God is sending one day by day; what one calls one's 'real life' is a phantom of one's own imagination."



Recently, the Gospel reading for Mass included an important, unanticipated "interruption" in the life of Christ — actually a Russian nesting dolls of interruptions. Twice the Apostle John exclaimed that there were many more signs and wonders that Jesus did than could be contained in his or any of the Gospels. So why was it that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all felt that this interruption within an interruption within an interruption was so important they each included it in their short accounts of Jesus' life?

As St. Mark tells the story, Jesus had just crossed the sea in a boat and was inundated by a great crowd. This was likely an interruption in his plans. Out of the crowd came a local synagogue ruler named Jairus who convinced Jesus to change his plans and come heal his dying daughter. Interruption number two.

But as the great crowd followed Jesus to see what would happen, the third interruption occurred, and it was so significant that Jesus and the crowd stopped dead in their tracks. St. Mark tells us: "And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Who touched my garments?'" And then his disciples incredulously asked the obvious: "Ah, Master, we're kind of locked in here by this rude, filthy crowd. I mean, who didn't touch you?" or something like that. But Jesus ignored them and looked around to see who had done it.

As the disciples quipped, one could imagine a bunch of people backing off, apologizing, "Hey, man, sorry. Didn't mean to crowd your space!" But then came the interruption that has been remembered for centuries. A woman falls out of the crowd before him and in tears of joy tells him that she "had had a flow of blood for twelve years, had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about [him], and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment," for she believed, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well." And to her surprise, which led to "fear and trembling ... immediately the hemorrhage ceased, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease."

It's interesting to imagine how the disciples and crowd might have been anticipating Jesus would respond to this audacious, brash woman who had had the gall to interrupt them

in her ritual uncleanness! But Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well (or, 'has saved you' [NAB]); go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Why was this interruption within an interruption within an interruption so significant as to be included in the Gospels? Certainly it emphasizes Jesus' divine power to heal, as well as encourages those struggling with seemingly incurable diseases to put their faith in Christ. But is there also another hidden spiritual meaning that remains of great significance to a full understanding of the power of the Mystical Body of Christ?

In her condition as an unclean woman in Jewish society, and only one of a multitude crowding around Jesus, she felt unworthy and unable to approach Him directly. Yet, in the boldness of her faith, she believed she could reach Him and receive the gift of His presence by merely touching the hem of His garment. She could not touch Him directly, but through the physicality of His garment, and by her faith, she reached Him and received from Him healing, saving grace. In this interruption, therefore, we catch a glimpse — a sign or type — of the dawning sacramentality of the age of the Church.

The *Catechism* states: "The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the 'dispensation of the mystery' — the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, 'until he comes.' In this age of the Church, Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls 'the sacramental economy'; this is the communication (or 'dispensation') of the fruits of Christ's Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church's 'sacramental' liturgy" (CCC, 1076).

St. Paul wrote, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor 13:12a). When we were baptized, we became new creations, children of God, members of the Mystical Body of Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit — but we probably felt no different, maybe acted no different. We saw through a mirror dimly, but by faith we touched the garment of Christ and received grace, healing, and salvation. When we were confirmed, married, or ordained as deacons or priests, we

► "We Interrupt This Program..." continued from page A

were indelibly changed, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be disciples of Christ — but yet I felt no different and, more often than not, I know I fall short of being a good disciple or husband. Yet, by faith, we have touched the hem of His garment and received grace, healing, and salvation.

And when we come forward in faith, as only one amongst the crowd, unworthy for Him to even enter under our roof, when we receive Him on our tongue or in our hands, we are touching the hem of His garment, receiving grace, healing, and salvation. In fact, though we see in a mirror dimly, blinded by the limits of our senses, we yet touch Him, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, through the garment of the accidents of bread and wine.

Even the sacramentals, sacred artwork, statues, rituals, and devotions are all threads in the hem of His garment through which we reach Him and, by faith, receive from Him the graces of healing and salvation.

Jesus said, as He pointed ahead to this present "dispensation of the mystery," "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh

of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53). Others in the crowd around the woman and Jesus may also have been plagued with illness and disease, but through lack of faith, refused to press forward to reach Him, to even touch His garment. And some who heard Jesus speak about eating His Body and drinking His Blood refused to follow Him any longer: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" Which is also why a vast portion of Christianity, since the Reformation, has denied the mystery and power of the sacraments and of the Church and as a result has settled for a Christianity of faith *alone*, or as St. Paul warned, is "holding a form of religion but denying the power of it" (2 Tim 3:5).

May we be interrupted from the distractions and presumptions of our every day lives, in the midst of our doubts and sickness — physical as well as spiritual — to reach out in faith to touch the hem of His garment in the sacraments that He has given us through the gift of His Church. ■

## Joyful Journey Updates

**We would like to share with you some 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 ED, A CRADLE CATHOLIC:** "I wish to express my sincere gratitude to you, Marcus, and all those who support you in your work through *The Journey Home* program and the Coming Home Network. I am a cradle Catholic whose faith journey was sparked over 30 years ago by my wife's journey as a Baptist to Catholicism. I am a great admirer of the deep faith of many, many non-Catholic Christians. I also believe home for everyone is the Catholic Church. Your programs are extremely informative for us "cradles" as well. You've managed to beautifully and so graciously address what so often has been very contentious, the Catholic/Protestant divide. You are helping not just non-Catholics, but cradle Catholics as well. Thank you so very much. My heart soars!"

### FROM BEN, A FORMER EPISCOPAL SEMINARIAN:

"By God's providence and the leading of the Holy Spirit, I responded to His call for me to come into full communion with the Catholic Church ... I was nearly in tears the entire time. Being able to receive the Eucharist at Mass this morning was incredible. I would say that for the first time I feel a sense of groundedness and security knowing that I am Catholic. As a Protestant, having full access to the sacraments is a blessing that you don't realize you're missing. God has used the ministry of the Coming Home Network and the witness of other faithful Catholics over the years to bring me to this point. Thank you very much for your prayers and outreach."

**FROM CLARENCE, A FORMER QUAKER MINISTER:** "It has now been 16 years since I first heard of *The Journey Home*. It has been 7 years since I entered RCIA. Easter will be 6 whole years of full communion

with the Church ... and after all that time I still find myself weeping at Mass; I am overjoyed at what the Lord has done for me."

**FROM RILEY, A NEW CONVERT:** "Receiving the sacraments this Easter season has been life-changing ... God has worked through these sacraments and shown His love to me through the Church. There have been a lot of deep, painful things that God has had to carry me through this month, but beneath it all [I have] an underlying sense of peace. I am so excited to call the Church my home!" ■

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## CURATED RESOURCES

Did you know we have pages on our website with curated resources for specific faith backgrounds? Go to [chnetwork.org/converts](http://chnetwork.org/converts) for insightful material specifically chosen by CHNetwork staff on various denominational backgrounds, such as Anglican, Evangelical, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and many more. Conversion stories, videos, articles, and books are all denominationally arranged so you can easily locate helpful resources for your own faith journey or to share with a friend!

## 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.

 [www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org)



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The Coming Home  
Network International

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

Zanesville, OH 43702

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

■ For a Church of Christ minister in the south, that his journey to the Catholic Faith may move forward and that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, his wife be able to overcome her fear of transition.

■ For Aaron, a Lutheran minister, that his great love of the Apostolic Fathers would bring him home to the Catholic Church.

■ For a former Baptist missionary in Ohio, that in his study of the Catholic Church he may come to embrace the authority of the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

■ For a former Presbyterian pastor, that, as she transitions to life as a Catholic, her family and friends support her new path and that her desire to follow Jesus regardless of the cost will bear abundant fruit.

■ For Bob, a minister in Pennsylvania, that our Lord Jesus would grant him the grace to embrace the authority He granted to the Apostles and their successors.

■ For a United Methodist minister and his wife in Kentucky, that the Lord would show them how to leave their congregation without hurting feelings and that they may find new employment as Catholics.

■ For the wife of an anti-Catholic Lutheran minister, that, through God's grace, a way may open to allow her to be received into the Catholic Church.

■ For Joel, a minister in Georgia, that his hunger and thirst for God would lead him to Jesus in the holy Eucharist.

■ For a non-denominational minister in California, that the Holy Spirit would show him a way to support his family as a Catholic Christian.

■ For Kenny, a Pentecostal minister, and his wife and family, that the Holy Spirit would guide their every step as they journey to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

■ For a clergy convert who is struggling with discouragement and frustration on account of his desire to serve within the Church not yet coming to fruition, that he keep his focus on Jesus and the sacraments.

## Laity

■ For Carol who is learning a lot about the Catholic Church but still struggles with feeling a connection with Our Lady, that Jesus will help her to understand His mother's role in our Faith.

■ For Mary, a convert, who is searching for the right parish fit to help her grow spiritually, that she be able to go deeper in her faith journey.

■ For a non-denominational Christian in Maryland who is going through the *Catechism* and meeting with a priest but isn't quite sure about the timing of becoming Catholic, that she have clarity as to how to proceed with her journey.

■ For Kristine who is wishing to correct the misinformation she has about the Catholic Church, that her search will lead her closer to Christ and His Church.

■ For a new convert in Missouri who has various struggles growing in her faith life as well as healing from past hurts, that she find good resources to help her move forward.

■ For Kristina to find a good RCIA program where she can be welcomed and continue to grow in her faith.

■ For Kimberly, that her efforts to draw closer to Christ and His Church reap abundant rewards.

■ For Lynn, that she have clarity as to how to proceed with her desire to be Catholic.

■ For an evangelical on the journey, that her husband's heart be softened so that he will go through an annulment and she can fulfill her deep desire to be Catholic.

■ For a convert who is struggling with a lack of faith and with going to Mass regularly, that her spiritual life be rejuvenated and she be able to joyfully approach the Lord's altar.

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

#### September 3

Dan Burke\* (convert from Judaism  
 R-air from 9/2/2013)

#### September 10

Gary & Charlotte Wiley\* (Gary: former  
 Wesleyan pastor; Charlotte: revert)

#### September 17

Gregory Graham\* (former  
 Evangelical)

#### September 24

Fr. Stephen Jones (former Anglican  
 priest)

\*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 from page 2

ture my faith as I had in Protestant services. I felt a more direct connection with God.

While the sacred atmosphere drew me back, I continued attending simply for a place to worship, as well as to practice the Russian language. As a bonus surprise, the multiple Bible readings at every Mass challenged my notion that Catholics were anti-Bible.

But my pride kept me from admitting I was becoming Catholic. “No way,” I told my Christian friends. “I’m ‘just Christian.’” Besides, any consideration of Catholicism would recall my friend’s words back in Toronto: “Just because a church is beautiful, doesn’t mean it’s right.” That was my stand.

Nevertheless, the middle-aged Italian priest amazed me. Father Lucca exhibited all the qualities I’d assumed were missing in Catholic leaders: warmth, charisma, and a love of Jesus. Seeing him at an annual ecumenical gathering of Christians in my town changed my perception of Catholic leaders. Father Lucca’s enthusiastic preaching and singing — the kind I was used to back home — confused even the other pastors.

Everyone loved what he stood for, but that didn’t stop me from confronting him with my Protestant principles and anti-Catholic concerns. His patience and faith humbled me. Not once did he push; he simply answered my questions.

## History

In January of 2017, I felt drawn to a study of Christian history. I needed to get to the bottom of why I believed what I believed. The arbitrariness of creeds and practices in the various Christian churches I’d seen was too much to overlook.

One prominent 19th century convert from Protestantism noticed that: “The Christianity of history is not Protestantism. If ever there were a safe truth it is this, and Protestantism has ever felt it so; to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.” When I began my study, I had never heard of Blessed John Henry Newman. But sure enough, history would make complete sense of my faith. It was as easy as A, B, C.

## A) The 16th Century Reformation

My first step was to find out what it was I was protesting. I started with Martin Luther and his famed 95 *Theses* of 1517. It was a thesis protesting the way in which indulgences were being sold (a practice that was contrary to Church doctrine), while repeatedly affirming Luther’s Papal allegiance.

I discovered that his 1522 German translation of the Bible had spearheaded a new form of Christianity, one in which the Bible replaced the Church as the pillar of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The canon of Luther’s Bible, which later became today’s Protestant canon, had been altered from its original form. The original canon had been confirmed at multiple ecumenical councils for over a millennium, but this man saw fit to alter it, removing seven books from the Old Testament, as well as wanting to subtract Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation from the New Testament.

This brought up the issue of how the original canon of the Bible was formed. Why were some epistles and Gospels included, and others not, when it was promulgated by the Catholic Church in the 4th century? I also didn’t understand why Protestants believed in the Bible if it had been put together by a sinful institution. Then again, why was

the doctrine of the Trinity, formally adopted by the Catholic Church around the same time, accepted by mainstream Protestantism?

Further, how had Christians practiced their faith prior to the printing press, widespread literacy, and material wealth? I cringed at the idea that a theological axiom like *sola Scriptura* was dependent on mere social development. This also put the use of images in churches into historical perspective.

Moreover, Luther wasn’t the angelic savior of Christianity I’d always believed him to be. He was unprecedentedly boorish, had counseled polygamy, and advocated the slaughtering of Jews in *On the Jews and their Lies*. On the other hand, Luther believed in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, venerating Mary, and purgatory — all things I’d assumed would be self-evidently false from the perspective of the Reformation’s initial protagonist.

Reformation history fascinated me, and I continued my research. I discovered that John Calvin, founder of the Reformed Church, overthrew 1500 years of Christian thought by writing the *Institutes of the Christian Tradition*. He believed that salvation, as well as all biblical interpretation, belonged solely within his own church; heresy was punishable by death.

One such “heretic” Calvin punished was Michael Servetus who was burned alive in 1553 for scripturally denying Calvin’s teachings on infant baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity.

But I acknowledge that horrors were committed by both sides during the religious turbulence of 16th century Europe. My point here is that these discoveries flew in the face of my previous understanding of the Reformers as the saviors of Christianity.

By the 16th century, the Church was in serious moral decay. But modern history has proved that moral scandals are a fact of humanity, not endemic to one church or another. The fact that Israel had rebelled repeatedly in the Old Testament doesn’t negate their chosen status. In a similar way, the fact that the Catholic Church includes sinners of every sort doesn’t refute its historical foundation by Jesus upon Peter and the rest of His Apostles and the veracity of its doctrine. Considering this, it became increasingly clear that the Reformation was a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

In fact, all the great Reformers — Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin — disagreed on the direction of the Reformation, and on truth itself. They accused each other of being unchristian.

Then I began to perceive that the Reformation’s religious goals were inextricably linked with the political objectives of various European states. Crumbling feudalism and nascent nationalism capitalized on Luther’s rebellion in Germany and Calvin’s in Switzerland as those states struggled to rid themselves of Papal authority. Other countries exhibited even more unconventional methods of theological rebellion.

Papal rejection of King Henry VIII’s appeal for an annulment in 1524 inspired the English monarch to eventually pass the Act of Supremacy of 1534, establishing himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. The absence of direct religious grounds is evidenced by Pope Leo X conferring upon Henry the title of “Defender of the Faith” in 1521 for denouncing Martin Luther as a heretic.

## B) The Church Fathers

As a professing Christian, I couldn’t believe I’d never heard of the Fathers of the Church. They were men who guided and defended

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

the Christian Faith during the early years of its existence. Those taught by Jesus' Apostles themselves are called Apostolic Fathers.

The very first use of the term "Catholic" in a letter (circa AD 107) by St. Ignatius of Antioch astonished me: "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."

When I read their words on devotion to Mary, the sacraments, Eucharistic Presence, purgatory, Peter's primacy, apostolic succession, ecclesial hierarchy, and the nature of salvation, I saw a Christianity that looked vastly different from the Protestant variant I was used to. Who was I to contradict these early Fathers on the nature of Christianity?

One such Father, St. Irenaeus, wrote in *Against Heresies* (circa AD 180) that it "behooves us to learn the truth, from those who possess that succession of the Church which is from the apostles" and:

When we refer them [heretics] to that tradition which originates from the apostles, which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth .... It comes to this, therefore, that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor tradition.

This is but a snippet of the Church Fathers' writings. I would encourage all Christians serious about their faith to explore them on their own.

Historically, the Christian religion was both founded and passed on for over a thousand years by two types of tradition: written and oral. It wasn't until the 16th century that the concept of writing alone, or *sola Scriptura*, was seriously suggested. This put the Reformation into further perspective.

The Church Fathers confirmed the authority of ecclesial tradition over a period of hundreds of years. Even in the earliest centuries, oral tradition was what formed the faith.

*Sola Scriptura* started looking even less attractive when I realized that the canon of the Bible wasn't established until the late 4th century. Surely, of all Christians, the earliest should have been allowed to practice their own faith. And if uncanonized scriptures had existed prior to that era, how would Christian truth have been protected from various letters and manuscripts in different places?

### C) The Holy Bible

Upon reading the Bible again, it felt like a different book. St. Paul, the author of most of the New Testament and the first "born again" Christian, started to look a whole lot more Catholic.

I noticed that *sola Scriptura* is itself never mentioned in the Bible. I had also overlooked the parts about guidance by both written and oral traditions (2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:15; Luke 10:16; 3 John 13-14; Romans 10:17) and idolizing the Bible itself (John 5:39-40, 46-47; 2 Peter 3:16; Matthew 18:17; Acts 8:31). Those thousands of different biblical interpretations were starting to look very unbiblical.

I'd always taken Reformation notions of universal priesthood and *sola Scriptura* for granted. Surely everyone was self-evidently qualified to interpret Scripture — or be his own pope. Then I reread about

Christ's founding a living Church upon Peter (Matthew 16:17-19), who is mentioned 155 times in the New Testament compared to a total of 130 for all the other Apostles combined, and his succession (John 14:25-26, 20:23; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; Mark 6:7, 12-13; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Matthew 19:11-12). That Jesus spoke some things to all His disciples, but others to His Apostles alone, was nothing short of a revelation to me.

It was dawning on me that there were no better pastors to preach from the Bible than the priests of the Catholic Church, for they are most directly connected to Jesus through apostolic succession. Jesus even *breathed on* His Apostles before conferring on them the power to forgive sins (John 20:21-23; 2 Corinthians 2:10, 5:18). It started clicking that the Holy Spirit works through the Body Christ Himself had established — the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church (John 10:16; Ephesians 4:4; Romans 16:17).

It also surprised me that the phrases "accept Jesus into your heart" and "personal Lord and Savior" appear nowhere in the Bible, being manifestly Baptist traditions. On the contrary, the Bible is quite explicit about how one becomes born again: "of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3-6). The idea of sacraments was starting to make sense, too.

The sacredness and obligation of the holy Eucharist (John 6:51-65; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:23-29) was perhaps my biggest oversight. I later learned that, rather than long sermons or singing, pre-Reformation Christians regarded the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of Christ) as the central aspect of their faith. It had always been believed to possess the Real Presence of Christ, even by the major Reformers — all except Zwingli, who insisted it was a mere symbol, and who was the only Reformer to state that the Eucharist should be shared infrequently.

At the time of the Reformation, degenerate Catholic practice had made this sacrament an annual celebration, and this was a significant point of protest for the Reformers. All except Zwingli urged it to be administered at least weekly. Yet in an ironic twist of history, it is the Catholic Church which today shares the Body and Blood of Christ daily whilst the heirs of the Reformation seem to have lost their leaders' — not to mention Jesus' — instruction.

Morally, I was comforted by the knowledge that faith and works were two sides of the same coin (Romans 2:5-10; John 5:28-29; Matthew 25:26-46). It had never sat well with me that a person could "believe in Jesus," then do every immoral thing under the sun and still be saved. Moreover, it seemed like all our time together at church was spent in Bible study and talking *about* faith — not putting faith into action.

It turned out the only time the words *sola* and *fide* (faith alone) ever occur together in the Bible, the idea of faith alone is summarily rejected (James 2:24). I felt at ease with the Catholic Church's emphasis of working out our salvation (Philippians 2:12), calling Christians to share in practice the love we'd been shown and not just thinking about it. The Catholic view of faith, works, and grace is much more holistic.

### Reflection

If my former Christian faith had felt like the Mississippi River, the Catholic Church was feeling like the Pacific Ocean. It wasn't "just another denomination," but rather holy and unique. The Church began to look like an old-growth tree, seeded by Jesus Himself, with

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

the boughs being Protestant and the twigs being more recent denominational rifts.

Born into a faith far from the Catholic trunk, I had always wondered how much more certain my non-denominationalism's understanding of the Bible was than that of the group of my childhood, which was so sure of its biblical interpretations. In fact, the 19th century boom of alternative churches in America, to which the Jehovah's Witnesses belong, is a prime example of the danger of *sola Scriptura*.

The absence of extra-biblical guidance was simply too non-scriptural, ahistorical, and illogical to accept any longer. Mainstream Protestantism questions the very Christianity of the United Church of God, Christian Science, the Church of Latter Day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses, to name just a few. Yet these groups (except Mormons) base their creeds on *sola Scriptura* and private interpretation arguments.

It became clear that Reformed disdain for tradition was yet another man-made tradition. So I called a spade a spade and admitted that my non-denominationalism was just another denomination. Besides, pre-denominationalism seemed much more attractive. In the end, I acknowledged that non-denominationalism, along with every other Protestant creed, differed only in detail, not in kind, from the Jehovah's Witnesses faith of my childhood since they rely on *sola Scriptura* as the basis of their faiths.

During my holidays off work, I would stop by Catholic churches — in San Francisco, Almaty, Bangkok, and Paris. This impressed upon me the value of liturgy, not only for its aesthetic beauty, but in maintaining solidarity. I didn't need to fret about finding a church whose preacher I approved. I knew exactly what to expect anytime, anywhere. Instead of listening to a lengthy sermon, I could attend Mass, hear Scripture and a homily, and witness the miracle of the Holy Eucharist.

I felt more humbled and challenged by these homilies to share Jesus' love than I'd ever felt as a Protestant. The fact that the Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental provider of health care and education worldwide forced the question: Who was I to talk the talk while the Church was busy walking the walk?

### Coming Home

Intensely studying my own faith humbled me enough to agree with Chesterton that "a Catholic is a person who has plucked up courage to face the incredible and inconceivable idea that something else may be wiser than he is" (*The Well and the Shadows*).

Moral teaching was another point that attracted me to the Catholic Church. According to Chesterton, "We do not really want a religion that is right where we are right. We want a religion that is right where we are wrong. We do not want, as the newspapers say, a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world" (*The Catholic Church and Conversion*). Most denominations have compromised their morals to a fickle world, but the Catholic Church has stood like a rock against popular culture and political correctness.

Along my way home, I came across the testimonies of hundreds of former Protestant pastors who had become Catholic. They showed me that taking the Christian Faith seriously isn't synonymous with anti-Catholicism.

Their stories secured me in my historical discoveries and helped me come in communion with fellow Catholic Christians. Somewhat ironically, I feel more "just Christian" than ever — which makes sense, considering that it is outside the Universal Church where personality cults such as Lutheran, Arminian, or Calvinist exist.

I was baptized in Kazakhstan on Ash Wednesday of 2017 and became more optimistic and secure about my Christian faith. Even though the corporal means of practicing the Catholic Faith — such as following the liturgical calendar, kneeling at Mass, or walking the Stations of the Cross are not critical to a relationship with God, they have made my faith more tangible and human.

I also feel a real sense of communion with other believers — all practicing Catholics share the same Creed and partake of the same Body and Blood of Christ. The depth and breadth of the Church provides the objective and meaningful connection with God that I had sought.

I could have remained Protestant and been a good person, but that wasn't the point. My Christian journey was guided by a search for the truth and the *fullness* of Christ. I realized that if I was going to be Protestant, I must know why I am not Catholic. After my studies, I decided to put my trust in the Church founded by Jesus Himself. In the words of a letter by J.R.R. Tolkien:

I myself am convinced by the Petrine claims, nor looking around the world does there seem to be much doubt which (if Christianity is true) is the True Church, the temple of the Spirit dying but living, corrupt but holy, self-reforming and rearing. But for me that Church of which the Pope is the acknowledged head on earth has as chief claim that it is the one that has (and still does) ever defended the Blessed Sacrament, and given it most honor, and put it (as Christ plainly intended) in the prime place. "Feed my sheep" was His last charge to St. Peter, and since His words are always first to be understood literally, I suppose them to refer primarily to the Bread of Life.

October 31, 2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the symbolic start of the Reformation, and so I pray for the same unity for which Jesus once prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. Amen. ■



DAVID RAKOWSKI, born in Canada, received a BAH from Queen's University in 2011, and a BEd from the University of Toronto in 2014. He is a world traveler at heart and considers India his most eye-opening destination. While teaching in a public school in Kazakhstan from 2014 to 2017, he came into full communion with the Catholic Church, receiving Baptism on Ash Wednesday, 2017. He is currently teaching English around the world and enjoys sports, meeting interesting people, and bike riding. He can be contacted at davidrakowski5@gmail.com.

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# 25 YEARS OF THE CHNETWORK!

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This year, the Coming Home Network International celebrates **25 YEARS** of ministry.

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