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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## A Journey from Islam to Christ

by Derya Little

My legs started to go to sleep as I sat on the floor of my bedroom in the middle of the night. The Qur'an rested on the small table in front of me. Its Arabic script was elegant and familiar, yet utterly meaningless to my Turkish mind. I could read the words, but their meaning escaped me. I was around 12 years old. My father had left us for another woman, and my world was collapsing around me, shattered like thin glass, impossible to clean up.

I was taught from an early age how to say my prayers and how to turn to Allah in times of crisis and darkness. He was, after all, omniscient and omnipotent, the unreachable Creator of the world, but he was also merciful to the cries of his slaves. Wasn't I pleasing to him?

Night after night, I read the Qur'an and said my prayers, all in Arabic. I fasted from dusk until dawn, without a bite of food or a drop of water. I prayed five times a day, my forehead on the ground. There was no reply. All I could sense was the darkness. The seed of doubt that was sown when my parents' marriage fell apart grew in the quiet of the night. The grief of my child's heart in the middle of desperation wanted to believe, but questions kept nagging: "Their love was false. What if everything else they told me were lies, too?"

Children of divorce tread on shaky ground. Every step is insecure, every decision full of questioning. My parents' marriage was never perfect, but it was an anchor to society for my brother and me. As a little girl, I didn't understand that my mother was crushed under the burden of full-time work and the responsibilities of a family without the help of

a husband. She worked hard all day, only to come home and cook a three-course meal. She hand-washed the laundry on her days off. My father was not physically abusive, but he often cheated on my mother. He was a man, and men had "different needs" than women — or so I was told. As long as he kept it quiet, my mother turned a blind eye to his infidelities. Theirs was not a happy marriage, but when the unhappiness reached the bitter end of divorce, I was suddenly cut loose.

Up until then, I believed what I was taught because as children of God, we all yearn for the transcendent. Deep down, we know that there is more to life than living and dying. The more I learned about Allah and the "one true religion," Islam, the more I wanted to please him. One of the subjects hammered into us the most was that of doubt. A true Muslim should never doubt or question. Perfect obedience and submission to Allah's will are paramount. We are nothing but slaves. How dare a slave question his master? How dare you presume to understand Allah's ways or his will? A Muslim can claim no relationship, no proximity, and no familiarity with Allah.

*Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

What a mighty wall that servile fear builds around a human being! If, by merely doubting, the gates of hell open wide for you, how can you even approach the wall of fear to see what is beyond?

But my parents' divorce cracked a big hole in my wall of fear. When that seed of doubt took root, and I dared to read for myself what kind of man Muhammed was, I understood why that fear was necessary. The wall was flimsy. All it took was a crack, and questions buried the years of indoctrination under the rubble of violence, inaccuracy, and inequality that Islam taught. As I sat in front of the book that had claimed so many days of my life, I decided to see whether my parents had lied to me about their religion as well.

For the first time in my life, I read the origins of Islam and the life of Muhammad with a critical eye. The nagging fear that I was blaspheming never completely left me during that time. That deep-seated threat of a fiery hell for simply questioning my religion often visited me, but I read on. The Hadith and the Sunnah (the life and sayings of Muhammad) have always been passed on to us by imams or elders as being devoid of any wrong-doings on the part of the perfect man, Muhammad. We were all encouraged to imitate him in every way we could, for he was free of sin and perfect in the eyes of Allah. When I read the Qur'an in Turkish for the first time and dove into the Hadith, the man I found was far from perfect.

Instead, he was just another man, desiring power, money, and women, like countless others throughout history.

Muhammad practiced and promoted polygamy. Every time he desired a woman, a new verse came down from Allah, sanctioning his conduct. He was betrothed to a six-year-old girl and consummated his "marriage" to this child when she was nine, still playing with dolls. Domestic rape and rape of captured non-Muslim women were all acceptable practices for Muhammad and his men. An open-eyed reading of his life from Muslim

sources will reveal Muhammad's lust and how he fulfilled his carnal desires, using fear and reward.

The violence Muhammad and his followers perpetrated was another appalling aspect of Islam that I was never taught. The imams, elders, and religious teachers always whitewashed the bloody details of Muhammad's military ventures. The truth was that the messenger of Allah attacked without reason, conquered everyone along his path without discrimination, and murdered without mercy. Opposition to him and his religion would leave you skewered by the sword of one of his followers. All this and more I read in the Qur'an and the Hadith.

How could I possibly emulate this man? His life was riddled with lust, blood, and greed. For the first time in my life, I believed I could see the truth that was hidden behind that wall of fear. No wonder doubt and questions were discouraged! Once that seed is sown, the ground Islam stands on collapses faster than a house of cards.

However, once I turned my back on Islam, I had nowhere to go. Gradually, a few others who had claimed their freedom from the lies of Islam became my companions in reading and learning. None of us had ever heard of any God other than Allah, who sat upon the heavenly throne as the master, whose whims could change at any moment. Allah could neither be reached nor understood. For a Muslim, Allah can't be eternally unchangeable since that would place unnatural limitations on his divine power. Such a deity, where consistency and immutability are constraints, though, was not compatible with natural science. As it happened, the natural world and its study became a new interest of mine, so much so that eventually evolution and science turned into the media by which I interpreted human existence.

A word about Islam's teachings on Christianity might be useful here. We had always been taught that Jews had corrupted the message Allah sent them through the Prophet Moses and that Christians corrupted the message that was sent through the

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## FEATURED RESOURCES



### Deep in Scripture

In this *Deep in Scripture* program, Matt Swaim joins Marcus Grodi to look at the character of repentance and restoration in Psalm 51. They discuss how the Catholic understanding of sin, free will, repentance, and grace are necessary to properly interpret this classic penitential passage of Scripture.

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a donation of \$35.



### From Islam to Christ — Derya Little

Born and raised in Muslim Turkey, Derya Little wandered far and wide in search of her true home. After her parents' divorce, she rejected her family's Islamic faith and became an atheist. During her stormy adolescence, she tried to convince a Christian missionary that there is no God but was converted to Christ instead. Her winding path through the riddles of God was not over, however. While attending a Turkish university and serving as a Christian youth minister, Derya began to compare the teachings of Protestantism and Catholicism, and during her doctoral studies in England, she entered the Catholic Church. Derya's story provides a window into both Islam and modernity. It shows that the grace and the mercy of God know no bounds. Rather, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ reaches souls in the most unlikely places.

\$50

Receive *From Islam to Christ* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *From Islam to Christ* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain premiums by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to [chnetwork.org/respond](http://chnetwork.org/respond).



# St. Elizabeth Ann Seton: A Convert Who Brought Her Gifts With Her Into the Church

By Matt Swaim | Outreach Manager

Next month, we'll be hosting a day of reflection at the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Maryland (see [chnetwork.org/retreats](http://chnetwork.org/retreats) for more information). There are a number of ways in which St. Elizabeth is a uniquely appropriate spiritual companion for converts and journeyers. She was drawn by the Eucharist, struggled with her desire to enter the Church, and faced opposition from loved ones when she decided to become Catholic. Furthermore, she experienced all of these struggles and joys as a wife and mother in an American context.



In addition to all of that, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton serves as a model for converts to the Catholic Faith in that she did something well that so many of us struggle to do: she took her gifts from a lifetime relationship with Christ outside the Church and figured out how to use them inside the Church after she entered.

## She recognized her gifts came from God

Elizabeth was born two years before the Declaration of Independence was signed. From an early age, she was taught the value of service by her parents, especially her father, a surgeon who would serve immigrants in New York City, even risking his life to do so when yellow fever hit the city. As a young woman in the Episcopal Church, she participated actively in her parish's social ministry and often distributed food and other vital items to needy families. In addition to those passions, she was also a talented musician and an avid reader, and in an age where education for women was rare, she saw early on the value of perfecting the intellect to the glory of God.

Later, she would be widowed with five young children to care for, and the sense of her need for God's providence would be sharpened. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton knew that God had guided her path the entire way and had given her experiences and gifts to weather the storms of life. When she would enter the Catholic Church in 1805, she would bring all those experiences of sorrow, joy, providence, and trust into the Church with her, along with a talent and heart for education and the works of mercy.

## She sought ways to use her gifts in existing Church structures

*I will go peaceably and firmly to the Catholic Church: for if faith is so important to our salvation, I will seek it where true faith first began, seek it among those who received it from God Himself.* St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Because she was skilled at hospitality and education, as a new Catholic Elizabeth started an academy for young women. When news of her Catholicism spread, however, many Protestant families pulled their daughters out of it, and it failed. As a young widow, initially she thought this meant she should head to the convent, but there was no way she could get the Church's permission with five children in tow. Nevertheless, she found help in Baltimore from a Sulpician priest who recognized her gifts and talents and helped her set up a small school next to Mount



St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Her dream of teaching continued inside the Church, even though at one point it had seemed that her conversion to Catholicism would mean leaving that dream behind.

For many who served in Christian ministry before entering the Catholic Church, there is a fear that their ministerial gifts and passions won't be able to flourish in a Catholic context. The frustrating reality is that there are many outreaches and minis-

tries that exist in Protestant congregations that don't always have a satisfying equivalent in the average Catholic parish.

And yet especially for people who have served in Protestant ministry, there are a number of places in the Church where their gifts are badly needed. A Protestant pastor often has to be an administrator, an educator, a counselor, and a financial manager, and those are all areas where many Catholic parishes, schools, and apostolates would be grateful for experienced help. Some of our members have run ecumenical ministries that have lost support over their decision to become Catholic, just like St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's original academy for girls.

### **She used her gifts to create something new for the Church**

In some ways, Catholic schools existed in the Church in the United States prior to the work of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. When she was invited to Baltimore, her school was adjacent to a flourishing seminary, and there were isolated Catholic schools in New Orleans and in the Spanish missions in the West where children could receive education and meals. But in the early 1800s, there was no organized system of Catholic education like the one we take for granted today.

Mother Seton created a system of education for all children who came to her order, wealthy or poor, regardless of their ability to pay. Her model of virtue education in the Catholic tradition would be adopted by the parochial system, setting in motion a revolution in Catholic education. She founded a new religious order to run the school, the Sisters of Charity, which adopted the rule of St. Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity but adapted to the needs of a young and growing United States. Her sisters would go on to run orphanages in New York City, do mission work on the Western frontier, and act as nurses on the battlefields of the Civil War.

For converts to the Catholic Faith who have ministry backgrounds, it can be easy to succumb to a spirit of defeatism when you can't find ministries or apostolates in the Church that re-

semble the ones you used to lead. But perhaps those ministries and apostolates don't exist because God is asking you to create them! Perhaps, like St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, with a combination of perseverance and humility, you can take the gifts and passions that God has impressed upon your heart and bring them to bear in a whole new way inside the universal Body of Christ. Or, perhaps there's an existing apostolate that could use your expertise, just in an unexpected way. And maybe, like St. Elizabeth, having your original plans fall through might help open your eyes to a new way of trusting in God's providence.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton knew better than anyone what it was like to have her efforts fail, her family question her sanity, and her new Church not know exactly what to do with her. Especially during her first few years as a Catholic, there was a lot of trial and error and a lot of radical reliance on the providence of God in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. But St. Elizabeth knew, as did St. Paul, that “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). Even after she found a place in which to use her gifts, her order would be beset by numerous tragedies, and she herself lived to be only 46 years old, with a lot of work left undone. Nevertheless she can serve as a powerful model to all of us who have worked in various forms of ministry before becoming Catholic and who are looking for ways to use our gifts in a Church that might not know exactly what to do with us and that we might not know exactly how to plug into. For St. Elizabeth, it was a matter of being open to God's will, wherever it led her, and being faithful to the sacraments while she waited for her answers.

As she put it once to her Sisters:

*The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it; and thirdly to do it because it is his will.*

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us! ■

# DAY OF REFLECTION

## **A Journey to the Catholic Faith with St. Elizabeth Ann Seton**

**Saturday, June 8**

**8AM TO 4PM**

**The National Shrine  
of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton**  
EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND



**JOIN THE CHNETWORK TEAM** for a day of reflection, fellowship, and prayer at the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. We'll look at the conversion of the first U.S.-born citizen to become a canonized saint and examine how she can serve as a model for converts and those on the journey. Registration is \$40 per person and includes refreshments and lunch.

Mass will be celebrated by recent *Journey Home* guest Fr. Edward Meeks, and there will be time to visit the relics of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and the shrine museum.

**To register, visit [chnetwork.org/retreats](http://chnetwork.org/retreats). | For more information about the shrine, visit [setonshrine.org](http://setonshrine.org).**

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## Ten Ingredients to Growing in Contentment

Marcus Grodi

With all the controversies, scandals, and divisions — political, cultural, economic, as well as religious — bombarding us today, it seems the most elusive thing is contentment. Especially as I press on into my upper-sixties and look at the trajectory of the world around me — not just what kind of a world I'm leaving my children and grandchildren, but what kind of a world my wife and I will need to endure for another five, ten, maybe twenty years together — I ask myself "How do I find contentment?"



Is contentment gained by accumulating more possessions or the best portfolio? Or by finding the right job or "partner"? Or by attaining the right weight or "look"? Or by moving into the best neighborhood or designer home?

The Apostle Paul — himself an old man, chained and in prison, separated from all his close friends, having nothing of financial value to his name, and at times wondering whether anything he had done was succeeding, once wrote a letter to his Christian friends in Philippi, confessing, "Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" (4:11). In other words, St. Paul first admits that he has not always been content, especially whenever he enumerates all the trials he has faced just for being a Christian. But then more importantly, he tells his friends, who themselves are facing many trials, that contentment is something that is learned; it is something that we receive as we abide in Christ and grow in grace.

In his *Letter to the Philippians*, St. Paul gives (at least) Ten Ingredients to Growing in Contentment. I'm presenting them below, with little commentary, for your prayerful meditation. I trust that nothing I might say will add any more wisdom to what the Holy Spirit might say to you if you prayerfully ask for insight and guidance.

We know from our work that many of you are struggling with discontentment — you who are inquiring into the Catholic Faith; you who are struggling with how to support your families or continue your vocation, or live with non-Catholic friends and family, after conversion; you who are so discouraged by the scandals and divisions in the Church that you are questioning whether to "return or remain" in the Church (cf. *Catechism* paragraph 846). I pray that these words of encouragement from St. Paul — from a man who himself at times struggled with trials and discontentment — will strengthen you as you seek to abide in Christ and grow in holiness, to grow in contentment. And please remember that we are here, especially through our

online community, to stand beside you whenever you feel discouraged.

Ten Ingredients to Growing in Contentment (According to St. Paul in *Philippians*):

1) Remember that someone cares for you! (1:3)

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.*

2) Realize that circumstances and contentment are not related (4:11-12).

*Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.*

3) Rather, accept circumstances as a part of God's plan (1:12-14).

*I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.*

4) Desire a relationship with Jesus Christ more than anything else (1:21; 3:7-11).

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain .... whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know*



► "Ten Ingredients to Growing in Contentment" continued from page A

him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

5) Live a selfless life for others (2:3-4).

*Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

6) Replace anxieties with prayers of thanksgiving (4:6-7)!

*Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

7) Think on things that are right, good, and true (4:8).

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

8) Fellowship with contented brothers and sisters in Christ (3:17; 4:9).

*Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us .... What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.*

9) Recognize and accept that conversion and contentment are a process (3:12-14).

*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

10) Remember that it all depends on the power of God (4:13).

*I can do all things in him who strengthens me.* ■

## ONLINE COMMUNITY

We have a great new way for converts and journeyers to connect online! Accessible through an internet browser or mobile device via the MightyNetworks IOS/Android app, CHN's new Online Community is now the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with other converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We invite you to connect at [community.chnetwork.org](http://community.chnetwork.org).

## 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.



**CHNetwork**

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The Coming Home Network International



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

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



### TELEVISION

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

*The Best of The Journey Home*: Sunday 7 PM ET

### RADIO

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

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

**May 6**

Renee Hendrix\* (former Baptist) Re-air from May 23, 2016

**May 13**

Elvis Grbac\* (Revert)

**May 20**

Alexandra Peoples\* (former Secular Jew)

**May 27**

Rod Bennett\* (former Baptist and Evangelical) Re-air from May 9, 2016

**June 3**

Casey Chalk\* (former Presbyterian)

\*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).

# Joyful Journey Updates

## From Jennifer, on the journey

"The testimonies (videos and written conversion accounts), the Coming Home Network newsletter, and you being willing to reach out and respond to my questions time and again have all contributed, and have truly been the underpinning, to this journey of mine. Each has inspired, encouraged, and 'taught' me. How grateful I am. Thank you for your contribution."

**From Lynn, a recent revert** "Thanks for the welcome gift! I love St. Augustine; he certainly impacted my journey. I am loving the community of my parish and

have joined the women's group as well as a new women's Bible study. Also I am still attending RCIA ... Again, thank you for your prayers and encouragement!"

**From Stanton, a former Evangelical pastor** "I am enjoying my journey to a deeper understanding of my faith. I have daily been praying through the Joyful Mysteries, Glorious Mysteries, etc I found on Formed.com. What peace and indescribable joy have filled my daily time alone with God! Please pray for courage and wisdom as I now let more people (in my life) know about my reception into the Catholic community of faith ...

I am praying for you and look forward to sharing my story in whatever way God gives in the days ahead. I owe you and the Coming Home Network a great debt of gratitude."

## From Kenny, a Pentecostal pastor

"I truly do want to thank you for taking time to engage with me. Our dialogue is an important element of this whole experience. My whole family is signed up to begin attending RCIA at our parish beginning on 19 September. We can't wait!" ■

## LAST CHANCE TO REGISTER!

## NEWSLETTER

The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are Copyright © 2019 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

## PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY

Our very first CHNetwork "Deep in History" pilgrimage will take place Sept 23 - Oct 4, 2019. We invite you to travel to Italy with Marcus Grodi, Ken Hensley, and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson to learn about "The History of the Catholic Church in Rome." Please email Ken Hensley at [kenh@chnetwork.org](mailto:kenh@chnetwork.org) for a full itinerary, pricing, and all other details.

## SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

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

The CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to [chnetwork.org/donate/](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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☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$25.00 on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

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(*Vice President*)  
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**Donald Brey** (*Director*)



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

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Prophet Jesus. The Bible was changed by men in order to fit Allah's message to their human agenda. I was also told in my religious education classes that Christians believed in three gods: Father, Son, and Mother. The concepts of Trinity and Incarnation were not only incomprehensible but even blasphemous to Muslim ears. At this stage of my life, as far as I could see, all of these religions believed in the same God, thus suffering from equal incompatibility with reality and science.

The only moral compass of my life came from Islam, and with the rejection of my parents' religion, I began to live a life free of moral boundaries. Getting drunk and smoking while my friends and I made fun of all things supernatural became a new lifestyle for me. Middle and high school years flew by as we met often to play chess and polish off a few bottles of cheap wine. We were a small circle of outcasts, but these friends were my new family, while my mother became depressed and unresponsive in the wake of her divorce.

This misfit group of friends was my escape from a meaningless life in our small town. Thankfully, despite my disconnectedness, the Lord had blessed me with a quick mind that helped me gain entrance to good universities.

By the time I moved to Ankara, the capital city, for my studies, I was a staunch atheist who had no qualms about sleeping around, regularly getting drunk, and even experimenting with drugs on occasion. Thankfully, however, I understood that I had to work hard to finish college. That sense of responsibility — and no doubt the Lord's gentle nudging — kept me from going off the deep end.

Very few college students worked in Turkey, but we all needed money. When I saw a flyer for a job tutoring an American lady in the Turkish language, I was excited. A few days later, at the age of 19, I stood at the entrance to Therese's apartment, staring at a verse from the Bible, cross-stitched and framed right across the door:

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. – Acts 4:12

Oh great! She was a Christian.

It was sad, really. The poor woman had grown up in a country where science and technology were advanced, but she still believed in fairy tales like God and angels. As an enlightened woman, it was my duty to help her see through the darkness of religion. Little did I know, Therese had been raised in an atheist household and had become a Christian after leaving for college. Upon graduation from college, she and her husband had moved overseas to spread the Gospel.

From our first tutoring session, Therese discovered that I was not shy about talking of religion and politics. After all, what else was a worthy topic of conversation? I was a missionary atheist; I wanted people to see the light and live the truth, no matter how unsatisfying it was. For three years, twice a week, two and a half

hours a day, Therese and I conversed, argued, and gritted our teeth at each other.

The God Therese talked about was completely different from Allah, who was not bound by consistency or goodness. According to Islam, something was bad or sinful because Allah said so. The absolute was fluid. Contrarily, the Creator of the Cosmos whom Therese believed in was consistent, pure, and good. This was utterly crucial for me because this Christian God could be compatible with science. He would be above and beyond science, of course, but it made sense that such a benevolent Supreme Being would be willing to create an order through which His creatures could come to know Him. At the end of those three years, Therese had convinced me that there was a possibility that God existed.

This posed a serious dilemma for me. If there actually was a God, and eternal life was real, then this short life of ours, where we could make our own decisions, was utterly unique. If there was a God, He was all-important. However, the question remained: was He truly benevolent? What kind of a good and powerful being would allow so much evil into His creation?

The problem of pain is a difficult one to solve. It is inherently intertwined with the problem of sin and the infinite consequences of man's sinful nature. Since Islam neither accepts original sin nor has a coherent understanding of man and his separation from God, I never comprehended what death after sin would mean. As an atheist, I blamed mankind for all the evils of the world. It was always someone else's fault, of course. Society was oppressive; the bourgeoisie was greedy; sexual norms were too constricting; religion was suffocating. It was never my fault.

At the end of my second year in college, our Buddhist professor assigned us a chapter titled "Grand Inquisitor" from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. English is painful. I spent an entire night poring over this chapter that was about the atheist brother trying to convince the Christian brother that religion was false.

In this chapter, Christ stops by the Spain of the Inquisitions. He walks amongst the crowd, heals people, and raises a girl from the dead. The Grand Inquisitor, a plainly dressed cardinal, arrests Him and puts Him in jail. When the Inquisitor visits the Son of God in His cell that night, he tells Christ that He should have accepted the devil's offers in the desert (see Matthew 4:1–11). Jesus should have turned the stones into bread because men only desire earthly security and earthly friends. Freedom and heavenly bread are not welcome. Jesus also should have accepted the power Satan offered to show men amazing signs and wonders, instead of giving mere mortals a chance to follow their hearts freely. Lastly, Jesus should have established a universal state to create absolute order because men always crave security. Christ does not respond because He has already said everything through His death and resurrection. When the Grand Inquisitor opens the gate to set Christ free, He simply kisses the man and leaves.

For the first time in my life, I came face to face with my own sinfulness. The sinfulness of my parents changed my life. My selfish and inconsiderate ways impacted many others. No man was an island, after all. Day after day, sin after sin, we knit an

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

intricate tapestry where one's actions affect countless others. I realized that I was infected and incapable of healing myself. That night of too many cups of tea and weird English words was the night when my intellectual objections to Christianity broke down. I had read many books about Christ and the genesis of Christianity and had concluded that Christ was a real historical figure; most of the Apostles had died for their faith. Now, I knew that Someone would have to pull me out of the dark pit of sin.

Summer came shortly after this realization, and Therese would be moving to the US for a year. I still had two years left at the university and was once again in need of gainful employment. After a few months, I started to teach Peter and Paul, the small children of a couple named Jerome and Martha. This was the first time I was truly immersed in the lives of Christians. With Therese, either I was not around her family enough to observe them or I was too blind to see the difference. But in Jerome and Martha's marriage, I saw something new: a partnership. They demonstrated selfless love and served each other and their children. Peter and Paul respected their parents and feared them, but that fear stemmed from love. They did not want to disappoint their parents. The family functioned in harmony; problems were solved together. It was beautiful to watch their daily life.

The love in that home was tangible, so much so that I found myself wanting to stay longer than needed. The questions I had been struggling with for three years were not simply intellectual exercises. Their answers required a radical change, and in this family's life, I saw what that change would entail: selfless love. I had loved and been loved. I was also blessed to have good boy-friends who cared for me. However, in those relationships, I invariably expected my boyfriend to satisfy all my needs — an impossible task for anyone. In Jerome and Martha's marriage, I saw that the first person they loved was Christ, and everyone they met bathed in the warmth of that love.

I wanted that love, but I did not want to give up the prospect of a good government job. Converts to Christianity are perceived as threats or traitors in Turkey. What would my fiancé think? What would my atheist friends think? Would I be alone? Would I ever “belong” again? So many questions, but their answers eluded me. I could not let go. I agonized over the decision of becoming a Christian. I could not eat; I could not sleep. Despite all my thinking and worrying, I could not choose Christ over my earthly concerns.

The Holy Spirit sighed, probably, and facepalmed in heaven. One morning, I was shuffling towards my early morning class. There were only a few other souls wandering around. In front of one of the gray buildings, in my mind's eye, a scene appeared. A little girl with a white dress sat in the middle of a meadow. She was preoccupied with toys in her lap and was not concerned with the great outdoors or the formidable mountains in the background. While she played, two hands reached down to offer her a gift. The owner of the hands was so huge that the mountains seemed small in comparison. The beautifully wrapped gift glowed from within. It was obvious that its contents were pre-

cious beyond imagination. But the little girl was so busy that she did not realize that she was being handed such a gift. Finally, she looked up for a moment and said: “No, thank you, I have these little things to play with.”

“Are you stupid?” was my first thought. “How could you possibly compare your measly toys to that gift?” Then I realized that I was the little girl, and the precious gift was Christ's sacrifice, offered that I might have eternal life. The light bulb finally came on.

The following day, I told Martha that it was a good day to become a Christian. They prayed the prayer for me to accept Jesus Christ into my heart. That day, my life changed forever. I read the Bible, joined studies, and started to meet other Turkish Christians. I was not the only one, after all. Slowly, I joined different ministries and made friends. But the worries I had before all came true. I broke up with my fiancé. I ended the relationship because he had become intolerant of my new life and beliefs. I lost many friends because conversations became awkward, and our common interests vanished. Instead of a government job, I decided to get a doctorate and teach in a university. Looking back, none of these developments seem like sacrifices, but the devil used my earthly worries to keep me from reaching for heavenly treasures.

I knew so little about Christianity that, for the first few months, all I did was read whatever Christian literature I could find. The more I learned, the more sense Christ's sacrifice made. But there remained a few persistent questions. I did not understand *sola Scriptura*, the doctrine of the Bible alone. Christ, after all, never wrote anything, and the New Testament canon was not formed for another three hundred years after the Resurrection. Similarly, it did not make sense that the Man who suffered and died for us, who knows us better than we know ourselves, would just leave us without having established some authority. He knows that, left to our own devices, we bicker and divide in an instant. Then there was *sola fide*, faith alone, which was not to be found in the Bible, even though it was a major tenet of the Christianity that I was taught. Did the Lord take away our free will as soon as we said the Sinner's Prayer? Lastly, creationism was defended so vociferously that I couldn't help but wonder whether our entire belief system would fall apart if, one day, evolution was proved to be true beyond doubt. Surely, the Lord could have used any means He wanted to bring about humans. But I pushed all these questions away, thinking that I just didn't know enough to understand them.

Then, the unthinkable happened. A good friend of mine named Anthony became Catholic during his studies at Notre Dame. Anthony and I had become good friends through the Christian teenage ministry we were both part of. When he told me he was becoming Catholic, I was astonished. Most Muslim countries are awash with anti-Catholic propaganda. The Crusades are often brought up as proof of the greed and violence of Christians. All the bad guys in old Turkish movies are deviant and decadent Catholics. It did not help that the Protestants around me were strongly anti-Catholic.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

My agnostic roommate and I had met Anthony for lunch in Istanbul. When I returned to Ankara, I was determined to prove him wrong, prove that Catholics added a bunch of weird unbiblical stuff, like praying to saints or the papacy or the Eucharist. However, the only book on Catholic theology in my university library was written by somebody named Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Well, this Mr. Ratzinger's arguments had better be ready to be taken apart by my mighty, new-convert intellect! As you can imagine, I could not get past the introduction. I put the hefty tome back onto its shelf with profound respect. When I returned to my dorm room, I found a package from Anthony with a much smaller and much less intimidating book by Mark Shea:

*By What Authority?* Reading this little book was the beginning of the end of my experiment in Evangelical Christianity. Shea, a former Evangelical himself, used passages of Scripture to demonstrate just how biblical Catholic doctrines really are.

As I read further and deeper about Catholicism, I realized that everything I had swept under the rug — *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, creationism, and the rest — found their answers in the Catholic Church. To begin with, *sola Scriptura* and the lack of an external ecclesial authority after the Ascension of Christ had never made sense to me. I found it very hard to believe that the Lord would not leave us a guiding light. Additionally, the "Bible-alone doctrine" seemed flimsy because of the ever-increasing division among the Protestant denominations. Their disagreement ranged from whether homosexuality is morally acceptable to the meaning of Baptism. These are no simple matters. How is it possible that the same Holy Spirit, who is supposed to be guiding every individual, could lead to so much confusion and quarrel?

The Bible itself never claims to be the only authority, nor do the Scriptures ever say man is saved by faith alone (see James 2:24). On the other hand, Our Lord time and again emphasized the importance of unity, which can only be acquired through one universal Church. Without a leader or a visible structure, how could there be only one universal Church?

All of these questions lead to Peter. It was clear that Christ had singled out Peter to be the leader of the disciples, not because Peter was perfect, but because he was given the charge of leading the Lord's sheep.

Establishing a hierarchical order among the disciples and the faithful and putting the seal of the Holy Spirit on the Church were two acts of Christ that showed the existence and importance of the Magisterium (the Church's teaching authority). Through this authority, eventually the canon of the Bible would be recognized and the unity of the Church would be protected — that is, until schisms and reformations tore the Body of Christ apart.

I found the fullness of truth in Mother Church and could no longer ignore the call of the Eucharist because for the first time

the words of John 6 made sense. Without apostolic succession and transubstantiation, Christ sounds like a lunatic who was willing to lose the majority of His followers over a parable or an analogy. However, the idea that a miracle occurred during every Mass was not easy to swallow. When I read the innumerable accounts of Eucharistic miracles over the centuries, occurring even today, that disbelief diminished, and I started to yearn for the heavenly Bread. I was ready to cross the Tiber.

I spent over a year in a tiny parish in Ankara, going through the Gospel of St. Matthew with other catechumens. Not long before my confirmation into the Church, I had to move to England for my graduate studies. As it happened, I was to go through

a second RCIA (catechumenate) and wait almost another year before I could receive the Eucharist, but the wait was worth it. During the Easter Vigil of 2008, in St. Cuthbert's Church of Durham, England, I received Our Lord in the Eucharist for the first time. Since that day, I have discovered an endless ocean teeming with

I have discovered an endless ocean teeming with life in the Catholic Church, with her saints, theology, and liturgy.

life in the Catholic Church, with her saints, theology, and liturgy. When I became Protestant, I had simply got off the train one stop too soon.

While studying in England, I met my husband and moved to the US. Nine years and four children later, my days as a Muslim and an atheist sometimes feel like a dream. With His grace and love, the Lord healed my wounds and brought something wonderful out of a broken past.

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." — Revelation 21:5 ■



*Born and raised in Muslim Turkey, DERYA LITTLE rejected her family's Islamic faith and became an atheist after her parents' divorce. During her stormy adolescence, she tried to convince a Christian missionary that there is no God but was converted to Christ instead.*

*While attending a Turkish university and serving as a Christian youth minister, Derya began to compare the teachings of Protestantism and Catholicism, and during her doctoral studies in England, she entered the Catholic Church. Little has an MA in History and a PhD in Politics. She has written articles for academic journals and Catholic publications. Her conversion story, From Islam to Christ, is published by Ignatius Press.*

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