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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The Art and Science of Faith

By Kristyn Lorraine Hall

Devotion Throughout my life, I can see a thread of gold woven in between many events, good and bad, and that thread is the love of God. I can see that love in my life when my family was loosely agnostic, and His name was nothing more than a word that people used when they got angry. I can see it when my mother took us to church one night for reasons she didn't entirely understand. I can see it especially in the darkest moments of my life, when the love of God prevented evil from having its day. I can see His love pulling me closer to Him, every day, in every circumstance. It's astonishing that He considers us at all, and yet He calls us His family (Hebrews 2:11-13).

My family began attending a Missionary church when I was eight years old, and it was a dream come true for me. In our small, rural community it seemed that *everybody* went to church. I wanted to be good, to do the things that good people did, and it seemed like church was part of that. I loved Sunday School and gave my heart to Jesus on a weekly basis, just to be safe. I learned the Bible verses and songs; I made friends with the preacher's kids, and I learned something that has stayed with me for the past thirty-five years: *Life is better with God than without Him*. I remember how happy I felt that first summer, when we began going to Vacation Bible School and then to Sunday worship. It was a new kind of happy. I think I was born wanting to devote myself to something, to someone. Maybe that is the gift of faith — instinctively I wanted to believe, and going to church helped me to accomplish it. Some people claim to have had the opposite experience with churchgoing, but I can only tell my own story.

After moving and spending a few years at a small Congregational church, we began attending an Assemblies of God (AG) congregation. I attended an AG college before marrying a preacher's kid. I am not good at doing things by halves, and when something is important to me, I am *all in*.

While a student at Bible college, I took a Church history class. There was something in that history that bothered me to no end. Between the Book of Acts and the Reformation, it appeared there was not very much to report. I wondered what the Holy Spirit had been doing during those 1,500 years. No one seemed bothered by this giant gap. I found it hard to believe that the work of God had gone largely undone until the Azusa Street revival in California, the cradle of Pentecostalism, in the early 20th century.

One of the Bible college professors had told me to switch my major to Greek, that my analytical mind was a natural for it.

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

But I got married instead. My brain continued part time the art and science of picking things apart. Babies were born, and I kept reading theology, right along with Peter Rabbit and Pooh Bear.

I remember borrowing a book from my mother called *What Catholics Believe* by Josef Pieper and finding it odd that most of what this “false religion” taught was what I already believed. Still, Mary and the Eucharist seemed “off” to me, bordering on idolatry. As I look back, I realize that the Incarnation had never been properly explained to me, and I didn’t understand the significance of it. Without that understanding, the mother and the Sacrament of the God-man appeared unimportant.

The Catholics I knew did not speak of their faith, but my acquaintance with it came about in other ways. For example, when I was expecting my third baby, I read a Natural Family Planning brochure, published by a Catholic organization, in the doctor’s office. I was amazed by how thoroughly the sanctity of life and the pitfalls of artificial contraception could be presented in such a small pamphlet. The references from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* were authoritative and concise, easy to understand, and seemed to me to reflect reality as I understood it. I had never encountered this kind of religious literature before. It made no appeal to the emotions. Church tradition and scientific evidence simply pointed in the same direction. Unfortunately, busy raising a family, I had little time to ponder such things.

Drifting

After a traumatic church split, we began almost a decade of church hopping. During that time, I was given a crash course in Christian denominations, and only by the grace of God did my faith in Christ survive. There were several moments when I re-

ally wanted to chuck the church stuff. But in the middle of it all, God sent me one of those little golden threads, in the person of a new friend.

Liz (not her real name) was a client of my midwife, and I kept hearing about her. The midwife would come over to check up on me (I was expecting baby number four), and she would say, “I was just over at Liz’s house this morning. The two of you have to meet some day. You could be sisters. You have everything in common.” I kept hearing this, visit after visit. Then one day we did meet, and oddly enough, it was all true. We even looked somewhat alike. After chatting a while, Liz said something about “Our Lady.” Say *what?*

Liz obviously loved her Faith. She was the very first Catholic I had ever met who talked about her religion naturally, as if it were woven into the very fabric of her life and being. Her husband was the same way. I could see the light of Jesus in her eyes. I was used to seeing this in the non-Catholic Christians I knew, but this was a little different. She said things like, “St. Anthony found my keys this morning, or I would have been late,” and I didn’t know what to think, because it obviously wasn’t superstition to her. The “great cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 12:1 was just a matter of everyday fact for Liz and her family.

When Liz’s husband’s job took them out of state, we stayed in touch via email, and every now and then I would screw up my courage and ask a question about Catholicism. I was always afraid that one day I would ask a question and get an answer that seemed ludicrous to my Protestant sensibilities and that it would somehow harm our friendship. But with every question, I would get a clear, concise answer. I teased her, “You Catholics have thought

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FEATURED RESOURCES

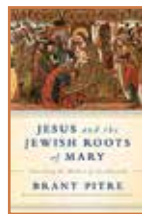


The Fathers Know Best: Scripture and Tradition in the Early Church CD — *By Patrick Madrid*

In a talk from a past *Deep in History* conference, Patrick Madrid addresses a common question regarding Scripture: With thousands of different perspectives on the Bible, whose should be trusted? Patrick explains that the best way to understand disputed passages of Scripture is to look at the way they were interpreted by those closest to the Apostles — the early Church Fathers, who, through the medium of Sacred Tradition, preserved the understanding of the Bible that the Catholic Church upholds today.

\$35

Receive *The Fathers Know Best* CD for a donation of \$35.



Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of the Messiah — *By Brant Pitre*

Are Catholic teachings on Mary really biblical? Or are they the “traditions of men”? Should she be called the “Mother of God” or just the mother of Jesus? Did she actually remain a virgin her whole life or do the “brothers of Jesus” refer to her other children? By praying to Mary, are Catholics worshipping her? And what does Mary have to do with the quest to understand Jesus? In *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, Dr. Pitre takes readers step-by-step from the Garden of Eden to the Book of Revelation to reveal how deeply biblical Catholic beliefs about Mary really are. Dr. Pitre uses the Old Testament and ancient Judaism to unlock how the Bible itself teaches that Mary is in fact the new Eve, the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and the new Ark of the Covenant.

\$50

Receive *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary* for a donation of \$50.

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A Damning System of Works Righteousness

PART I: ARE CATHOLICS EVEN CHRISTIANS?

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

“No doctrine is more important to evangelical theology than the doctrine of justification by faith alone — the Reformation principle of *sola fide*. Martin Luther called it the article that determines whether the church is standing or falling.”¹



These words form the opening sentence of a little book I have in my library titled *Justification by Faith Alone*. In this book a number of fairly well-known Protestant theologians make the case for the Reformation view and against the Catholic view.

What must we do to inherit eternal life? Do we have to do anything at all? Is salvation something that can be had and then lost? The answers to these sorts of questions are so foundational to the Christian Faith that it's hard to believe that to this day the doctrine of justification remains one of the most disputed. But it is.

Oh, I hear from time to time about how this whole issue has been resolved. Tell that to the authors of *Justification by Faith Alone*. For them, the Reformed Protestant doctrine of justification is still the article upon which the church must stand or fall. It is the *only* view, they believe, that is both true to the teaching of Scripture and that gives glory to God alone. In contrast, the Catholic view is described as “a damning system of works righteousness.”²

Before becoming Catholic, I was in the Reformed Protestant camp for about twenty years. So how does one come to leave behind a view that is “true to the teaching of Scripture and that gives glory to God alone” in order to embrace a “damning system of works righteousness”? This is the question I hope to answer over the next several months.

Justification by Faith Alone

The Catholic Church has always presented salvation as a process, a process in which we are intimately involved.

This process includes not only the forgiveness of our sins, but also our interior renovation, our sanctification, and our being remolded in the image of Christ and made fit for heaven. The theological term the Church uses for this process is “justification.”

We can think of the Exodus as an archetype of the Catholic view. While deliverance from bondage in Egypt was God's gift to the children of Israel, and He provided the Israelites with everything needed to make their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, still Moses and the people had to actually cross the desert. They had to follow the pillar of cloud and fire. They had to eat the manna given to them every morning. They had to bring their sacrifices and confess their sins again and again. They had to *make* the journey.

In the same way, the Catholic Church has always viewed salvation as a road that must be taken, a path that must be walked and persevered in. We don't walk that path in our own strength. We don't walk it without falling countless times and returning to the Lord over and over to receive forgiveness and grace to begin again.

But still, salvation is a process and a process in which we cooperate with God's Spirit and grace and are actively involved.

Now, Martin Luther was a man who felt himself utterly unable to walk this path of salvation. No matter how hard he tried, God, for Luther, was always an angry Father he would never be able to please. Luther wrote:

I was a good monk and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.³

Looking back many years later, Luther describes how he felt during those years of struggle: “I was more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him!”⁴

Eventually, Luther was appointed Professor of Scripture at the University of Wittenberg. Between 1513 and 1516, while lecturing through the Psalms and St. Paul's letter to the Romans, he came to a view of “justification” that was new. He began to teach that justification has nothing to do with God actually *making* us righteous. Nor does it involve our obedience to God. Rather, the righteousness by which we stand before God, holy and blameless, is a righteousness that is “imputed” to those who simply believe.

Luther spoke of a “glorious exchange” that takes place the instant one looks to Christ in simple faith. At that moment, all of our sins are credited to Christ, and His perfect righteousness is credited to us. God, as it were, legally transfers (“imputes”) to us Christ's perfect righteousness, and from that moment we are, in terms of our standing before God, as righteous as Jesus Himself.

It's no wonder this new view of justification brought peace to Luther. He later wrote, “I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet.”⁵

Important Clarifications

So does this mean that those who embrace the doctrine of justification by faith alone don't believe that God actually changes us and makes us holy — that He just “credits” us as being holy?

Not at all. In fact, most Protestants are quite clear in insisting that those whom God justifies He also sanctifies. He gives them new hearts and the gift of the Holy Spirit and begins in them a process of sanctification conforming them to the image of Christ.

But this, they insist, is *not how we are justified*. We are made “right” in the sight of God, they would say, by “the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith alone.”

So does this mean Luther, and Protestants since then, don't believe that obedience to God is important?

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1 *Justification by Faith Alone*, edited by Don Kistler p. 1.

2 Ibid. p. 2.

3 Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, p. 45.

4 Ibid. p. 59.

5 Ibid. p. 65.

Again, not at all. The vast majority, in fact, view the desire that a Christian has to become holy and obedient to God as “evidence” that that person has been justified. Because, again, “those whom God justifies He also sanctifies.” And what better evidence is there than that one has been given a new heart and received the Holy Spirit than that he or she now desires to live a life of holiness?

Protestants care about obedience. What they insist upon is that our obedience has nothing to do with our justification, which is by the imputed righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone.

That is, for Protestants, how we are “saved.”

The Importance of *sola fide*

Luther’s commitment to justification by faith alone was total. He began to interpret all of Scripture in the light of this teaching, even questioning the inspired authority of the Epistle of James, which he viewed as being in conflict with St. Paul on this matter.

Luther once wrote, “Away with James! Its authority is not great enough to cause me to abandon the doctrine of faith ... If they [referring to other teachers] will not agree to my interpretations, then I shall make rubble of it. I almost feel like throwing Jimmy [the Epistle of St. James] into the stove. It is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works ... Therefore, I do not want him in my Bible.”⁶

Luther even asserted that no one could be saved who didn’t agree with him on this issue, “I do not admit that my doctrine can be judged by anyone, even the angels. He who does not receive my doctrine [of justification by faith alone] cannot be saved.”⁷

Would it surprise you to know that this is *still* how serious Reformation-minded Protestants feel about this issue?

For instance, Dr. John Gerstner, professor for many years at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, tells in his chapter of *Justification by Faith Alone*, how he mourned for his former student Scott Hahn when he learned of Scott’s conversion to the Catholic Faith. He mourned because he believed that no one could be saved who had once understood and embraced the doctrine of justification by faith alone and then rejected it.

Dr. Gerstner writes, “Instead of leaving the Protestant Church ... [Scott] was leaving the lost world into which he was born — and from which he was never actually separated — for the false church of Rome. He has leapt from the frying pan into the fire, and only God can deliver him as a brand from the burning.”⁸

Are Catholics Even Christians?

Here’s the question some of you must be asking at this point: Why? Why is Luther ready to throw Jimmy [the Epistle of St. James] in the stove rather than question his own doctrine of justification? Why is Professor Gerstner, a sincere follower of Jesus Christ, ready to consign Scott Hahn to hell over this issue? Are Catholics not even Christians in their eyes? Is it their way or the highway when it comes to justification?

Yes, it is. And here’s the reason: as they understand the teaching of Scripture, there are really only two options: either one is

justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone, or one is involved in some damning system of works righteousness and attempting to “earn” their own salvation.

So, if we are “made right” in the sight of God because the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ has been “credited” to our account, then — so the reasoning goes — salvation is entirely the free gift of God. Then you and I have nothing about which to boast. Then God receives *all the glory* for the great work of salvation.

On the other hand, if we are “made right” in the sight of God by a process involving — in any sense whatsoever! — our cooperation with God, our obedience to God, then salvation is *not* the free gift of God. Then you and I have in some sense “earned” our salvation. Then we have something about which to boast. Then God does not receive all the glory for the great work of salvation.

This is how those committed to justification by faith alone think about this issue. In their view, the only way to protect the full glory of God in the work of redemption is to make sure that human activity does not enter into the picture in any way.

Now, we Catholics know that salvation is the free gift of God and that there will be no grounds for boasting when we enter the presence of God. And even though salvation involves a path that we must walk, that it’s a process in which we are involved, we know that it’s God’s grace that *enables* us to walk this path. We *know* this.

But no. According to the authors of *Justification by Faith Alone*, because we believe that we must use our freedom to cooperate with God’s grace, and that faith *and* obedience are required in order to inherit eternal life, we are teaching salvation by works. We have embraced a “damning system of works righteousness.”

Here’s how Reformed Baptist pastor and author John MacArthur sums up the situation:

The difference between Rome and the Reformers is not theological hair-splitting. A right understanding of justification by faith is the very foundation of the gospel. You cannot go wrong at this point without corrupting every other doctrine as well. And that is why every “different gospel” is under the eternal curse of God.⁹

Conclusion

Now, this Reformed doctrine of justification is one I know well. It’s the only view I knew in my early years as a Christian. I was taught this view in Bible College and Seminary. It was the view of all my theological heroes: Calvin, Luther, the Puritans. I taught it myself for a number of years as a Protestant pastor.

But over time I began to have doubts. And it wasn’t because I was paying attention to the writings of Catholic theologians. This would come much later in the story. It was because I was paying attention to the writings of the Old and New Testaments, including the writings of St. Paul. This is what set me to doubting.

So what was it that started me thinking that the classic Protestant teaching on justification was not the teaching of the Bible? What set me on a path that concluded a decade later with my receiving the sacraments and entering the Catholic Church?

This is where we begin next month. ■

6 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, pp. 81, 85.

7 Luther, *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops Falsely So-Called*, found in LW 39: 248-249.

8 *Justification by Faith Alone*, p. 185.

9 Ibid, p. 20.

Managing an Expanding Mission

By Marcus Grodi

When Our Lord began recruiting His team of apostolic evangelists from the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He built upon what they already knew as the foundation for their future mission: "And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mt 4:19-20). For several years, He disciplined them, teaching and modeling for them the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, which one day would be their responsibility to proclaim.



After His death and resurrection, as Jesus was about to ascend to heaven and leave the mission in their hands, He gave His Apostles His final words of instruction: "All authority in

heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). St. Luke adds that Jesus told them, "[Y]ou shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

After this, Scripture says that they returned to the Upper Room in Jerusalem and "devoted themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). We know little about what they discussed and prayed about, except for the replacement of Judas, but one thing they may have discussed is how they — a mixed team of former fishermen, tax collectors, and other occupations, none of whom were trained priests or scholars — were going to accomplish the great task, given to them by Jesus, of converting the world! What we do see, through the witness of the New Testament, is that they were limited to, but yet utilized, the technologies of their day.

After the Holy Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost, and Peter preached his first Christian sermon, the first "inquirers" were moved by grace:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayer. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need (Acts 2:41-45).

The first Christian converts, therefore, were conveniently together in one place, and the Apostles could disciple them face-to-face. But the community continued to grow, as more and more were converted. As a result, new problems arose:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:1-4).

The original Apostles needed helpers — deacons and presbyters — to manage the growing Church. But then a new crisis required new solutions: "[O]n that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Now the Church was no longer under one roof, but pockets of Christian believers became present in every Jewish community in the Diaspora, around the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. To "manage this expanding mission," Paul says that the Lord's "gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph 4:11-12).

In every new Christian mission, Paul and the other Apostles appointed bishops, presbyters, and deacons to disciple and further evangelize. Paul's preferred method of "managing the expanding mission" was to meet face-to-face with bishops and presbyters, as, for example, he did on his last trip to Ephesus: "And from Miletus he sent to

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► "Managing an Expanding Mission" continued from page A

Ephesus and called to him the elders of the Church" (Acts 20:17). But, especially after his imprisonment, he had to resort to the most advanced communication technology of his day — writing. As he wrote to his apprentice bishop, Timothy, stationed in Ephesus, "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:14-15). In fact, all of the New Testament Epistles were occasional letters that would not have been written if their authors could have been present face-to-face.

As the Church continued to grow and expand, the apostolic missionaries instructed their disciples to train more men for the mission ahead, as Paul instructed Timothy: "[W]hat you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).

After the first Council of the Church held in Jerusalem (Acts 15), the major decision of the Apostles, concerning full inclusion of Gentiles, was then propagated by letter and delivered by hand to all the churches of the Diaspora. But the overall apostolic leadership of Peter was expressed and propagated in the same way to the continually expanding mission:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (1 Peter 1:1-2).

By the end of the first century, and for centuries to come, the leadership of the Church used the available technologies to "manage the expanding mission" given to her by Christ. It would take an entire book, of course, to detail how through the centuries the Church continued to adopt new technologies to manage her ever-expanding and changing ministry — using technologies those first-century Apostles never could have imagined!

I've written this condensed summary of how the Church "managed her expanding mission" through the centuries to illustrate how, to a certainly much smaller extent, we in the Coming Home Network have also needed to adapt to the changing technologies to "manage our expanding mission." When we first began in 1993, we only had face-to-face, postal mail, and the telephone to communicate with inquirers, converts, and potential donors — and compared to today, our in-house computer network was quite primitive. Soon, however, we began using email, then our first simple website, and even our first online forum. Also, in the beginning, and for many years, our growing staff was all located under one roof, which made "managing our expanding mission" much more manageable.

But so much has happened in the last twenty-six years: EWTN and the invitation to host *The Journey Home* program on satellite television and radio; the *Deep in Scripture*, *Signposts*, and *Insights* internet programs; the publishing of books through CHResources; our exponentially growing online community; and so much more, but especially our expanding virtual staff! No longer is the Coming Home Network under one roof; the diaspora of our staff extends from Maine to California; Minnesota to Washington, DC and Ohio. We still have only one main office, but technology allows us to work together over the internet and to gather every morning for prayer through online video conferencing.

All of this we can do — by the mercy of God, of course — but yet only through your prayers and generosity. For this reason, our "management of this expanding mission" includes you — this is your mission; this is one of the ways you take part — even as you're reading this — in completing that initial mission given by Christ to His Apostles: to carry the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations. Thank you for your continued partnership in this expanding mission! ■

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

August 5

Kevin Stephenson* (former Anglican & Charismatic)

August 12

Carlos Zamora* (revert)

August 19

Fr. Bart Stevens* (former Assemblies of God & Episcopalian)

August 26

Dr. Abigail Favale* (former Evangelical Protestant)

September 2

Sonja Corbitt* (former Southern Baptist)
Re-air from Dec 5, 2016

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

Joyful Journey Updates

From Andrea, a recent convert "It has been a whirlwind year for our family. I can hardly believe it has been almost a year since we came into full communion ... I still feel like I'm only ankle deep in my faith ... not as a bad thing at all. I have to learn to wade before I can swim! The faith is so deep. So many resources! So many treasures! So many saints! So many devotions ... I have to remind myself not to jump in at that deep end because it can be so overwhelming because my personality wants to 'do it all' right now ... The Eucharist still holds first place in my heart as well as the new acceptance of having a loving mother who cares for us. No one can ever take those things from me. For the first time in my entire life of trying to serve Christ, I now understand why the disciples were willing to die for the Faith ... I'm still watching Coming Home videos and recently read through Alex Jones' book *No Price Too High* after watching his interview on *The Journey Home*. Although we were Reformed in background as adults, when I was a child

I was raised in charismatic churches. His testimony really echoed many of my own experiences and thoughts. I grappled with many of the issues that Deacon Jones did ... I'm still Catholic in a very small town without many people to share the love of the Catholic Faith with. Thank you for your kind inquiry! May the Lord bless your day."

From a Lutheran on the journey

"Thanks for the email ... My wife has also been more interested in the Catholic Church lately, and we've just started reading a book called *Rediscover Catholicism* by Matthew Kelly as a way to reignite our passion for a Spirit-directed life, while also pointing us toward topics on the CHN website that we have deeper questions about. I can't say

how much your emails mean to me. I feel sometimes that I've been forgotten, and simple things like this remind me that it's just not true."

From Sarah, a recent convert "Hello, and thank you so much for the kind note and wonderful St. Augustine necklace you sent me several weeks ago! I can't thank you enough for all your support. I'm so grateful for the prayers and to see God's hand at work in my life this past year and a half." ■

CONTACT THE CHNETWORK



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Account number _____

☐ **Credit card**

Card number _____

Expiration date / CVV Code _____

☐ Visa

☐ MasterCard

☐ Discover

☐ American Express

Prayer List

Clergy

■ For Danny, a minister and missionary, may his growing love for the Blessed Virgin Mary bring him home to the Church of her Son, our Lord Jesus.

■ For a Presbyterian minister in North Carolina, that the truth of Jesus faithfully held by the Catholic Church would bring him rejoicing to the Lord's altar.

■ For Chad, a Baptist minister, may the continued witness of faithful Catholics who love Jesus draw him into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For Michael, a minister in Colorado, that the mutual love of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity would draw him into the light and life of God in His holy Church.

■ For a non-denominational minister, that he may find his way into the Catholic Faith and also that his wife would be open to his desire to be Catholic.

■ For a Seventh-day Adventist minister on the west coast, that he may embrace the fullness of the faith found only in the Catholic Church.

■ For a Church of Christ minister in the south, that his wife's hostility toward the Catholic Church may be healed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

■ For Aaron, a Lutheran minister, that his continued study and prayer, especially of the Rosary, would enable him to overcome all obstacles blocking his path to the Church.

■ For a woman in Canada who is struggling to find her place in the Church after years serving as a Protestant missionary.

■ For Justin, an Episcopal priest, that he and his wife may soon be able to receive our Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

Laity

■ For a former Catholic in Missouri who is no longer interested in returning to the Church, that she will continue seeking truth.

■ For Jackie, that she will continue to draw closer to Jesus and Mary through her praying of the Rosary.

■ For Alison who isn't sure about how to proceed with her journey, that she will have certainty and clarity as to God's will for her life.

■ For Sheila who is reading and studying about Catholicism, that she will know when it's the right time to move forward with her journey.

■ For Lori and her family as they journey towards the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide them in their search for truth.



■ For Jason as he delves deeper into his Catholic Faith and looks for ways to become more involved in his parish.

■ For Susan and her husband as they wait on an annulment petition, that they will be able to partake of the Eucharistic table of our Lord Jesus very soon.

■ For a woman whose husband who is not supportive of her Catholic Faith, that he will come to better understand and encourage her journey.

■ For Vicki to have clarity in her faith journey and for her husband to be supportive of her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For Sue who is struggling with the Catholic teachings on Mary, that she will be able to better understand how Mary only leads us closer to her Son, Jesus.

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.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

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of everything!” She simply said, “Two thousand years is a long time; a lot gets figured out.” Then she used the fateful phrase that changed everything for me: “the Church Jesus started.”

That phrase lodged itself in my brain and wouldn’t leave me alone. I had never really thought of faith in terms of a visible organization started by Christ Himself. “Religion” was a dirty word in my environment; it was always presented in opposition to a “relationship with Jesus.” Faith was all on a personal level for me; Christ calls you to accept Him, then it’s your job to figure out where to go to church and get involved. The notion of the Church coming first is entirely scriptural (Jesus did say, in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my Church”), but for some reason, it had never occurred to me to think in these terms. I was not yet ready to concede that the Catholic Church was the one He started (even though, from a historical standpoint, there’s no denying it). Instead, I began praying, “Help us find the Church You started, and we’ll do whatever You say.” This was in the middle of our church hopping, and it was getting old.

Over the next few years, 2004–2008, I read conversion stories constantly. I borrowed a *Catechism of the Catholic Church* from the library so many times that I started to forget it wasn’t my book. I listened to Catholic radio in the car when I had a chance. Ignatius Press probably misses my business from those years. I just kept reading and reading. In hindsight, it was pretty obvious that the Lord was calling me to become Catholic, and I was putting Him off without saying a flat-out “No.” I didn’t want to deal with the loss of relationships, the criticism, the feeling I needed to explain myself to everyone. I’m an introvert that processes *everything* interiorly before I can talk about it. The up side is that I don’t say a lot of things I regret. The down side is that it can take me *years* to make a big decision. And with this, it did.

But the crazy thing was, no one was pressuring me. I talked to a couple of priests who seemed completely content to leave me in my state of religious flux. “Call again if you have more questions,” was all they would say. Where was the altar call and the “repeat after me” prayer? “Maybe they really don’t care about my soul,” I reasoned. But I think it was simpler than that. They could see that the Holy Spirit was working and didn’t feel the need to push in front of Him and take control of the wheel. This was something I wasn’t used to. I had reluctantly participated as a teenager in door-to-door evangelism in the hopes of getting someone to sign a card, say a prayer, accept a Gospel tract. And here were these priests who seemed to trust me to do the right thing when it was time. I really had to decide for myself!

Meanwhile, our Sundays took us all over the place. We were visiting different Catholic parishes, Lutheran churches (I briefly thought this might be a happy medium, with the Lutheran liturgical service and belief in consubstantiation), and occasionally worshipping with friends in the house church movement. I moved from being genuinely confused to actively avoiding a decision.

The more I read, the more I realized I had painted myself into a corner. Nothing satisfied me like Catholic teaching. Nothing

filled my soul and made my faith feel alive like a book on the Eucharist or a conversion story. Everything I read, I had to share with my family. My kids liked the stuff I was learning about Advent traditions and St. Nicholas and other saints — what kid doesn’t like the idea of more holidays? My husband seemed mildly interested, too, but it later came out that he thought I was “going through a phase” and would soon “return to the truth.”

For a while, I boxed up all my Catholic books and put them in a closet. I was expecting my fifth baby; we were having financial issues after moving, and I felt I was just irritating my husband with all my religious exploration. After our third baby boy was born, our two girls, upon professing faith in Jesus, were baptized in a pond with a bunch of our house church friends’ kids. It was a special day, but I was bothered by the fact that so many of the kids had been baptized before. It really didn’t *mean* anything, and I had read too much about Baptism to feel okay with that. In retrospect, I think most of those people viewed it more like the baptism of John, a public statement of repentance, instead of the sacrament that followed the day of Pentecost.

During the next year, we continued our wandering. I really do regret my indecision during this time. It was entirely motivated by “What will people say?” when what I should have been asking was, “Do I believe what the Catholic Church teaches?”

Doctrine

I had memorized the Assemblies of God’s “Sixteen Fundamental Truths” as part of my education at Bible college, but affirming what the Catholic Church teaches is somewhat more involved. The thick catechism book that Pope St. John Paul II promulgated in the 1990s is pretty comprehensive, and there’s no memorizing *that*. Also, many of the distinctly Catholic doctrines are intertwined and require lengthy explanation.

Mary is another huge stumbling block to many Protestants who are feeling the tug of the Catholic Church. The elevation of Mary as a Queen really grated against my sensibilities, particularly how it was portrayed in art. I distinctly recall asking a priest before my conversion how Jesus might be in all things preeminent (Colossians 1:18) when He was often portrayed as mournful, while His mother was breathtakingly beautiful. It just seemed to me that she had been placed beside Him as an equal and that, more often than not, Jesus took a back seat. I never blamed Mary for any of this, but I wondered why Catholics made such a big deal of her.

You can find fascinating answers to this conundrum with a Google search. You can read about the New Ark of the Covenant and the New Eve. You can read about the Davidic kingdom, in which the king reigned with his mother — not his wife — as queen. As someone who has always been fascinated by Jewish history and tradition, these concepts were all very interesting to me on an intellectual level. But I think it was the generosity of Jesus that helped me finally “get” Mary.

All that is His, He offers to us. He offers a share in His life, His death, His home, His family ... His mother. She is my mother, because she is His mother. And the part of Jesus that is like

...Journeys Home Continued...

me, the human side that I can relate to, *came from her*. Jesus is not God-made-man without her. When I receive Jesus' "Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity" in the Eucharist, the Body and Blood I am receiving comes from His mother. *Of course* Catholics make a big deal about Mary! Everything we have in Christ is possible because of her "Yes, Lord."

Another thing I had to hash out was the Mass itself. I had heard and assumed that the priest believes he is re-sacrificing Jesus again and again. Then I read in the book of Hebrews (7:27) that Jesus was sacrificed once for all, and I felt that obviously the Catholic Church had got this one very wrong. I wondered how all those brilliant Catholic minds had missed something so obvious.

On a visit with my friend Liz, her brother-in-law, who is a priest, came over to "answer a few questions." We chatted a bit about Mary, the concept of "hierarchy," and St. Peter. Then I launched into my questions about Christ's eternal priesthood. "Do you really believe you're sacrificing Him over and over? Why would God allow His suffering to be prolonged? Didn't the resurrection mean that His sacrifice was completed? Doesn't the book of Hebrews say that it was 'once for all'?" My questions poured out because I was sincerely disappointed. I thought I had asked the unanswerable question, taking me back to square one in my searching for the Church Jesus started.

Very gently and quietly, he said, "I don't sacrifice Him again. He makes the past sacrifice present to us so we can take part in it." Suddenly, another event from the past became present to me. Years before, I had taken a Sunday school class called "Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith," and in that class the teacher taught extensively on the Passover. We learned about the "perpetual memorial" that God commanded, which included being dressed and ready to leave Egypt, whether you were in Jerusalem or Paris or Detroit, as if the Exodus were happening *now*. "It was God's invitation to the Eternal Now," the teacher had said. "God is outside of time, and once in a while He brings us outside with Him." As these things came back to me, I sat speechless in Liz's living room. I had been expecting this great mystery to fit inside the little box of my understanding, but God had opened it all up in that moment.

In time, I learned that this view of the Eucharist was not a secret, and I have heard many priests say that we are present at the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection at every Mass. We join the angels and saints in heaven as we sing the *Sanctus* and the Great Amen. Once my "unanswerable question" was answered, I mentally moved on from questioning to learning.

Decision

In 2008 we had one more boy and made the decision to stick with a parish and ask about RCIA. I can honestly say that from the moment we approached the priest about how to begin the inquiry class, I stopped doubting. I finally said my own "Yes, Lord," and He pulled me completely into His circle. I was no longer vulnerable to the endless cycle of doubts and questions. Straddling that circle, I had been that "double-minded man" that St. James warned us about (James 1:5-8). I read an article about

John Henry Newman's conversion and his great desire as an Anglican to show that Anglicanism was the "*via media*" between Catholicism and Protestantism. His awakening came when he realized that his position was simply that of a heretic, accepting neither side.

The following Pentecost Sunday, in 2009, we were received into the Catholic Church as a family. The boys were baptized, those of us old enough to do so received our first Holy Communion, and we lived happily ever after.

Well, not exactly.

It would be nice to end the story there, but following Jesus involves carrying a cross (Mark 8:34). The universe is not a vending machine where you put in your coins of faithfulness, and it spits out the candy bar of everything going right. It doesn't work that way. I had thought I trusted God, but my faith was about to be tested.

Disaster

In less than a year, I was taking the kids to church alone, and every marital problem we had ever encountered was back with a vengeance. Within two years, it was obvious that things were not reparable without divine intervention. We had reached an impasse. All I can say is that things were more terrible during those two years than I ever thought possible, and the following year they got even worse.

Our priest did what he could, but as he said, you can't help someone who doesn't want help. One thing he did do was help me to understand that my prayers and novenas were not going to eradicate someone else's free will. This was a foreign concept to me (don't we pray so that God will do what we ask?), but I did learn over time what a risk God took when He gave us this irrevocable gift of free will. And all for love! It has made me look more closely at my own decisions, knowing that God wants us to choose Him, not out of obligation, but out of love. He loves to see us rightly using the gifts He's given us.

For the kids' sake, I kept up with the liturgical calendar of the Church every day, learning about saints and traditions, even if we couldn't get to church to celebrate them with others. One year, during Holy Week, we were without a car, but we washed each

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other's feet and venerated our crucifix at home. We read poetry and classic literature and studied beautiful artwork, a little every week. Really, these activities felt very routine, but I now understand that they were preserving our hope when it would have been easy to despair. I highly recommend keeping "the good, the true, and the beautiful" within reach during any time of difficulty.

My faith sustained me; I can say that honestly. But it sure wasn't that "Jesus and Me" kind of faith that had tempted me years previously. Jesus' hands and feet were my parish. When my kids and I had no vehicle, a couple picked us up for Sunday Mass and catechism every week, even though they usually went on Saturday night. Other parishioners prayed, called, sent cards, dropped off food, and brought me Kleenex after Mass when I blubbered in my pew week after week, praying for wisdom. As I journaled during the winter of early 2012, "There is no solution to this disaster." I really believed that, and it terrified me to imagine what might happen as the nightmare played out.

Deliverance

During all this, my oldest daughter was approaching Confirmation. I brought something to Mass that I had made for her and asked our pastor to bless it. In an offhand sort of way, as he walked over to the font to get a handful of holy water, he said, "Hey, we had an idea. What if you guys moved into the extra rectory?" Within a month, the kids and I were living in an empty rectory, part of our parish cluster, out in the country. I was offered a job cleaning at the parish, and a couple of families pooled some money together and bought us a used minivan. It all happened very quickly, and our lives changed dramatically. It was a miracle! Our parish was a lifeboat in the middle of a storm. Where would we be now without them? I don't even want to guess.

We lived there for two years, during divorce proceedings and a complicated annulment process. I spent many nights sitting in the church in front of the tabernacle (the rectory was connected to the Church by a breezeway), praying and processing everything that had occurred. None of the terrible things that had happened added up, and I couldn't understand how things had gone so bad so quickly. On the other hand, nothing of the good that had happened added up, either.

"What did I do to deserve this?" is one of those funny questions that has no business being asked. So much of what we go through in life is the result of living in a broken world that has not yet been overcome by its brokenness, and we live in the ebb and flow of that tension. It is hard for someone with my overthinking personality not to ask, "Why?" — but that door swings both ways. I never expected to be a divorced single mom. I also

never expected to be so spectacularly loved and cared for by so many people. Faith truly is both a science and an art, because we are dealing not only with knowable facts and absolute truths, but also with the inexplicable, undeserved love of a God who just wants us to tell Him, "Yes, Lord." He calls us to trust. He doesn't

eradicate other people's free will. He doesn't put us in a bubble where we are unaffected by the results of original sin. But when we open the door to Him and say, "Make Yourself at home," He does exactly that. He walks the whole way with us. He gives us grace to walk that road with each other. He helps us forgive and let go of the things that will hurt us if we hold on to them. Truly, *life is better with God than without Him*.

In the past five years, we have settled into our "new normal." I still live close to our parish and work there, and we continue to be

blessed with the friendships that kept us going during our most difficult days. I love being a lector at Mass, and I help with sacristan duties as I'm able. Liturgical ministry really helps you appreciate all the beauty of simple things, like altar candles, the lectionary, and the significance of the color purple. There is much food in them for both the intellect and the soul, just waiting for us.

My brain still loves to pick things apart, but I am more accepting that there are some things that are simply beyond my understanding. One of the beautiful facets of Catholicism is the embrace of mystery. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," wrote the poet and priest Gerard Manley Hopkins, and clearly this means there will be things unknowable. If you look at the world only through the lens of facts and figures, all is not as it should be. Humankind has made a woeful mess of things. But *O felix culpa* (Oh, happy fault)! God is an Artist, and He is making something beautiful in the middle of it. He is weaving that thread of love in and out of our lives, and it shines brightest in the dark spots. The "happily ever after" is a sure thing after all, just not quite yet. ■



KRISTYN LORRAINE HALL is a homeschooling, bookish mom of two daughters and four sons. She is blessed and thankful to be an amateur Catholic in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

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