



May 2021 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



My Heart Was in the East

By Alan Orser

My journey from Baptist pastor to Catholic convert was an amazing, agonizing one, with numerous twists and turns along the way. From the outset, I want to say that I will always be grateful to my Baptist heritage for the excellent grounding in the Scriptures it gave me and the foundation it provided for living a life that pleases Jesus Christ. I have not dispensed with my Baptist roots. Instead, I have built upon them.

Beginnings of Faith

At age ten, I came to faith in Jesus Christ through an after-school neighborhood Bible club my mother and her friend offered for children in Sudbury, Ontario. I remember saying what Baptists refer to as the Sinner's Prayer with my mother one night as she tucked me into bed. I would later come to know that Catholics refer to that prayer as the Jesus Prayer.

At age twelve, I was baptized by immersion at First Baptist Church in Sudbury. I still remember the sense of the Holy Spirit's presence lingering with me the entire day.

Shortly after that, my family moved to Owen Sound, ON. Unfortunately, my teen years were turbulent ones, and I drifted away from my faith in Jesus. However, a dramatic turnaround occurred in the summer of 1974.

The Jesus People movement was coming onto the scene, and that caught my interest. Also, my mother brought home a copy of Ken Taylor's *The Living Bible*, which was becoming very popular among Protestants. As I read the Bible in contemporary language, especially the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Christ, I had a revelation that Jesus had

died not only for the whole world, but for me personally. I became convicted by the Holy Spirit with my need to turn my life around, and I resolved that, from then on, I would live my life in full-time service to God.

The Cherry Tree

In 1979, two significant things happened in my life. I decided to enroll as a student at the conservative Evangelical Ontario Bible College in Toronto, ON, with the goal of obtaining a Bachelor of Theology degree. I also started picking what I shall refer to as "cherries from the Roman Catholic cherry tree."

Prior to leaving for Ontario Bible College, I had discovered in the local Christian bookstore in my home town a book by a famous Catholic theologian on the nature of the Church. That was my first cherry, and I was mildly surprised to find a Catholic book being sold in a conservative Evangelical bookstore.

At Ontario Bible College, I continued picking cherries from the Catholic tree. I enjoyed reading Henri Nouwen's *Out of Solitude* and purchased from the school's bookstore

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

The Confessions of St. Augustine. Again, I was mildly surprised to find these works offered at an Evangelical Bible school, but never gave much thought to the tree from which the cherries had come.

When I graduated from Ontario Bible College in 1983, I decided to attend the University of Waterloo in Kitchener-Waterloo, ON since, with my transfer credits from the Bible college, I would be able to obtain a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies in just a year.

While there, I did a directed reading course at St. Jerome's Roman Catholic College, which was located on the campus of the university. The course allowed me to pluck more Catholic cherries as I avidly read works by Simone Weil, Jean Vanier, and Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk. I also very much enjoyed *Revelations of Divine Love* by Mother Julian of Norwich. I still did not, however, inquire deeply about the nature of the tree from which I was plucking the cherries.

One memory stands out from my Catholic cherry-picking days. I was heading home to Owen Sound on the bus and found myself sitting next to a young man who was training for the priesthood and who also lived in my city. I remember feeling an instant connection with him as we talked during that long trip.

Turning East

Having received a solid undergraduate foundation, I needed to choose a Baptist seminary where I could earn a Master of Divin-

ity degree, required of all Baptist pastors in the Baptist Federation of Canada. I decided to go farther east, specifically to eastern Canada's Baptist seminary at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. I chose the seminary because of its conservative and Evangelical leanings.

During my years at Acadia Divinity College, I was far too busy to pursue any Catholic leanings. But it was there that I met and married my wife, Sandi, while assigned to a Baptist church in Dartmouth, NS for a course in pastoral field education. Sandi was completing her Ph.D., prior to becoming an English professor at two Halifax universities.

Upon graduation from Acadia Divinity College, I became the pastor of a small Baptist church in Mt. Uniacke, a small bedroom community not far from Halifax, NS. I continued to read various Catholic books in my spare time and got on extremely well with the Catholic clergy in the community. I also developed a close friendship with a Catholic layman who would have an impact on my life as I saw his character and Catholic convictions lived out in daily life.

Remarkably, I would stay at the Baptist church in Mt. Uniacke for twenty-seven years, until I retired from active pastoral ministry in September, 2016. It was during the last few years of my tenure as pastor that my journey to the Catholic Church would begin to accelerate.

Turning Toward Eastern Europe

During my days off, I loved to prowl the thrift stores of Halifax. In one such store, I stumbled across Randall Sullivan's book *The Miracle Detective*. Sullivan had been a seasoned reporter with *Rolling Stone* magazine, and he had set out to investigate the Marian apparitions around the world. As a result of his investigation, he ended up becoming a Catholic Christian.

I was impressed by Sullivan's scholarly treatment of the subject and intrigued by the attention he devoted to an alleged Marian apparition site in Europe. In another visit to the same store, I discovered two more books that delved deeply into the events taking place in that European town.

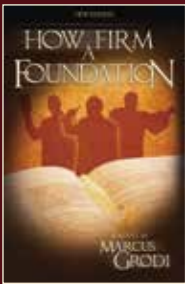
As I read these three books, I found myself becoming intrigued with the concept of spiritual motherhood, which is a subject not found in Protestantism. As a Protestant, I firmly believed in the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus, but only mentioned her in my sermons at Christmas. Once the Nativity scene was packed away, I didn't talk about Mary again until the following Christmas.

I shared the view of many Protestants that Catholics worship Mary, but as I read the books about Marian apparitions, I discovered a deep longing stirring in my heart. If I had a spiritual mother, then I sure wanted to know more about her, this woman who was everybody's mother.

I had a strong sense that Jesus had His hand on my shoulder and was guiding me in the way He wanted me to go. The longing to go to the site of the alleged apparitions was growing in my heart, but a Baptist pastor does not go off to a bastion of Catholicism in eastern Europe without being absolutely sure of what he is doing.

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RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



How Firm a Foundation by Marcus Grodi

This month, the CHNetwork staff would like to suggest the novel *How Firm a Foundation* to our readers. Stephen LaPointe believed in Jesus. For him, the Bible was the only sufficient, firm foundation for his life. He wanted to obey God in all things and had given up a career to become an ordained minister. He loved to preach the Word and knew that one day he would stand before God, accountable for everything he preached. But there was one problem: how could he be certain that what he was preaching was true? Sara LaPointe never wanted this role, but she loved Stephen. So, through his encouragement and tutelage, she had become both an enthusiastic Evangelical and an effective pastor's wife — at least in the eyes of the congregation. But would the gnawing guilt of a past mistake — a mistake she would never reveal to her husband — ever let her go? And then there was Walter. He, too, believed in Jesus. He, too, loved the Bible and vowed to do whatever God called him to do. But what if this was the unthinkable?

Go to www.chresources.com to purchase this book and other resources about the Catholic Church.



ON THE JOURNEY

Is *Sola Scriptura* Scriptural? Part IV: Reasoning in a Circle*

By Ken Hensley

In this and next month's article, we will look at the New Testament passages that Protestants see as teaching *sola Scriptura*.

I don't mind. After all, this doctrine — that Scripture is the “sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the Church” — is the foundational issue separating Protestantism and Catholicism. It was the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation. It started the unraveling of Protestantism and, ironically, it was the unraveling of *sola Scriptura* that was key to my own conversion and is with most Protestants who become Catholic.

We've seen that the Apostles do not speak and act like men preparing the Church for “Bible only” Christianity. Instead, they speak and act like men who believe that the substance of their teaching will be preserved in the Church, by the Holy Spirit, through their successors.

As the Father sent the Son endowed with His Spirit and authority, as the Son sent the Apostles endowed with His Spirit and authority, so the Church is sent into the world endowed with Christ's Spirit and authority.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3, the New Covenant Church is Christ's letter to the world, written on tablets of human hearts.

To put it another way, the Church as the Body of Christ becomes an extension of the Incarnation into the world — loaded with sinners but given the ability by the Spirit of God to guard the apostolic doctrine committed to it, to preserve it, and to pass it down.

Is *sola Scriptura* “implied” in the New Testament?

Now, Protestant scholars will admit that *sola Scriptura* is not something that is “formally” and “explicitly” taught in the Bible. Rather they see it as *implied* by other things that *are* formally and explicitly taught. In *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Disagreements*, Protestant scholars Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie write:

Catholic scholars themselves recognize it is not necessary that the Bible explicitly and formally teach *sola Scriptura* in order for this doctrine to be true. Many Christian teachings are a necessary logical deduction of what is clearly taught in the Bible ... Likewise, the Bible does teach implicitly and logically ... that the Bible alone is the only infallible basis for faith and practices. This it does in a number of ways.

OK, this is the question we want to focus on today: what are these “ways” in which *sola Scriptura* is “implied” in the New Testament?

Jesus quotes Scripture

Geisler and MacKenzie begin by referring to Matthew 4 where Jesus responds to the temptations of the devil by quoting three times from the book of Deuteronomy. They write:

Jesus and the apostles constantly appealed to the Bible as the final court of appeal. This they often did by the introductory phrase “It is written,” which is repeated some ninety times in the New Testament.

In their minds, this “implies” the truth of *sola Scriptura*.

The only problem is, while it's true that Jesus often said, “it is written!” Jesus also said, “truly, truly I say to you.” And while the Apostles often said, “it is written!” Paul praised the Thessalonians for receiving his oral “teaching” when he came to them “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13). And when the Apostles and elders met in council in Acts 15 to settle the first major theological controversy in Christian history, they describe the decision they came to as the being the decision of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28)!

Now, Geisler and MacKenzie know these passages. So, the question that comes to me is: *why* would they view these passages as “implying” *sola Scriptura*? After all, we Catholics agree that Scripture is authoritative. We also say, “it is written!” So why do these Protestant scholars see this as implying Scripture *alone*? It's because they've already decided that the Church we see functioning in Acts 15 — a Church that could preserve the apostolic doctrine by the Holy Spirit and speak with the authority of Christ — ceased to exist with the death of the last Apostle, leaving the Church with “Scripture alone.”

Saying Scripture is “authoritative” only implies *sola Scriptura* if you've also decided that the Church is not “authoritative!”

But isn't this the very point at issue between Catholicism and Protestantism? Catholics say the Church of Acts 15 still exists. Protestants say it doesn't. Essentially, Geisler and MacKenzie are *assuming* the truth of Protestantism in order to argue for it. They're arguing in a circle.

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Jesus rejects tradition

The second passage they refer to is Matthew 15:3,6, where Jesus blasts the Pharisees for putting their “traditions” above the Word of God.

Jesus made it clear that the Bible was in a class of its own, exalted above all tradition. He rebuked the Pharisees for negating the final authority of the Word of God with their religious traditions, saying, “why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” Jesus is not negating the value of all tradition but simply not giving it authority equal to or greater than Scripture.

Well, yes and no. It depends on the sort of “tradition” one has in mind.

Of course, it’s true that no “human tradition” — and this is the sort Jesus is talking about in Matthew 15 — should be given authority equal to Scripture. But what about the “traditions” Paul has in mind when he commands the Church in Thessalonica to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess 2:15)? What about the “tradition” Paul has in mind when he says to Timothy, “the pattern of sound words which you have *heard* from me ... guard” (2 Tim 1:13,14)? Was Paul’s teaching less authoritative than his writing?

As we’ve seen, Paul seemed to believe that the “substance” of his teaching could, and would, be preserved not simply in the letters he wrote but in the churches he founded, by the Holy Spirit and through a process that looks a lot like what Catholics mean by “apostolic succession.”

And this is what Catholics mean by “apostolic tradition” — not that the exact words and sentences and sermons of Paul were somehow memorized and have been passed down within the Church and are now hidden away in the Vatican Archives. Not at all. What Catholics mean by “apostolic tradition” is that the “substance” of Paul’s doctrine was preserved in the doctrine and worship of the churches he founded and can be known apart from what he wrote. In the second century St. Irenaeus put it like this:

When, therefore, we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek among others the truth, which is easily obtained from the Church. For the Apostles, like a rich man in a bank, deposited with her most copiously everything which pertains to the truth; and everyone whoever wishes draws from her the drink of life (*Against Heresies*, 3:4:1).

Paul seems to have believed this. Catholics believe this. Geisler and MacKenzie do not. And this is *why* they see Matthew 15:3,6 where Jesus speaks against “tradition,” as implying *sola Scriptura*.

Again, without realizing it, they’re arguing in a circle. They’re assuming that the Catholic view of the Church and of Tradition is wrong. And yet this is the very issue in question, isn’t it?

Adding or subtracting to God’s Word

Next, Geisler and Mackenzie bring forward passages that talk about how we are forbidden to “add to” or “take away from” Scripture. They take these passages also to imply *sola Scriptura*.

In addition, the Bible constantly warns us “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6). This kind of exhortation is found throughout Scripture. Moses was told not to “add to what I command you nor subtract from it” (Deut 4:2). Solomon reaffirmed this in Proverbs, saying, “Every

word of God is tested Add nothing to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be exposed as a deceiver (Prov 30:5-6). Indeed, John closed what is widely held to be the last word of the Bible with the same exhortation: “I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words in this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words in this book, God will take away his share in the tree of life” (Rev 22:18-19). “*Sola Scriptura* [they conclude] could hardly be stated more emphatically.”

A couple of things: First, the passages from Moses, Solomon, and John — these are warnings against tampering with the Word of God. You don’t take what these men have written and mess with it. You don’t add a word or two or take away a couple sentences.

These passages have nothing to do with *sola Scriptura*.

But what about 1 Cor 4:6 where Paul admonishes the Christians in Corinth to “not go beyond what is written”? First, it needs to be stressed that it isn’t at all clear what Paul is saying in this passage. There are nearly as many interpretations of this text as there are commentators. But whatever Paul is saying, he certainly isn’t saying that the Corinthians should reject his oral teaching as being less than his written teaching. He certainly isn’t saying that the Corinthians should hold fast only to what he has written to them.

Scripture as revelation from God

Fourth, Geisler and MacKenzie quote passages that speak of Scripture as a revelation from God. They see this as implying *sola Scriptura*.

Further, the Bible teaches *sola Scriptura* by stressing that it is a revelation from God (Gal 1:12 and 1 Cor 2:11-13) as opposed to the words of men. A revelation from God is a divine unveiling ... This is argument for *sola Scriptura* ... Roman Catholics admit that the New Testament is the only infallible record of apostolic teaching we have from the first century. They do not seem to appreciate, however, the significance of this fact for the Protestant argument for *sola Scriptura*.

Here’s their logic: because the Bible is revelation from God and “the only infallible record of apostolic teaching we have from the first century,” Scripture is our “sole infallible rule of faith and practice.” Catholics fail to appreciate the implications of this truth.

Well, what Geisler and MacKenzie fail to appreciate, or to even consider, is that *along with* this infallible written record of apostolic teaching God may have given us a Church with the ability by the Holy Spirit to preserve “the correct understanding” of that written record. And since this is the point in contention, once again, we find them arguing in a circle.

The Problem with Circular Reasoning

Again and again in debates over this issue, I’ve heard Protestant apologists stress the unique status of Scripture as “revelation from God” and “inspired” and so forth and assert that unless Catholics have some other source that is “exactly like Scripture” then we cannot treat it as an authority alongside Scripture. How many times have I heard Protestant apologists say, “Scripture is inspired, God-breathed, *theopneustos*. And so, unless you can show us a Tradition that is also *theopneustos*, you cannot treat it as an authority alongside Scripture!”

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When I hear this, I wonder “why not?”

Was Paul’s preaching “inspired” in exactly the same way that Scripture is inspired? Was the decision of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 “inspired” in exactly the same way that Scripture is inspired? Protestants and Catholics alike would agree that they were not, that “inspiration” pertains uniquely to Scripture alone. And yet Paul’s preaching and the decision of the Council of Jerusalem were both *authoritative and binding!*

In other words, there’s no contradiction involved in saying that the Scriptures are unique as an inspired record of divine revelation and at the same time that the Church has been gifted to preserve the *correct understanding* of what Scripture teaches and the authority to pronounce on what is and is not apostolic doctrine.

So again, simply stating that Scripture is inspired divine revelation doesn’t imply *sola Scriptura*, unless one assumes at the same time that the authoritative Church we see functioning in the New Testament no longer exists — which, again, is the point in contention between Catholics and Protestants.

This reminds me of a discussion I listened to on the radio many, many years ago between well-known Reformed apologist Greg Bahnsen and a popular Catholic apologist. In an article titled “The Concept and Importance of the Canon,” Bahnsen had written: “although the tradition of both Jesus and the apostles was transmitted in both oral and written form, *obviously* only the latter is available to us today.”

Well, this is only “obviously” true if the Catholic view of the Church is wrong. In stating it like this, Bahnsen is assuming the point at question. He’s assuming that the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles could not be preserved in any way except by writing.

Well, in this discussion on the radio, the Catholic pointed this out. “You’re arguing in a circle. You’re assuming what needs to be demonstrated: that the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles could not have been preserved in any way other than in writing!”

Listen to how Bahnsen responded to this,

No. Let me go through this again. We could hear the apostles speaking if they were here with us. God could speak to us directly from heaven in a dream. But apart from that, the *only way* we can hear them speaking is in what they wrote.

Well, he’s correct in the sense that apart from the Apostles coming and speaking to us, or God giving us the information in a dream, the only way we can hear the Apostles actually “speaking” is in what they wrote.

He’s correct in that. But by saying this, he entirely misunderstands what the Catholic Church *means* when it speaks of Apostolic Tradition. Again, we don’t mean that we have in our possession the actual sermons of Jesus and Paul and Peter and John that are not recorded in Scripture. What we mean by Apostolic Tradition is that the substance of the Apostle’s doctrine has been preserved in the doctrine and worship of the Church.

And when Bahnsen assumes that the teaching could not have been preserved in any way other than in writing, *he is assuming what needs to be demonstrated*. He’s arguing in a circle and begging the question.

Conclusion

In short, the passages that Geisler and MacKenzie believe “imply” *sola Scriptura* only do so when one assumes that the Catholic view of the Church is wrong. If the authoritative Church Christ founded, the authoritative Church we see functioning in the New Testament, is the Church that still exists in the world, then none of these passages implies or asserts or in any way establishes Scripture *alone*.

To be continued. ■

**See the January-April 2021 issues for previous installments in this series, online at chnetwork.org.*

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Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters. We do ask for a \$35 yearly donation to help cover the production costs of the newsletter.

ONLINE COMMUNITY



We have a great way for converts and journeyers to connect online! CHN's Online Community is the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.

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Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Saturday 6 PM ET

RADIO

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

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May 3

Dr. Barry Carey*
(former Oneness Pentecostal)
(re-air from 8/13/18)

May 10

Fr. Eric Roush*
(former agnostic)

May 17

Gary and Charlotte Wiley*
(former Wesleyan missionaries)
(re-air from 9/10/18)

May 24

Frank Cronin
(former atheist)

May 31

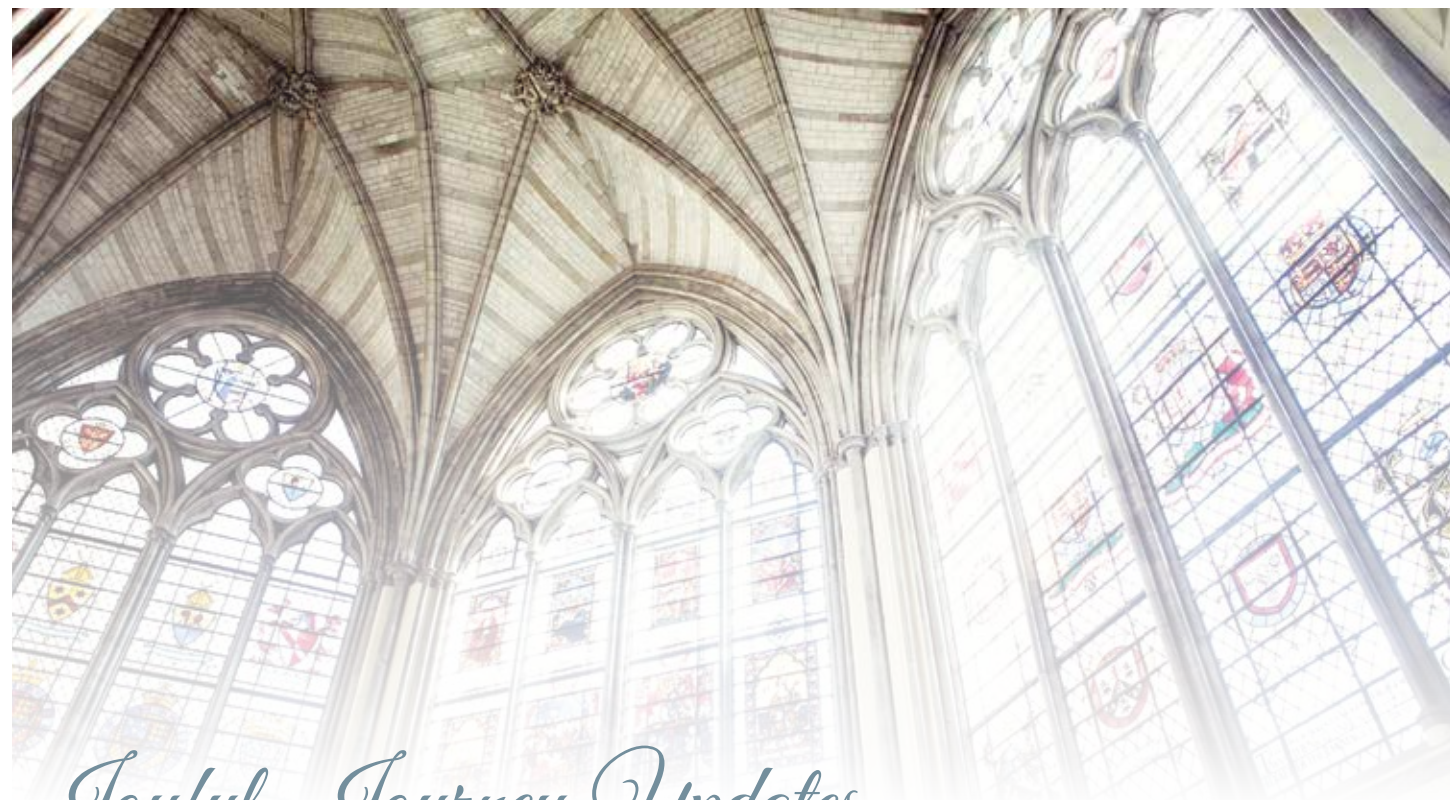
Fr. Stephen Jones*
(former Episcopalian priest)
(re-air from 9/24/18)

June 7

Nick de la Torre*
(former Unitarian and revert)

*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 Regin, a former pastor

"During my time as a Lutheran pastor, I always felt that I lacked a kind of absolute authority in what I was doing. Both the validity of my ordination and the correctness of my exegesis of the Bible were something I increasingly began doubting without daring fully to confront these disturbing questions. It was a liberation for me to see how a Mass could be conducted free of that pulpit personality-cult that I often witnessed in my Protestant surroundings. Here in the Mass was something much deeper and more rock-solid than I had ever known. A true apostolic succession was the secret behind this authority in Catholic worship. Precisely therefore have I decided to rejoice in my new-found Church, come what may."

From a former pastor "I just finished my pastor's meeting. Today I resigned from my denomination. Thank you for your encouragement. Tomorrow is my first day on my new job. Thank you for your prayers and help because of that I could free myself from doctrines which are not according to the Word of God. I will surely pray for you all. I am really thankful. I have no words to explain my joy. Thank you!"

From Rachel, on the journey "My husband and I are actually in RCIA now. Our two children were baptized on October 25 and we will be coming into the Church . . . I listen to Relevant Radio and have been reading some wonderful books about the saints and watching videos on FORMED. God is so good and we are so happy to be coming into the Church. Thank you for the support and prayers!"

From Doug, on the journey "I just finished reading Fr. Ray Ryland's memoir *Drawn From Shadows Into Truth*. Wow! What an incredible journey. I'm still as fired up about Christ and His Church (the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church — the Catholic Church) as ever, however, I'm still in a holding pattern with regards to becoming Catholic. I'm in the same boat as a lot of converts who eventually did convert, but had to wait until their spouse was more receptive. In the meantime, I am constantly educating my fellow Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ on so much false information they have accumulated over the years about the Catholic Faith. Thanks for your continued prayers and may the Lord continue to bless you and the entire staff at CHN in a mighty way. I truly appreciate all that CHN does to reveal the real beauty and splendor of what Catholicism is all about." ■

Prayer List

Clergy

- **For Jeff, a Methodist pastor** who has been on the journey a long time and is beginning to face the reality that he needs to think about how he will support his family when he leaves to enter the Catholic Church.
- **For Robert, an Episcopal priest** who has begun exploring the possibility of becoming a Catholic priest through the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.
- **For Jon, an Anglican** who last year put his journey toward the Church on hold but now feels the Holy Spirit calling him once again, that he will be able to explain to his wife what the Lord is calling him to do.
- **For a Bible Church pastor** who has been watching *The Journey Home* and other video resources from the Coming Home Network and finds himself drawn to the Church but has so many questions, that the Lord may lead him to the answers he seeks.
- **For Nickolas, a pastor** convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and beginning to think seriously of how to make the difficult transition with his family, how to find another means of income, and how to explain this to his congregation.
- **For Andrew, a Lutheran pastor** attracted to the teaching of the Catholic Church but who has no idea how he could move forward given what he believes to be his calling as a pastor and his responsibilities as a family man.
- **For Joshua, a Protestant pastor** facing extreme opposition to his interest in the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him the grace to deal with this while he continues to learn and grow in his love for the Church.
- **For John, a Baptist pastor** who recently started watching *The Journey Home*, had never even heard of a convert from Protestantism to the Catholic Church, and now finds himself struggling with what this could mean for him, his ministry, and his family.
- **For Jose**, who grew up Catholic, became a Church of Nazarene pastor, and is now meeting with a priest and on his way back into the Church.

- **For a Pentecostal pastor** convinced that he must return to the Catholic Church where he was baptized as an infant, that the Lord will help him overcome his fear and lead him forward.
- **For an Evangelical pastor** who has come to the Coming Home Network looking for assistance in finding the truth in the midst of so many Protestant denominations and sects, that the Holy Spirit will lead him and give him clarity.
- **For Lanny, an Episcopal priest** who is drawn to the Church but wrestles with the question of the Orthodox church.
- **For Joshua, an evangelical missionary** who began to study Catholicism with his wife during the COVID-19 lockdown and is now firmly on a path toward the Church but worried about their respective families who are very anti-Catholic.

Laity

- **For Percy, a Southern Baptist**, that, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he may overcome his doubts about the Catholic Church.
- **For a Presbyterian in California**, that he might enter into life with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For a Jehovah's Witness**, that he may discover the joy of the Lord Jesus in the Catholic Church.
- **For Richard**, that his quest to learn more about the Catholic Faith would bring him home to the Church.
- **For Andrew in California**, that the Holy Spirit would open his heart to the fullness of the faith that Jesus is offering to him.
- **For Ricardo, a Presbyterian**, that he may act on his belief that the Catholic Church is true and come into full communion with the Church.
- **For Colin, a non-denominational Christian**, that his mind may be opened to all that Jesus has to offer him in the Catholic Faith.
- **For a Baptist**, that he may successfully complete the long road that he has been traveling and arrive at the altar of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For Chris, a Presbyterian in the south**, that both he and his wife would discover the fullness of the faith in the Catholic Church.
- **For a Reformed Baptist in Arizona**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him through no-man's-land and into the Catholic Church.
- **For Stephen, a member of Calvary Chapel**, that, by digging into the Bible and Church history, he may discover and accept the truth of the Catholic Faith.
- **For Harrison, a Lutheran**, that he may, by the grace of God, overcome his fears and enter into all the sacramental graces Jesus wishes to offer to him.
- **For Nick in the south**, that the Holy Spirit would open his wife's heart who is completely opposed to Catholicism.
- **For Lynn and her husband** to find a good, faithful priest to give them instruction so they can come fully home to the Catholic Church.
- **For a woman who is very drawn to the Church** but her husband is anti-Catholic and her journey is causing problems in their marriage.
- **For Jen**, that Our Lady will bring her ever closer to Jesus and His Church.
- **For Peter** to once again be drawn to the fullness of the faith within the Catholic Church.
- **For Elizabeth** who is beginning RCIA and reading about Catholicism, that the Holy Spirit will guide her steps.
- **For a former Catholic in Georgia** who no longer feels led to pursue returning to the Church, that she will continue seeking truth.
- **For a woman** whose husband is deeply involved in the Mormon church and she feels like she can't move forward with her interest in Catholicism at this time.



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.

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

My wife and I agreed that I had to have a sign that I was to go. The sign came when Sandi and I attended a leadership conference at a Protestant church in Halifax. While there, we learned about contemplative prayer, and the speakers freely acknowledged that this kind of prayer had been part of the Catholic monastic tradition for centuries. I was quite surprised when one speaker spent part of his allotted time talking about his changing view of Catholics. He even gave up a great deal of his time in order to have us watch an extended video greeting by Pope Francis, in which the Pope reached out to Protestants and asked them to pray for him. My wife and I agreed, I had my sign. I was to go to on pilgrimage.

In 2014, I was turning sixty, and as a birthday present, Sandi offered to send me with a group of Catholics from the Moncton, New Brunswick area, who were making a pilgrimage to the apparition site. Making this pilgrimage with a group of devoted Catholics was one of the most joyful experiences of my life. Although I'm sure it was something of a novelty to have a Baptist pastor travelling with them, I was treated with kindness, love, and unconditional acceptance by my fellow pilgrims.

In this eastern European town, I was introduced to the Catholic way of life. I was astounded to see that it was like having church all the time. St. James parish is located in the center of the village, and the activity never seemed to stop. Masses were being offered throughout the day in various languages. Adoration (contemplative prayer) was offered in the afternoon. With evening came the recitation of the Rosary, followed by a Holy Hour. Long lines of pilgrims stood before the confessionals. Everywhere I turned, everything pointed to Jesus Christ. I was impressed that even after people understood that I was a Baptist pastor, no one attempted to convert me to the Catholic Faith.

I left with the firm assurance that Mary was my true mother in the faith. I would later discover that my new-found revelation was firmly rooted in sacred Scripture, Catholic Tradition, and the teaching of the *Catechism*. For example, in John's Gospel, Jesus said to His mother from the cross, “woman, behold your son.” Then He said to John, the representative disciple of the Church, “behold your mother” (Jn 19:26-27). I had always interpreted this text as a dutiful son making sure His mother would be cared for after His death, but I came to understand that because Jewish law stipulated that a woman in Mary's position should be cared for by relatives, the arrangement Jesus made with John was His statement that His mother was now the mother of the Church, everybody's mother.

I also learned that there is a significant difference between worship and veneration (showing honor toward Mary). After all, Mary herself said, “from now on will all ages call me blessed” (Lk 1:48 NAB).

The Call of the East

Upon returning home, I began seeking out Fr. Mark Cherry, the priest at St. Thomas Aquinas–Canadian Martyrs Roman Catholic Church in Halifax. I had met him at an interdenominational ministry event prior to my pilgrimage.

Over the next few years, Fr. Cherry and I met many times and developed a friendship. He answered the questions I posed and often sent me away with articles to read that related to the matters I had raised concerning the Catholic Faith. I was also in touch with the Coming Home Network, and Jim Anderson was fielding my questions as well.

In addition to my struggle over Mary, I grappled with other “biggies.” These included

- The Eucharist
- The Communion of Saints
- Papal authority
- Confession of sins to a priest
- The liturgy of the Mass

Space won't permit me to recount how I resolved each of these issues, but I will deal briefly with some of them:

As a Baptist, I had always held the view that the Lord's Supper was symbolic and memorial. I could not understand the doctrine of transubstantiation,

which states that the bread and wine become the actual Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Then I began to take a deeper look at John, chapter six, where Jesus declares Himself to be the Bread of Life (see Jn 6:22-66).

I had thought He was using figurative speech, but as I read the text with fresh eyes, I realized chapter six of John's Gospel is a narrative, not an allegory or a parable. The listeners understood that Christ was speaking literally and became offended, so much so that they left the

gathering. It is noteworthy that our Lord did not call His listeners back and explain, “I was only using a figure of speech when I said I am the Bread of Life.”

As a Protestant, I thought that in the Eucharist, Catholics were sacrificing Christ over and over again, as if His death on the cross had been to no avail. I came to realize that this was a misunderstanding. The sacrifice of Christ is being re-presented to us as a liv-

I left with the firm assurance that Mary was my true mother in the faith. I would later discover that my new-found revelation was firmly rooted in sacred Scripture, Catholic Tradition, and the teaching of the *Catechism*.

...Journeys Home Continued...

ing sign, in which the mystery of His Real Presence literally comes to us in the eucharistic offerings of bread and wine.

I was surprised to learn that this had also been the view of the early Church. My readings from works of the early Church Fathers supported this. The doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist had been the norm until the schism of the Reformation.

I didn't have too much of a problem with the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. After all, the Book of Hebrews reminds us that "we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1). The Catholic Church believes in a living Church in which the people of God who are now in heaven intercede for us. Protestants often misinterpret seeking the intercession of the saints in heaven as praying to the dead, but I came to believe that asking someone in heaven to pray for me is no different from picking up the phone and sharing a prayer request with a fellow Christian or asking someone who is regarded as a prayer warrior to pray with me about a particular matter.

I also noted that my Protestant friends, while maintaining that the people in heaven have no awareness of matters here on earth, often gave evidence that they believed otherwise. I would hear such comments as, "Uncle Charlie is looking down on us"; "Grandma is listening to us right now and having a good laugh"; "On my birthday, I felt as if my father were near to me." I realized I couldn't have it both ways when it came to the Communion of Saints.

At first, I struggled with the liturgy of the Catholic Mass. As a Baptist, I had been used to an informal order of service, with my sermon as the high point. I slowly began to appreciate the beauty of the liturgy, with its ancient prayers, and understood that the worship was not all about me. The Mass is all about lifting up the King of kings and the sacrifice He made for sinners.

I've come to love the drama of the Mass as well. When I was a Protestant pastor, I did not ask the people in the pews to become engaged in what was going on, other than to sing the hymns and listen to what I had to say as I prayed for them and preached. When I started attending Mass, I found myself involved in a back-and-forth exchange of responses with the priest and sharing in

various expressive actions, such as making the Sign of the Cross and kneeling.

As a Protestant pastor, I set the preaching agenda for each Sunday, but in the Catholic Church, the priest follows the liturgy the Church has established for each Mass. I came to understand that, when I came to Mass each Sunday, the liturgy was Christocentric, meaning that wherever Catholics gathered throughout the world for the Mass, we were all involved in the same journey with Christ as the liturgical year took us from His birth to His death, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven.

A real eye-opener for me was the role of the Bible in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. As a Protestant, I had just assumed that the elevation of sacred Scripture was unique to Protestantism. After all, didn't we Protestants have big Bibles opened wide on our communion tables, and didn't the pulpit, where the Word of God was read and proclaimed each Sunday, occupy the central position at the front of our sanctuaries?

I was delighted to find out that at any given Sunday Mass one could expect to hear two readings from the Old Testament (the First Reading and the Psalm) and two from the New Testament (the Second Reading and the Gospel). Furthermore, the liturgy is designed in

such a way as to take the faithful through most of the Bible in a three year cycle, if one attends both Sunday and weekday Masses or makes use of a missalette (a booklet of daily Scripture readings and ritual for each Mass).

There was one final step in my conflict-ridden journey. I knew that before I could consider becoming a Catholic Christian I would need to be very grounded in my faith. As a Baptist pastor, I faced an enormous credibility issue if I failed to conduct a proper and thorough investigation.

On the internet, I discovered the Institute of Catholic Culture, led by Fr. Hezekias Carnazzo. The Institute was offering a webinar on the Catholic *Catechism* led by Monsignor Charles Pope, a well-known Catholic writer. Under Monsignor Pope's tutelage, I came to appreciate the beauty of the Catholic Faith and felt that I had at last found the fullness of truth for which I had been searching. I read through the entire *Catechism* in the course of a year.

I knew I had to share the news with the Protestant pastor of the church I had been attending ... I was not expecting him to be supportive of my decision and was astounded at his reaction. He said, 'I've known for about eight months that your heart was in the east.' That seemed an odd thing to say, so I asked, 'What do you mean, east?' My pastor replied, 'Rome.' Then he blessed me and wished me well as I began an adventure that took me along an ancient way.

...Journeys Home Continued...

It was 2018, and I was a spiritual basket case. After years of study, prayer, and reflection, I was still torn between my long-held Baptist beliefs and the discoveries I was making in the Catholic Church. The inner conflict was taking a toll on me, and I longed for a resolution.

I made another pilgrimage to the same apparition site and asked my mother Mary to pray for me that I would be given a clear and certain word of direction. I returned home without having received that word.

Advent had arrived, and Fr. Mark and I decided to get together for lunch on a Wednesday. Earlier that morning, I received a call from Fr. Hezekias Carnazzo with the Institute of Catholic Culture in which he encouraged me to step out in faith and make a decision for the Catholic Church. Then, during the course of our conversation at lunch, Fr. Mark said to me, "I think you need to make a decision." I responded, "are you looking for more converts?" Fr. Mark replied: "I'm happy with my little flock, but I just think you need to make a decision one way or the other. You are more prepared to be a Catholic than anyone else I have met." Instantly, I thought of the Scripture verse, "on the testimony of two or three witnesses, a fact shall be established" (2 Cor 13:1 NAB).

I went home still thinking that I had not received a clear and certain word from God. (The reader can be forgiven for thinking me deaf to the Spirit of God.) I continued to pray. Finally, I made up my mind. Even without the final word I sought, I would become a Catholic. I phoned Fr. Mark and asked for a brief meeting with him prior to Eucharistic Adoration that night.

Having made my decision, I knew I had to share the news with the Protestant pastor of the church I had been attending with Sandi in Halifax, where I had retired. I was not expecting him to be supportive of my decision and was astounded at his reaction. He said, "I've known for about eight months that your heart was in the east." That seemed an odd thing to say, so I asked, "what do you mean, east?" My pastor replied, "Rome." Then he blessed me and wished me well as I began an adventure that took me along an ancient way.

That evening, I arrived at Fr. Mark's office and told him tearfully of my decision to become a Catholic Christian. When I told him that my Protestant pastor had said he knew my heart was in the east, Fr. Mark looked stunned. He asked me to repeat what the pastor had told me. Then he said, "I'm going to show you something."

Fr. Mark picked up his copy of lectionary readings and turned to the Scripture reading for the coming Sunday. He had made notes in it as he prepared his homily. One of the Sunday readings was to be from Baruch 5:1-9, which reads, in part, "rise up Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children. Gathered from east to west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God" (Baruch 5:5 NAB).

Over the top of the phrase, "look to the east," the priest had written the word "Eucharist."

Fr. Mark proceeded to explain to me the significance of the east in the Catholic Church. He noted that:

- Traditionally Catholic churches are built facing east.

- In the Book of Ezekiel we read, "there was the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east!" (Ezek 43:2 NAB).
- In the Christmas story, the wise men come from the east, following a star from the east (Matt 2:1-3).
- Christ said of His return to earth, "just as the lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:27 NAB).

The struggle and turmoil were over. I slumped in relief. God had given me a clear and certain word. My mother Mary and my other prayer partners had not failed in their intercession for me. I had made the journey home.

I was confirmed as a Roman Catholic Christian at Easter Vigil 2019 and am now active in St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs Roman Catholic Church, Halifax, as a greeter, lector (reader), Alpha team member, and soon-to-be Bible study leader.

People often want to know how my wife, Sandi, reacted to my decision to become a Roman Catholic Christian. As one might expect, she was troubled by my decision. It helped that our pastor was so supportive of me and had given me his blessing.

The Holy Spirit also spoke to Sandi about the matter following a healing Mass that was led by Fr. Mark Cherry. She experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit during the service, and His presence continued to linger with her as we went home. In the morning, Sandi shared with me that she had heard the Holy Spirit telling her, "What has happened to Alan is my doing. You are both exactly where you need to be at the present time."

I've made the journey home, but my journey with Christ, the King whose glory is coming from the east, continues. Praised be to Jesus Christ! ■



ALAN ORSER is a blogger and resides in Halifax, NS. You are invited to contact Alan. He welcomes any questions and on request will provide information on accessing his television interview with Mary TV. Email him at revalanorser@gmail.com. To view his blog, Explorers of the Way, go to: explorersoftheway.wordpress.com/.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

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

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ON THE JOURNEY?

RECENT CONVERT?

Easter is the time that many people officially enter the Catholic Church. If you have been recently received into the Church, please let us know so that we can update our records and welcome you home!

Additionally, whatever the status of your spiritual journey, we'd love to hear an update and answer any questions you might have.

Please reach out to our *Pastoral Care Team* at info@chnetwork.org.