



## June 2021 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Why and How I Became Catholic

By B.A. Lewis

When people ask me about my decision to join the Catholic Church, I like to divide the question into two. There's the question, "*Why* did you become Catholic?" Then there's the question, "*How* did you become Catholic?" The first question can be answered in a single sentence: I entered the Catholic Church because I became convinced in my head and in my heart that the Catholic Church is who she claims to be: the one Church that our Lord Jesus Christ founded to carry out His mission in this world and which is guided by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach the fullness of the Gospel.

The answer to the "how" question is a story, and it follows pretty closely the three stages of conversion noted by G.K. Chesterton: "It is my experience that the convert commonly passes through three stages or states of mind .... The first phase is that of the young philosopher who feels that he ought to be fair to the Church of Rome. He wishes to do it justice; but chiefly because he sees that it suffers injustice .... The second stage is that in which the convert begins to be conscious not only of the falsehood but the truth, and is enormously excited to find that there is far more of it than he would ever have expected .... And the third stage is perhaps the truest and the most terrible. It is that in which the man is trying not to be converted" (*The Catholic Church and Conversion*, Ignatius Press, 2006, pp. 72-77). If I may be allowed to sum up each of these in a word: fairness, discovery, and flight.

### Beginning to be Fair to the Catholic Church

I like to say that the first stage started when I read C.S. Lewis in the 9th grade. But it really started long before

that. I grew up United Methodist in Georgia, the son of two United Methodist "pastor's kids." In fact, three of my four grandparents were ordained ministers in the United Methodist Church. So I had been baptized as a small child and was active in Sunday school, children's choirs, and eventually the church youth group. In the summer before I started high school, I attended a "Chrysalis Flight," an intensive three-day Christian discipleship retreat experience for teens. I came away from that weekend with a desire to grow in my faith, and I picked up a copy of *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Reading that book changed my life. It was like opening a door onto a whole new world. It was the first book I read that caused me to think seriously about my Christian faith, to think about it not merely as something good and true, but as the only explanation (among all the philosophies and religions of the world) that really explains everything. It was my introduction to apologetics, philosophy, and rational argument. I was hooked. I loved the simple profundity of Lewis's style, his ability to take complex concepts and explain them in

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Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

everyday language. I started reading every C.S. Lewis book I could get my hands on: *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Problem of Pain*, collections of essays and sermons. C.S. Lewis became my undisputed favorite author.

Through my reading of Lewis, I first encountered the doctrine of purgatory. As Lewis writes in *Letters to Malcolm*:

Our souls *demand* Purgatory, don't they? Would it not break the heart if God said to us, "It is true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy"? Should we not reply, "With submission, sir, and if there is no objection, I'd *rather* be cleaned first." "It may hurt, you know" — "Even so, sir." (C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964, pp. 108f.)

As a Methodist, I considered the idea of a post-mortem cleansing a logical conclusion from John Wesley's idea of Christian perfection. If God is going to sanctify me by His grace, if He is going to work in me to make me perfect as He is perfect, then what happens if I die before that process is complete? Will God leave undone the good work He began? Or will He "bring it to completion" (Philippians 1:6)?

About a year after I started reading Lewis, my dad came into my room one day and said, "You know, Benjamin, if you like C.S. Lewis so much, there's another author I think you should read." Then he told me about G.K. Chesterton. "There's a book of his that is similar to *Mere Christianity*, and I think we have a copy of

it downstairs. I'll try to find it for you." He came back a little later and handed me a copy of *Orthodoxy*. I started reading, and was almost instantly conflicted.

I was a devoted fan of Lewis. He was not only my favorite author, he was my first literary love. But Chesterton seemed every bit as clever and insightful as Lewis, if not more so. I hated to admit it, but perhaps I liked Chesterton even more than I liked Lewis. By the time I finished reading *Orthodoxy*, I had resolved the conflict: though I retained my appreciation of C.S. Lewis, I had a new favorite author. I then began to read every Chesterton book I could get my hands on.

The more I read, the more I came up against the fact that Chesterton joined the Catholic Church as an adult. In many of his post-conversion books, he wrote things in defense of Catholicism that seemed to make sense to me, but I didn't know enough about the Catholic Church to know what I really thought about it all. The more I read, the more I had to admit that I didn't know much about the Catholic Church, but I wanted to learn more.

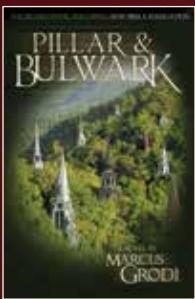
In high school, I also began reading some early Church Fathers and medieval theologians. The youth director at my Methodist church started a theological reading club for the juniors and seniors in high school. He called it the "Dead Theologians Society." We met weekly to read and discuss such works as *The Confessions* of St. Augustine, *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius, and selections from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. The group was supposed to continue with readings from Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and more recent theologians, but we never got that far before the group's attendance dwindled and the project was abandoned. On my own, I was also reading St. Anselm. As a result, much of my early theological reading was decidedly Catholic. No one told me to be careful about what these authors wrote. No one warned me that Methodists didn't believe everything that Augustine or Aquinas believed. I simply read these great thinkers, and found that what they had to say made a lot of sense. So, at the same time I was reading Chesterton, I was also getting a solidly Catholic introduction to theology.

I also experienced in high school my first encounters with the mischaracterizations of Catholic teaching. Let me give two examples. The first occurred in Sunday School, where I was participating in a "Disciple Bible Study" that covered most of the Old and New Testaments in 34 weeks of daily readings with weekly meetings to discuss. When we read Matthew 16:13-20, the famous "you are Peter" passage, I knew enough about Catholicism to know that this was the basis of the idea of papal authority. So I asked my youth director, who was teaching the class, "Why aren't we Catholics?" He seemed a little surprised at the question, and one of the other students made a dismissive remark about the appalling behavior of the popes in the Renaissance. I didn't know enough then to explain the Catholic position, but I instinctively knew that the sinfulness of individual popes in history was irrelevant to the question of teaching authority. (Infallibility is not the same as impeccability.)

Another example of the unfair mischaracterization of Catholicism came when I attended a Christian music festival with my youth group. One of the speakers at the music festival argued that Catho-

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### PILLAR & BULWARK BY MARCUS GRODI



This month, the CHNetwork staff would like to suggest the novel *Pillar & Bulwark* to our readers. *Pillar & Bulwark* continues the story begun in *How Firm a Foundation* of a Protestant minister striving to serve Jesus under the weight of an escalating crisis: how can he be certain that what he is preaching is eternally true and not just his opinion? After nearly losing his life to an assassin,

Stephen LaPointe resigned from his pastorate as a Congregational minister. He made this radical decision as the result of a crisis of truth. This decision had many immediate ramifications for his vocation, his career, and, most significantly, for his marriage and family. Now a year later, no one knows where he is. He has disappeared. Out of love, as well as remorse, several people — an old friend, his estranged wife, and a potential enemy — set out separately to find him. This is a story of conversion — of heart, of mind, and of love.

Go to [www.chresources.com](http://www.chresources.com) to purchase this book and other resources about the Catholic Church.



## ON THE JOURNEY

# Is *Sola Scriptura* Scriptural? Part V: Not by Wonder Bread Alone\*

By Ken Hensley

I want to begin by sharing a section from *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation from Vatican II:

For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known .... It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls (paragraphs 9-10).

Epistemology is that branch of philosophy that searches into the question of “how we know.” Well, at the level of what we might refer to as “theological epistemology” — the question of how we know what is and is not Christian doctrine — when we compare Catholicism and Protestantism we are comparing two very different *systems* of thought.

In the Catholic system, authority resides in the interworking of three realities: the written Tradition (inspired Scripture), the unwritten Tradition (the apostolic teaching as it was preserved in the Church), and the teaching authority of the Church (the Magisterium). It is these three that *Dei Verbum* insists are “so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

In the Protestant system, this is rejected. Authority (binding authority) is seen as residing in *Scripture alone*. As our two contemporary Protestant scholars Geisler and MacKenzie put it: “the Bible, nothing more, nothing less — and nothing else — is all that is necessary for faith and practice.” This is *sola Scriptura*.

So we have two very different methods here for deciding Christian doctrine, two very different “theological epistemologies.”

For several months now we’ve been examining the question: is *sola Scriptura* Scriptural? In this article, we’re going to look at two final passages — one that Protestants often see as supporting the idea of *sola Scriptura*, and then a second that is often taken as near proof of *sola Scriptura*.

### The Noble Bereans

The first is in Acts 17. The context is that Paul and Silas are on their first missionary journey across ancient Greece and come to the city of Thessalonica.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” Some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason,

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seeking to bring [Paul and Silas] out to the people (verses 1-5).

So a riot begins to break out and in the commotion the city officials arrange to have Paul and Silas hustled out of town. Picking up at verse 10:

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Here's how the argument goes. The Bereans are described as being "more noble" than those in Thessalonica. And why? Because they don't simply accept what Paul and Silas tell them as the Gospel truth. Instead they examine the Scriptures to see if what these men are teaching is true! They treat Scripture as the final court of appeal! Thus, *sola Scriptura*!

When someone presents this line of thought to me now, the first thing I do is ask a simple question: are you saying that Paul's teaching was *not* authoritative?

Because remember, in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul praised the Thessalonians for receiving his "teaching," when he came to them, "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God." And in his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul reminds his readers that the Gospel he "preached" when he first came to them was given him by direct revelation from Christ. He goes on to pronounce a curse on those who would dare to preach "another Gospel!"

So it's *not* the case that Paul's teaching *wasn't* authoritative, that Scripture was the "sole infallible rule of faith and practice" for these Bereans.

If there was an issue, it was simply that the Bereans *didn't know that Paul's teaching is authoritative*! Think of it. This guy comes to town preaching. They don't know him from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How do they know that he's a chosen spokesman for the Messiah and that he's bringing the very revelation of God to them? They want to see how what he is telling them lines up with Scripture. It makes sense!

But once they come to believe that Paul is an Apostle, do you think they continued to treat everything he said as suspect, as requiring confirmation from the Old Testament before being accepted? I don't think so.

That's my initial and primary response. But secondarily, I think the Protestant apologist who wants to find "*sola Scriptura*" in this passage is reading Luke's words here with a negative tone that isn't really warranted by what he actually says. When Luke describes the Jews in Berea as "more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so," I don't see Luke describing a situation where the Bereans are saying, "Oh yeah? This is what you say! We will examine the Scriptures and let you know what *we* think, Paul!"

Instead, I think Luke is describing a very different situation. Paul has come to them, and as he did to the Thessalonians, he has "argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ'" (Acts 17:3). The Bereans "welcome Paul's message with eagerness" and (I believe) in their *excitement* want to search the Scriptures to see for themselves the wonderful things Paul is telling them.

In other words, I think the tone is positive and joyful, not doubting and demanding of proof that what Paul is saying is true.

## All Scripture is Inspired of God

The second passage we want to look at is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. There's no doubt: this is *the primary passage* brought forward as supporting — if not demonstrating — the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. In every debate on this subject this is the key passage appealed to.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Quoting again from Geisler and MacKenzie, here's the argument: "Scripture states that it is inspired and competent for a believer to be equipped for every good work. If the Bible alone is sufficient to do this, then nothing else is needed."

In response to this argument, it has been common for Catholic apologists to point out that in the context Paul is speaking to Timothy about the Old Testament. A few verses earlier Paul speaks of how Timothy "from childhood has been acquainted with the Sacred Writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). So when he goes on in the next verse to say, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable..." is he saying that all Timothy needs is the Old Testament?

But here's how I have come to respond to this.

It's Paul's use of the word "profitable" that stands out to me. He says that Scripture is "profitable" for teaching, reproof, correction, and so forth, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

A question comes to mind: when we say that something is "profitable" — that something is "useful" for accomplishing a particular goal, do we *normally mean* to say that *nothing else is needed* to accomplish that goal, that nothing else might also be "profitable" or "useful"?

Let me illustrate. My daughter has eight children. Imagine that as a concerned father and grandfather, I say to her, "You need to make sure the kids are eating loads of Wonder Bread. After all, I remember the advertisement saying that Wonder Bread builds strong bodies in twelve different ways, and we want them to be complete, prepared for physical feats of any kind. Right?"

Would she think I was saying that nothing else is needed? Would anyone listening to me imagine that my *intention* was to say that *all* my grandchildren need in order to be perfectly healthy is Wonder Bread? No. Everyone listening would know precisely what I meant and yet I would be using words that *almost exactly mirror Paul's words here*.

There's a passage in the Epistle of St. James that in terms of structure parallels 2 Timothy 3:16-17 very closely. Listen to what James says.

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, *in order that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (Jas 1:2-4, emphasis added).

Now, it's true that the Greek words James uses here translated "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing," are not exactly the same Greek words Paul uses in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. But I think you can see that the structure of thought is nearly identical.

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James is speaking here of what will make the man of God spiritually mature, complete, lacking in nothing. And he says it is “steadfastness” in trials that will accomplish this. And so, again the question: does anyone reading James imagine that he intends to teach that all a Christian needs in order to become “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” is steadfastness in trials? Nothing else is needed? The inspired Scriptures aren’t needed? The sacraments? Prayer? Just steadfastness in trials?

I think it’s clear that what James *intends* in this passage is to emphasize how important (“profitable!”) it is to his reader’s growth in holiness that they exercise steadfastness in the face of trials. It’s not his intention to teach that this is *all one needs* in order to be perfect.

And I think the same is true of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Paul is intending to remind Timothy of the importance of Scripture, of how “profitable” the inspired Word of God is for making us complete. It doesn’t follow that Scripture is *all that is needed* to make us complete. What we have here is a classic non-sequitur. The Protestant apologist is attempting to wrench more from the words of Paul than are contained in them.

### **Sola Scriptura is a Default Position**

What have we seen in this review of the New Testament over the past months? We’ve seen that no one in the New Testament practiced *sola Scriptura*. We’ve seen that nowhere do the Apostles teach *sola Scriptura*. We’ve seen that nowhere do we find the Apostles preparing their churches for a time when they will be gone and their living authority will be no more and *sola Scriptura* will become the Church’s *sole infallible rule*.

And then, when we look at the passages that are supposed to imply *sola Scriptura*, we find that they only imply *sola Scriptura* once you assume that the Catholic view of Apostolic Tradition and the Church is wrong.

While still a Baptist pastor, what I came to realize over time was that I had embraced *sola Scriptura* not because it was something I saw actually taught in the New Testament. It was simply what

one believes when one has accepted the authority of Scripture and doesn’t believe in the authority of the Church; when one doesn’t believe that the kind of authoritative Church we see Jesus *establishing* in the New Testament, the Church we see *functioning* in the New Testament, exists any longer.

I was also coming to realize that this is precisely how *sola Scriptura* came about at the time of the Reformation. It wasn’t because Luther and Calvin performed a rigorous inductive study of the New Testament and found *sola Scriptura* clearly taught in its pages. It was born at the moment the Reformers ceased to believe what they had believed all their lives, that there existed on earth a unified spiritual authority, the Catholic Church.

To be continued... ■

\*See the January-May 2021 issues for previous installments in this series, online at [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org).

## **SOLA SCRIPTURA**

To read more about the topic of *sola Scriptura*, our exclusive CHResource *The Bible Alone?* presents a compelling look at the biblical roots, historical precedent, and logic behind using only the Bible as an infallible source of truth. This short book affirms the importance of Scripture as a divinely given foundation for our faith and also encourages the reader to consider the need for an authority established by Christ for its trustworthy interpretation. To obtain a copy of this book, please visit [chresources.com](http://chresources.com) or call 740-450-1175.



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## SAVE THE DATE!

Please consider joining us for our upcoming CHNetwork retreat. For converts and those on the journey, this retreat will be a wonderful opportunity to go deeper in your faith.

**Oct 11-14, 2021** Holy Name Retreat Center, Houston, TX  
To learn more or to register, please go to [chnetwork.org/retreats/](http://chnetwork.org/retreats/) or contact Ken Hensley at [kenh@chnetwork.org](mailto:kenh@chnetwork.org) or 740-450-1175.

## CONTACT THE CHNETWORK



**CHNetwork**  
P.O. Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH  
43702-8290



740-450-1175



[info@chnetwork.org](mailto:info@chnetwork.org)



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## 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](http://community.chnetwork.org).

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



### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 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

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

**June 7**

Nick De La Torre\*  
(revert and former Unitarian)

**June 14**

Fr. John Lipscomb\*  
(former Episcopal bishop)  
(re-air from 10/8/18)

**June 21**

Dan Teller\*  
(convert from Judaism)

**June 28**

James and Kelli Beaumont\*  
(former Methodist youth ministers)

**July 5**

Charles Hoffman\*  
(convert from Judaism)  
(re-air from 10/29/18)

\*Schedule is subject to change.

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





## Joyful Journey Updates

*This month, we'd like to share with you some of the encouraging messages we've received from those who have recently become Catholic. Thank you for your partnership in our apostolate which allows us to help them.*

**From Kayla** "I was received into the Church this weekend — praise God! Baptized, confirmed, and First Holy Communion! ... I am so honoured and blessed with His humility to come to me even in this very different way. Since it was an outdoor 'drive-in' Mass, I was able to have so many family and friends present, as well, which was such a gift."

**From Brian** "I was confirmed in the communion of Christ's Catholic Church in the Easter Vigil. Alleluia! I made my first confession a few weeks ago and entered into a schedule of making confession once a week. I thank you for your prayers for me. I made an honest confession, the only way in which it was not complete is because of sins forgotten . . . I do not know in what manner I am going to move forward in the Church. The Knights of Columbus have extended an invitation to me. I am inquiring to learn which religious orders have Tertiary affiliation. And my RCIA instructor has asked me to become her assistant in two or three years time, after I have spent some time growing in the Church. I received many smiling welcomes into the Church last night, and more after this Easter morning's Mass."

**From Anna-Maria** "Thank you so much for your kind message, it is so nice to hear from you. I'm so sorry it's taken me so long to get back to you! But I have been doing very well, I was just received into the Church at the Easter Vigil!! I am so happy to be united with all Catholics now and to be officially Catholic. It was such a special day and everything went very well. I love going to Confession & Mass! My father will also probably be converting to the Faith eventually, and I think my mom will also eventually return. Despite all the hardship of last year there has been so much grace and the Lord has definitely been at work in my family! Please pray that God will strengthen my parents to do the right thing. Thank you so much!!"

**From Sarah** "We are doing wonderful. We were received into the Church on March 27 at the Saturday morning Mass. We were therefore able to receive Jesus through the Eucharist every day of Holy Week. It has been the best and most beautiful week of our lives. It is so much easier to walk in the light of Jesus when you have taken the Eucharist in."

**From Treva** "Brian and I were received into the Church on March 14th. Everything went well, and we're very happy about our becoming Catholic. We were both nervous about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but it was actually a tremendous experience. I

felt so light, and it was so freeing that the fear was nothing compared to the wonderful blessing of being released from the burden of past sins, and being able to hear the words of absolution. Then, being able to receive the true Eucharist is such a joy and a privilege. When I was a traditional Anglican, we worshiped in a catholic manner and we held to the sacraments as a means of receiving God's grace, but I always felt like something was missing, or maybe lacking is a better term. I think that was because we didn't have a true priesthood. The succession of holy orders had been broken in the 17th century, and although the claim is that the Anglican Church is a branch of the Catholic Church, after I researched it, that argument doesn't hold water. *The Book of Common Prayer* has a beautiful liturgy, and I miss it, but it was written in a very vague and ambiguous way, probably intentionally because of the mixture of religion and politics, and having to shift faithful Catholic people of that time into the new state religion of the Anglican Church. Although I loved the beauty, I wanted the spiritual reality more, and I found it in the Catholic Church. We have a lot to learn yet, but as we continue our spiritual journey, I feel so much more connected to the saints in heaven and to fellow Catholic Christians around the world. Thank you for all your help and encouragement." ■

# Prayer List

## Clergy

■ **For Bret, a minister in Texas**, that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide him as he investigates the teachings of the Catholic Church.

■ **For Jeremiah, a pastor** being drawn to the Church, that the Holy Spirit would give him wisdom and his wife openness as he begins to tell her what he's learning.

■ **For a former Protestant seminary student** who entered the Church on Easter of 2020 and is in the process of discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church.

■ **For a Pentecostal pastor** who has been on the journey a long time and has gone in and out of RCIA, but has struggled with the scandals in the Church and not yet been able to decide whether to become Catholic.

■ **For Brian, a Methodist pastor** who is convinced he must become Catholic and is struggling with how he will support his family.

■ **For Jon**, who last year put his journey toward the Church on hold but now finds himself being drawn once again, that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead him home.

■ **For Darshak, who resigned his Protestant ministry** to enter the Church, found a new job, and is excited about moving toward becoming Catholic, that the Lord will give him wisdom as he leads his family and bless him financially so that he can support them.

■ **For Jacob, a pastor** convinced of the truth but strongly opposed by everyone around him, that the Lord will give him wisdom and fortitude as he attempts to follow the truth and love his family at the same time.

■ **For Michael, a former Pentecostal pastor and his wife**, who were raised Catholic and have now made the decision to return home.

■ **For a Vineyard pastor** who wants to return to the Catholic Church and is struggling with how to deal with everything this will mean for his family and livelihood.

■ **For Brook** who has wanted to become Catholic for some time and is exploring employment possibilities that would allow him to support his family and enter the Church.

■ **For an Anglican priest** who is drawn to the Catholic Church and struggling very much with strong opposition from everywhere, that the Lord will give him courage.

■ **For Jay, a non-denominational pastor** who was raised Catholic and finds himself drawn back toward the Church into which he was baptized.

■ **For Charles, a Protestant pastor** who is being removed from his position because his denominational leadership learned that he was considering becoming Catholic, that the Lord will provide him with a means to support his family.

## Laity

■ **For Mark**, that our Lord Jesus would heal the wounds in his soul caused by the lies he has been told about the Catholic Church.

■ **For Linda and her husband** who are on the journey but can't get questions answered at their local parish and are discouraged.

■ **For a former Catholic in New Jersey**, that God would give him a deep hunger for his Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and that he will again be able to partake of the table of the Lord.

■ **For Edward, an Evangelical** with a general interest in the Catholic Faith, that the Holy Spirit would touch his heart.

■ **For an Anglican in Canada** who was formerly of the liberal end of the Catholic spectrum, that he may embrace the freedom and joy of orthodox Catholic teaching.

■ **For Heather, an Evangelical**, as she learns more about the Catholic Church and seeks the Lord's will in her life, that He will guide her into all truth.



■ **For a Lutheran in Minnesota** to have clarity and peace in her discernment regarding becoming Catholic and that she will know how best to move forward with her journey.

■ **For an Evangelical in Belgium**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him as he discerns his entry into the Catholic Church.

■ **For a brother of the Jewish faith in California**, that he may embrace the graces of Jesus his Messiah in the Church founded by Him.

■ **For Frank**, that the truth and love of Jesus would effectively call him back home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For a Southern Baptist** as she discerns whether she should pursue her interest in the Catholic Church without the support of her husband.

■ **For Mark in Canada**, that he may find solid answers in the truths of the Catholic Faith as he continues to work his way out of secular materialism.

■ **For Jim, a Baptist**, that his hunger for the grace of the sacraments would bring him into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ **For a Baptist in Kentucky** who has a lot of fears and hesitations about committing to becoming Catholic, that Jesus will give her clarity.

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

lics were not real Christians, and he cited, among other things, their “superstitious” beliefs about communion. I remember being taken aback by his remarks, and I felt compelled to consult one of his books in the merchandise tent after his talk was finished. I encountered in his book arguments against Catholicism that, like his talk, seemed to misconstrue the Catholic position. Again, I didn’t know enough at that time to articulate a clear Catholic rebuttal of what he said, but I knew that his arguments rested on a faulty understanding of Catholic teaching. These experiences, and others, gave me a growing sense that the Catholic Church was frequently misunderstood and misrepresented by her opponents. I wasn’t yet ready to accept the Catholic Church’s claims, but I was beginning to have serious doubts about the arguments against those claims.

### Discovering the Catholic Church

By the time I had started as a freshman at Asbury College, a non-denominational Christian liberal arts college in Kentucky, the question was in my mind, “Should I become Catholic?” The question was not yet an urgent one, but I gave it a lot of thought and prayer and study. Three things in particular helped me along the way to answering that question in college.

The first major help came in the form of books. I had already been reading the Bible, Augustine, Anselm, C.S. Lewis, and G.K.

Chesterton. But now, at college, I had access to so much more. In addition to course textbooks and the resources of the college library, I was blessed to find several works of Catholic apologetics at local used bookstores. But the single greatest printed resource came from the college library’s book sale during my very first semester. It was 2003, and the college had ordered the second edition of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* for its library’s reference section. This meant they were selling the original 1967 edition of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, nineteen volumes in all, for a total of \$50. As a freshman in college, I didn’t have much money to spend, but I knew this was a good deal. So after thinking it

over, I bit the bullet and bought the set. For the next four years, it sat on the back of my desk in my college dorm room. Whenever I had a question about some Catholic teaching or practice, I would pull a volume off the shelf and start reading.

Conversations with my college friends were the second major help I received in answering the question, “Should I become Catholic?” One of the advantages of attending a non-denominational Christian college was that almost everyone took their Christian faith serious-

ly, but not everyone agreed on questions of theology. Many of my friends were some version of Methodist (whether United, or Free, or Evangelical), but one of my closest friends was an evangelical Presbyterian, raised in the Reformed tradition of John Calvin. So we frequently discussed and debated theological differences between Wesley and Calvin. One conversation in the cafeteria will suffice as a typical example. Someone raised the question of which of God’s attributes was most important. The Wesleyans at the table made a case for holiness as the fundamental divine attribute; my Calvinist friend, though clearly outnumbered, made a compelling case for sovereignty as more fundamental than holiness. I remember thinking at the time that the debate was fairly even, and perhaps there was something more fundamental than either holiness or sovereignty. So I looked up “divine attributes” in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, and found that there is something more fundamental: aseity (“from himself”-ness). As the *Catechism* puts it: “God is the fullness of Being and of every perfection, without origin and without end. All creatures receive all that they are and have from him; but he alone is his very being, and he is of himself everything that he is” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 213). So what distinguishes God from His creatures is not holiness or sovereignty per se, but the fact that God’s holiness and sovereignty (and all His other attributes) come from

Himself, whereas any holiness or sovereignty that we humans might attain comes not from ourselves but from God. This distinction not only helped me see a deeper Catholic answer to a Protestant debate about divine attributes; it also helped me to understand the difference between worshipping God and venerating the saints. God can make someone perfectly holy, and that person is still not God, because the difference between God and His creatures is not one of degree but of kind: God’s holiness is His own, from Himself; any holiness that we gain is pure grace, a freely bestowed gift from God. When we worship God, we praise Him for *who He is in Himself*. When we venerate the saints, we praise them for *what God has done in*

*and through them*. As long as that distinction is preserved, the more we praise the saints, the more it redounds to God’s glory.

This argument about divine attributes was one conversation out of dozens. From purgatory to saints to discerning God’s will, there were numerous questions that my friends and I discussed and debated. Sparring with people from different theological traditions helped me better understand my own, and drove me to see what answers the Catholic Church offered.

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Professors were the third major help I received in answering the question, “Should I become Catholic?” Several of my college professors had what I would call Catholic sympathies. They would say, although not in so many words, that they agreed with the Protestant Reformation as a whole, but they wished we had kept this one aspect of the Catholic Faith, or that one Catholic tradition. The trouble was that different professors had different sympathies. So, one by one, I started putting the pieces together. Whenever the subject of the Catholic Church came up in any of my college courses, I thought about it and related it to this question of becoming Catholic. In French classes, I was being exposed to a strong Catholic culture, with the celebration of saints’ feast days. In courses on ancient and medieval philosophy, I was reading more Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. Through music ensembles, I was being exposed to Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony, and various musical settings of the Mass. One of my English professors was a Chesterton scholar, and I had many fruitful conversations with him in his office.

But probably the most influential Catholic sympathy came in a history course on Western Civilization. The professor sought to present a fair and balanced picture of the state of Catholic Christianity on the eve of the Protestant Reformation. He made a particular point of saying it was not all bad. Yes, there was corruption in the hierarchy, but medieval and early Renaissance Catholicism also witnessed growth and dynamic renewal through new religious orders like the Dominicans and Franciscans, the fervent work and prayer of traditional monastic communities, the founding of universities, and the patronage of the arts. The professor presented a complex and nuanced picture of pre-Reformation Catholicism.

Then he had us read selected stories from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. One story in particular addressed the issue of corruption in the hierarchy of the Church, and turned the typical Protestant argument on its head. In the story, a Parisian Jew named Abraham surprises his Catholic friend by deciding to convert, even after visiting Rome and witnessing firsthand the corruption in the Church’s hierarchy. He explains that, from what he saw, the pope and the cardinals in Rome appeared to be doing their best to bring about the utter destruction of the Christian religion. However, since this did not occur, but instead Christianity grew and flourished, he became convinced that the Christian religion must truly be guided and pro-

tected by the Holy Spirit. From this story, and from the complex picture of pre-Reformation Catholicism that my history professor presented, I began to see that the sins of its leaders actually made the Catholic Church’s claims harder to dismiss. If the Catholic Church was merely a human institution, how could she survive — and thrive — with such weak and broken human leaders?

All of these ideas and experiences drove me to action. I had been reading books, debating with friends, and encountering Catholic sympathies in my professors. Now I needed to do something about it. So far it was all in the realm of ideas. I needed practical experience. So on January 9, 2005, the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, I made my first visit to a Catholic church for Sunday Mass. I looked up the closest parish to my college and found my way to St. Luke Catholic Church in Nicholasville, Kentucky. I was struck with how normal the Mass seemed. I am not sure what I expected, but the evident faith of the congregation dispelled any notion I had that Catholicism was merely a “dead tradition” or a bunch of people “going through the motions.” The Mass did not seem so different from the Methodist communion services of my upbringing. It was strangely familiar. Though I would not have said so at the time, in hindsight I would say it was like coming home for the first time. By this point

in my journey, I had gone well beyond being fair to the Catholic Church. I was now growing rather fond of it, discovering that it was true, not only occasionally, but regularly. In fact, it was proving a dependable source of wisdom and truth. I was well on my way to answering the question, “Should I become Catholic?” The question was now urgent, and my answer was imminent.

### Attempting to Flee from the Catholic Church

In the fall of my junior year of college, I began attending RCIA classes at St. Luke Catholic Church and started going to Mass every Sunday that October. I also decided to join the parish choir. These may not sound like the choices of someone who is trying to flee from Catholicism, but they were an attempt to immerse myself in the life of the Catholic Church

to see if personal experience would confirm my private study. I was putting all my reading and argumentation to the test. Was the Catholic Church really what Chesterton said it was? Did my experience in a real Catholic parish match what I had read in Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and various books of Catholic apologet-



...medieval and early Renaissance Catholicism also witnessed growth and dynamic renewal through new religious orders like the Dominicans and Franciscans, the fervent work and prayer of traditional monastic communities, the founding of universities, and the patronage of the arts. The professor presented a complex and nuanced picture of pre-Reformation Catholicism.



ics? Did the Catholic Church look from the inside like it did from the outside? In a way, I wanted my picture of Catholicism to be proven wrong. It would have been more convenient to keep the Catholic Church at arm's length, to admire and respect her while remaining Methodist. I was not exactly looking forward to the conversations I knew I would have with family and friends if I became Catholic. But my regular exposure to local Catholic worship and fellowship did nothing to overturn or contradict my years of study and prayer.

In my attempt to find a way out of joining the Catholic Church, I also started asking some trusted spiritual mentors, "Why aren't you Catholic?" I was hoping that their reasons would be sufficient for me, too. They were not. I found them admirable, but not applicable to me. I even had one professor warmly congratulate me on my impending decision, and confess that he had often wished he had the opportunity to learn more about the Catholic Church.

### The Unfathomable Final Step

As Chesterton says, "This note on the stages of conversion is necessarily very negative and inadequate. There is in the last second of time or hair's breadth of space, before the iron leaps to the magnet, an abyss full of all the unfathomable forces of the universe. The space between doing and not doing such a thing is so tiny and so vast" (*The Catholic Church and Conversion*, Ignatius Press, 2006, p. 83). My story so far has been rather cursory and preliminary. This is intentional, because even on the eve of my Catholic confirmation, I was not able to articulate fully all the ideas, impressions, and experiences that went into my decision to join the Catholic Church. It was such an intensely personal thing, I botched more than a few attempts to explain it to family and friends. There were a thousand tiny reasons that all amounted to the conviction that the Catholic Church was right, its teachings were true, and for all its human element, it was truly guided and directed by the Holy Spirit.

There was also in this whole process a growing awareness of being providentially guided to this conclusion. I had been raised by my parents, and encouraged by my Methodist upbringing, to look for God's hand at work in my life, and to follow Him with trust and confidence. I could now see enough of the past shape of my life to know what present decision I needed to make, even if I could not predict the future outcome. At the Easter Vigil of 2006, as a junior in college, I was confirmed and received into the Catholic Church.

### Further Growth in the Catholic Church

Some of my family and friends were afraid that by joining the Catholic Church I would be entering a spiritually cold and dark place. I have found it to be quite the opposite: dazzlingly full of light and warmth. I have been fortunate to know some wonderfully

kind confessors, wise spiritual directors, and dynamic homilists. I routinely have the Scriptures opened to me in new and compelling ways. I have made many Catholic friends and encountered in the

Catholic Church inspiring examples of faith, hope, and love. I have grown in my Catholic faith and have found a fervor and tenderness in Catholic devotions. I am nourished by the Word and the Sacraments. God has been immeasurably good to me. My heart is full.

After graduating from college with a degree in Classical Languages, I was accepted into graduate school at the Catholic University of America, where I received my master's and doctorate in Greek and Latin. In my time at CUA, I was further nurtured in my Catholic faith by daily Masses and frequent confessions at the

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and evening prayer at the Dominican House of Studies. I was also involved in a Gregorian chant schola and the young adult group at my local parish in Maryland. I have never regretted my decision or doubted my conviction that the Catholic Church is who she claims to be. In fact, after fourteen years of full communion in the Catholic Church, and worshipping at over 3,000 Masses in seven different countries, in seven different languages, I am more convinced than ever that I made the right decision, and that I am where God wants me to be. I am home. ■



*B.A. LEWIS entered the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil of 2006 and went on to receive a bachelor's degree in Classical Languages from Asbury College and a master's and doctorate in Greek and Latin from the Catholic University of America. He and his wife spent three years in Athens, Greece, and now live with their three children near Washington, DC, where Dr. Lewis works as the Director of Translation Services for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL).*

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