



August 2021 CHNewsletter

"Something Missing, Something Found"

By Tony Barrett 1

"ON THE JOURNEY — Is Sola Scriptura

Historical? Part II: The Bible or the Church?"

By Ken Hensley 3

EWTN's *The Journey Home* schedule 6

Joyful Journeys..... 7

Prayer List..... 8

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Something Missing, Something Found

By Tony Barrett Ph.D.

The Early Years I grew up going to several Baptist churches in a small town in north Georgia about an hour outside of Atlanta. Our Sunday mornings were usually filled with either in-person church or watching sermons on TV from well-known evangelical pastors. I can recall singing hymns, Sunday school in the church basement, WWJD bracelets, Wednesday night youth groups, and fiery sermons. But music was my family's favorite part of going to church. They loved gospel music, especially southern Appalachian-style songs. They would sometimes take me with them to gospel quartet concerts at little country churches. Typically, the music consisted of piano and sometimes a guitar. Sometimes, people would share their personal testimonies of how they came to know the Lord and we'd do communion sometimes and have baptisms once or twice a year.

During the summers, I attended vacation Bible school. The church bus would come to pick my sister and me up from our apartment complex. They would feed us, we would play games in the gym, and then we'd have some time in a youth church service. They would talk to us about the Lord through a series of lessons. We always got some sort of candy bar, which for me was a major highlight. I was baptized shortly after turning 14 and got my first Bible as a gift from my grandfather. Today it is a cherished family keepsake on my bookshelf.

For Baptists, you are baptized when you are old enough to profess faith in Christ, which is past the "age of accountability." It is seen as an outward, public profession of an inward faith that has already happened. In Baptist theology, the waters of baptism

don't save you; it's just a symbolic act. It's your faith in Christ and your acceptance of Christ that save you.

Jumping Into the Scriptures

As a new Christian, I was really excited to study the Bible. But then I started asking my grandfather questions about what I was reading and had a bit of a disconnect when comparing it with our Baptist worship services. One of my fondest Bible study memories is sitting up late with my grandfather, rattling off questions about the faith and what I was reading. As Christians, I knew that we didn't follow all of the Old Testament traditions or requirements to keep the kosher laws. Still, I didn't understand why our church didn't have a tabernacle, why we didn't have a Passover Lamb, and why there were no oils, no spices, no decorations

Continued on page 2 ➡

Journeys Home

in our church. The description of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Table of the Bread of the Presence were very specific in Exodus 25: "And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat" (Ex 25:18).

While I do not remember all of the details of that conversation with my grandfather (may his memory be eternal), I do recall discussing the disconnect that I was having between reading the Bible about how the Israelites worshiped God and what we did at church. We had four bare, white walls in our church. I knew that God couldn't be inconsistent in what He wanted. My grandfather agreed, and he also wasn't sure why that was, other than that was back then, and this was now. At our church, there seemed to be this idea that anything spiritual was good, and anything material or physical was bad. But in Genesis 1:31, the Word of God says: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, *it was very good*" (emphasis added). We couldn't disdain the physical or material elements of worship if God called everything He created "very good." God surely doesn't change His mind. I wanted to be faithful to how God wanted to be worshipped, and I felt there was something missing. This left me hungry to know more. It was a very confusing time for me as I considered the question of what is worship. So, I continued pondering it all.

Altar Calls, Getting Saved, and the Mind Game of "Faith Alone"

The emphasis in our church was asking Jesus into your heart to be your personal Lord and Savior. There would be an invitation to an "altar call," where one would go up to the front of the church. Interestingly, there was no actual altar in the church, but rather, a podium. The altar call was for the preacher to get everyone stirred up spiritually. It would culminate in the person dedicating himself to the Lord. Some people would do this repeatedly, rededicating their lives to the Lord as often as they felt they needed. People would answer the altar call, then the preacher would begin to pray that Jesus would come into their lives as their personal Lord and Savior. As I understood it, this was supposed to be a transformational moment in the life of the Christian believer. The preachers would get so immersed in the message that they would begin to

sweat, get red in the face, start getting short of breath, and would always have a handkerchief to wipe the sweat off their face. The verse that was preached from the pulpit was always Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

This understanding of "being saved," in the past tense, was for us a "lightning bolt" type of moment. If you begin to doubt whether or not you are genuinely saved, you weren't. I questioned my salvation a lot because of this emphasis on one-time salvation. I wasn't sure that I had actually been "saved," and when I asked about it, I was told that if I were truly saved, I would have faith and knowledge that I had been saved.

This only created more doubt, because I then had no confidence in having faith that I was saved. I thought, maybe I didn't say the words of the Sinner's Prayer right and needed to do it again and really mean it from the deepest depths of my heart. I surely didn't want to go to hell. Everyone in the congregation believed in "once saved, always saved": once you were saved, you were good to go. I wondered if that was all there was to it, and I was confused about what being "saved" was. I had serious issues with just simply saying the Sinner's Prayer.

Again, even though we taught salvation by faith alone, every sermon was about avoiding sin and doing good works. If my ticket was already punched, then the dilemma in my mind was that, if I were already going to heaven, it didn't matter what I did or how I lived my life. If all I have to do is profess Christ and say the Sinner's Prayer with a repentant heart, then I'm literally good to go. It was more of a transaction than a transformation, and that caused me a lot of consternation.

It didn't square with Christ saying: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:21). My experience of the doctrine of "faith alone" and saying the Sinner's Prayer left me with deep questions. I struggled to reconcile it with Scripture itself in light of James' letter: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:24).

Grape Juice and Crackers

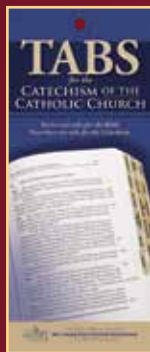
One of my most nagging doubts, in light of the New Testament and the Old Testament clearly mentioning wine, was why we used grape juice and crackers. In the Bible, wine is mentioned 240 times. Our church went to great lengths to convey that communion was "just a symbol," nothing more. But Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27). If it's only a symbol and not real and nothing more, then I'm not sure how this squares with Scripture. You can't be guilty of profaning "just a symbol" that isn't really real. The partaking of a symbol unworthily would be, at worst, just another symbolic act that isn't really real. Not to mention that Christ responded to His disciples' disputes on "eating his flesh": "so Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you

Continued on page 9 ➡

TABS FOR THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

This month, the CHNetwork staff would like to recommend our Tabs for the *Catechism*. These handy tabs give quick and easy reference to the teachings of the Catholic Church on 25 topics and include a subject index.

Go to chresources.org to order these tabs and other resources!



ON THE JOURNEY

Is *Sola Scriptura* Historical? Part II: The Bible or the Church?*

By Ken Hensley

Is *sola Scriptura* historical? What do we see when we look into the writings of the early Church Fathers, those bishops, theologians, and apologists living in the centuries immediately following the Apostles?

For example, how did Irenaeus, the first great biblical theologian of Christian history, understand the interworking of Scripture and Tradition as authorities within the Church? How did he imagine that disputes within the Church would and should be settled?

Did *he* teach that “the Bible, nothing more, nothing less — and nothing else — was all that [was] necessary for faith and practice”?

In terms of my own story, at the same time that I was coming to see that *sola Scriptura* wasn’t scriptural, I was also beginning to read the early Church Fathers to see what they had to say about this foundational issue of authority. As I read Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others, I found myself presented with a kind of conundrum, a kind of puzzle to be resolved: somehow both the written tradition of the Apostles (Scripture) and the unwritten tradition of the Apostles (Tradition) were presented as authoritative.

Inspired Scripture or Ecclesiastical Tradition?

From the beginning, Scripture was received as the sole inspired written record of the teaching of the Apostles.

Tradition, understood as the teaching of the Apostles as it was known, preserved, and passed down in the doctrine, life, and worship of the Church rather than in writing, was not viewed as “inspired.” The Old and New Testaments alone were believed to be “God-breathed.” And in the Fathers, we can find statements that could easily be taken as making the case for *sola Scriptura*.

For instance, listen to Cyril of Jerusalem, writing around AD 350 in his *Catechetical Lectures*:

For concerning the divine and Holy mysteries of the faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scriptures; nor must we be drawn aside by mere plausibility and artifices of speech. Even to me who tell you these things, give not absolute credence, unless you receive the proof of the things which I announce from the Divine Scriptures. For this salvation, which we believe depends not on ingenious reasoning, but on demonstration of the Holy Scriptures.

This is the most common passage cited by Protestant apologists attempting to argue that the early Church believed in *sola Scriptura*. And I think you can see why, with Cyril writing, “Concerning the divine and Holy mysteries of our faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scriptures!”

It sounds an awful lot like something a “Bible only” Protestant might say. And if what Cyril says here was the only thing the Fathers had to say on the subject, we might have a slam dunk case

for saying that the early Church was a Church committed to *sola Scriptura*!

The only problem is: this is *not the only thing* the Fathers had to say on the subject. Along with statements that every “Bible only” Protestant would be happy to make, I found a great number of statements that no “Bible only” Protestant would *ever* make!

For instance, you would *never ever* have heard me, from the pulpit of the church I pastored, say anything remotely like what Origen says in the preface to his *Fundamental Doctrines* (c. AD 225).

The teaching of the Church has indeed been handed down through an order of succession from the Apostles, and remains in the churches even to the present time. *That alone is to be believed as the truth, which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition.* (emphasis added)

And, of course, if Origen was out there on his own speaking this way — and Origen was known to be “out there” — that would be one thing. But the truth is, we can find statements like his everywhere in the early Fathers. Origen’s statement isn’t idiosyncratic at all!

Here’s Irenaeus, bishop and martyr, writing around AD 180.

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 ... What, then? If there should be a dispute over some kind of question, ought we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches in which the Apostles were familiar, and draw from them what is clear and certain in regard to that question? What if the Apostles had not in fact left writings to us? Would it not be necessary to follow the order of tradition, which was handed down to those to whom them entrusted the Churches? (*Against Heresies* 3:4:1)

Now, a Protestant might respond, “sure, if the Apostles had *not left us writings* it would be necessary to follow the order of tradition and look to the teaching of the churches. But the Apostles *did* leave us writings and so there no need to!”

The problem is, this isn’t the point Irenaeus is making. The point Irenaeus is making is that even if the Apostles had not left writings, we would be able to find the truth in the Church, because

Continued on page 4 ➡

the Apostles deposited the truth in the Church like a rich man deposits his money in the bank!

And because the Church is in possession of the truth, when a dispute arises within the Church, notice what Irenaeus *doesn't* say: "Take out your Bibles and fight it out, chapter and verse!" Instead, he says, "If there should be a dispute over some kind of question, ought we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches in which the Apostles were familiar, and draw from them what is clear and certain in regard to that question?"

Here's one more. It's from Tertullian, writing around AD 200:

Moreover, if there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might *seem* to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: let them show the origins of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles Then let all the heresies ... offer their proof of how they deem themselves to be apostolic (Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heresies* 32).

In other words, what we find in the Fathers are passages insisting that the Bible is inspired and infallible and that nothing should be received apart from the Holy Scriptures and that everything should be supported from the Holy Scriptures. And right alongside these we find passages insisting that the standard of "true teaching" is the standard of Tradition, the teaching of the Apostles as it was preserved not in their writings but in the Church and handed down through Apostles' successors.

How to Reconcile

How would I have reconciled these two kinds of passages when I was a Protestant? Would I have even tried to reconcile them? Probably not. Most probably I would have said, "Well, the passage from Cyprian emphasizing the binding authority of Scripture is biblical and true and the passages from Origen, Irenaeus, and Tertullian emphasizing the binding authority of ecclesiastical Tradition are *not*!" I wouldn't have felt the need to *even try* to reconcile these obviously contradictory ideas.

But now it was different. Now I wanted to try to comprehend the mindset of the early Church. I wanted to understand how they saw the puzzle pieces of Scripture and Tradition fitting together. And once I tried to understand, it really wasn't that hard.

Maybe the best way to explain this is to read another passage from the Fathers that began to make sense of it to me.

Around AD 434 Vincent of Lerins wrote his *Commonitorium*. His purpose was to offer guidance on how to distinguish good orthodox Catholic teaching from the teaching of heretics.

If one should ask one of the heretics ... "What ground have you for saying that I ought to cast away the universal and ancient faith of the Catholic Church?" He has the answer ready, "For it is written." And forthwith he produces a thousand examples, a thousand authorities from the law, from the psalms, from the apostles, from the prophets, by means of which, *interpreted on a new*

and wrong principle, the unhappy soul may be precipitated from the height of Catholic truth to the lowest abyss of heresy Do heretics appeal to Scripture? They do indeed, and with a vengeance. For you may see them scamper through every single book of Holy Scripture ... Whether among their own people or among strangers, in private or in public, in speaking or in writing, at convivial meetings or in the streets, hardly ever do they bring forward anything of their own which they do not endeavor to shelter under the words of Scripture ... You will see an infinite heap of instances, hardly a single page, which does not bristle with plausible quotations from the New Testament or the Old (chapters 25 and 26).

In other words, the problem, as Vincent sees it, is that while the early Church may not have practiced *sola Scriptura*, the heretics certainly did. They were masters of *sola Scriptura*!

The question naturally arose: how does one know who is properly interpreting and understanding the teaching of Scripture? After all, it's one thing to declare that the Old and New Testament writings are inspired and authoritative. It's quite another to determine exactly what these books are teaching — about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the Church, the sacraments, and so forth.

On the one hand, I had to laugh at Vincent's image of the heretics scampering through the Bible to find support for their false doctrines. I couldn't help but think of those prophecy "experts" I had seen on TV, men and women who could rattle off from memory passage after passage from Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel and the Book of Revelation to support "End Times" scenarios completely unknown before the mid-19th century.

On the other hand, I couldn't deny that what Vincent was getting at was true. Many years of experience teaching Scripture had convinced me that it is indeed possible to find "plausible quotations" from the Old and New Testaments to support virtually any and every doctrinal position that has ever been proposed.

But the Protestant responds: isn't the Bible enough? Isn't everything God wants us to know there? And isn't it set forth clearly enough that anyone of average intelligence who sincerely prays for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and studies the Word, can *know* the truth?

Vincent anticipates this question and replies:

But here someone perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason: because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters. For Novatian expounds it one way, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, another, Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian, another, Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius, another, lastly, Nestorius another. Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various errors, that the rule for the *right understanding* of the prophets and apostles should be

framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation. (emphasis added)

Sounds just like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen.

To put all this in simple terms, Catholicism makes a distinction between the authority of Scripture on the one hand, and, on the other, the question of *how we can know for sure* what the Scriptures are teaching. Catholicism says that, while the Scriptures are indeed inspired and authoritative, for the correct *understanding* of what the Scriptures teach one needs to look to the Church.

Tradition — the teaching of the Apostles as it was preserved in the Church by the Holy Spirit and passed down through the order of succession from the Apostles — provides the interpretive key to Scripture. It is the lens through which the light of Sacred Scripture is brought into focus and properly seen and understood.

This is how the early Fathers saw things. This is how they reconciled the authority of Scripture and the authority of Tradition.

Conclusion

The thing that was becoming so clear to me as I read the Fathers and listened to them in their own words, was that I had entered a thought world very different from what I knew as an evangelical Protestant. Very different. And I knew immediately that had I preached a million sermons over the course of a million Sundays from the pulpit of my Baptist church, I would never once have thought to speak as these early Fathers spoke quite naturally.

I would never, for instance, have thought to describe the truth as something the Apostles deposited in the Church as a rich man deposits his money in the bank. And I would *never* have said that "everything which pertains to the truth" can be found in the Church and drawn from the Church like a rich man draws his money from the bank!

I would *never* have said that in the event of a dispute, we Christians should have "recourse to the most ancient Churches in which the Apostles were familiar, and draw from them what is clear and certain in regard to that question?" No way on earth!

Now, the Fathers may have been all wrong and Luther and Calvin right. But at least this much was clear to me: the Christianity I knew was not that of these early Fathers. The great Athanasius spoke of the "teaching and faith of the Catholic Church, which the Lord bestowed, the apostles proclaimed and the fathers safeguarded."

It was hard for me to face the reality that if I, a Baptist, could have been transported back to the city of Alexandria, in the fourth century, Athanasius and I would not have been members of the same Church. We would not have been sitting together in the same pew. After all, the Christianity I knew was founded precisely on the conviction that the Fathers had not safeguarded the apostolic faith, that the apostolic faith had been corrupted by the Fathers into this thing called "Catholicism," and that it had waited for more than a thousand years to be rescued by Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers.

To be continued... ■

*See the January-July 2021 issues for previous installments in this series, online at 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 or call 740-450-1175.

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

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

The CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to chnetwork.org/donate or complete this form and mail to:

CHNetwork Attention: Ann Moore

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

Your information

Name _____

Signature _____

Address line 1 _____

Address line 2 _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$25.00 on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$_____ on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

☐ Checking account or ☐ Savings account

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

☐ Credit card

Card number _____

Expiration date / CVV Code _____

☐ Visa

☐ MasterCard

☐ Discover

☐ AmericanExpress

CHNETWORK STAFF, ADVISORS, & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President/Founder
Marcus Grodi
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Chief Operating Officer
JonMarc Grodi

Ministry Membership & Pastoral Care Coordinator
Jim Anderson
(former Lutheran)

Office Manager
Ann Moore

Studio Manager
Bill Bateson
(former Secularist)

Resource Specialist
Janna Pitcock
(Revert)

Publications & Pastoral Care Coordinator
Mary Clare Miller

Outreach Manager
Matt Swaim
(former Methodist)

Developer of Web & New Media
Seth Paine
(former non-denominational)

Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator
Ken Hensley
(former Baptist minister)

Ecclesial Advisor & Chaplain
Msgr. Jeffrey N. Steenson
(former Episcopal bishop)

Financial Advisor
Kevin Lowry
(former Presbyterian)

Spiritual Advisor
Brother Rex Anthony Norris
(former Anglican)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marcus Grodi (President)
Msgr. Jeffrey N. Steenson (Vice President)
Kevin Lowry (Treasurer)
Donald Brey (Director)

REGISTER NOW!

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/ or contact Ken Hensley at 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



The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org



THE
COMING HOME
NETWORK
INTERNATIONAL

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.

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

August 2

Fr Joshua Whitfield*
(former Episcopal priest)
(re-air from 11/19/18)

August 9

Jeff Miller*
(former atheist)

August 16

Dr. Kenneth Craycraft*
(former Church of Christ)
(re-air from 12/3/18)

August 23

Dr. William Saunders*
(former Evangelical Protestant)

August 30

Jason Craig*
(former Evangelical Protestant)
(re-air from 12/17/18)

September 6

Dr. Matthew Bunson*
(child of converts)
(re-air from 1/7/19)

*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 Susan, a recent convert “I wanted to give you a very big update from my side as now a convert. The last time I corresponded, I mentioned I was in RCIA & going forward with the 1st Rite of being presented to the Church in November. Over Christmas, I was able to attend several Masses when traveling in AL and FL on vacation. They were very rich & beautiful experiences. I had never attended a Catholic church for Christmas as a (now former) Baptist. VERY different. My husband and I were blessed to witness extreme reverence at the particular parishes we visited with holy priests who love their people. That was very obvious. This was a refreshing experience and overall different from where I currently live. When I returned, I met with our parish priest to discuss coming into the Church early as we had talked before. He’s a very hard working and holy priest. I was allowed to be confirmed in the Church last Saturday! Fr. was able to perform a conditional baptism & confirmation

in the extraordinary form!!! I was so amazed and it was incredibly powerful. Quite the experience! Hands down, it was the very best thing Fr. could do for me as I believe a lot of healing came from the conditional baptism. I’m still very much in awe from this journey. And very excited about being able to receive the Eucharist during the season of Lent. I’m sitting in awe for many reasons. The Holy Spirit without doubt, led me to questioning inside the Catholic Church & led me on this warp speed journey. I’m here and made it!”

From Marian, a revert “Every time I watch a new video from the Coming Home Network I get so much joy in hearing truth and seeing you all spreading God’s love in such a wonderful way. But . . . if I don’t say anything you will never know about the great joy I experience when I watch:

On the Journey with Matt and Ken — your wonderful series on the Eucharist, the Real Presence!!

Deep in Christ with JonMarc and Fr. Peter Grodi — amazing to watch the virtues unfold and the two brothers so in tune at work!

Deep in History with Marcus Grodi and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson — what can I say but that not a minute is not enjoyed and . . . bringing back happy memories.”

From Nicolas, “Thought I would let you know how things went for the purpose of advice and prayer. I told my dad on Sunday evening and my mom on Monday morning as they both came to visit in person. Dad was more surprised; mom was more emotional and the question was “Nick what can you possibly do for a living?” I’m continuing to pray the rosary and asking the Holy Family for guidance. Finally, I am in touch with a former pastor turned Catholic . . . and am seeking out his advice on the practical nuts and bolts of leaving.” ■

Prayer List



Clergy

- **For Bret, a Baptist pastor** who has begun examining the teachings of the Catholic Church and attending Mass but is struggling to reconcile his Protestant background and understanding with what he's now learning.
- **For James, a pastor** who has become convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith, that the Holy Spirit might soften his wife's heart and give him the wisdom to know how to lead her toward the Church.
- **For William, who works for a Protestant ministry**, is in the middle of a doctoral program at a Protestant seminary, and who has become convinced that he must become Catholic, that the Lord will show him how to move forward.
- **For Joshua, a former Baptist pastor** who, with his wife, is headed toward the Church, that the Holy Spirit will soften the hearts of his in-laws, which is their main concern as they move forward to become Catholic.
- **For Mark**, who has worked for many years for a Protestant mission organization with strict Protestant doctrinal requirements and is leaving to become Catholic, that the Lord will lead through this difficult time.
- **For Jeff, a Methodist pastor** who is contemplating leaving the ministry to become Catholic and is struggling very much with what he will do to support his family.
- **For Kent, a former Protestant seminary student** who entered the Church 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 gone in and out of RCIA, but has struggled with the scandals in the Church and has not yet been able to decide whether to become Catholic.

- **For Brian, a 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 a Methodist pastor** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for a number of years and continues to struggle with what he would do to earn a living if he were to resign his position to become Catholic.
- **For Darshak**, who in 2020 resigned from his Protestant ministry and found a new job and is excited about moving toward entering the Church, that the Lord will give him wisdom as he leads his family and will bless him financially so that he can support them.

Laity

- **For Joanne** who has a lot of twists and turns in her journey, but once again is moving toward the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide her discernment.
- **For a Seventh-day Adventist**, that the Lord Jesus would lead him on the path of light, light, and truth.
- **For a Muslim in Dubai**, that he may find a way to travel to another country where he may freely become a Catholic Christian.
- **For James, an Anabaptist**, that his spiritual journey would lead him to the eucharistic table of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **For a member of the Reformed Church in Georgia**, that the Holy Spirit would open the heart of his wife to the wonders of the Catholic Faith.
- **For Birgitta in Europe** who doesn't know how to move forward with her interest in the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will show her a path.
- **For a Muslim teenager**, that his parents would allow him to follow his heart's desire to receive the graces of Jesus in holy Baptism.
- **For a Baptist in Texas**, that our Lord Jesus would guide and bless him with His healing grace.
- **For a man in North Carolina**, that his parents would be healed of their anti-Catholicism.
- **For Andrew in New York**, that the Holy Spirit would lead him home to the Catholic Church through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- **For Steve, a non-denominational Evangelical**, that Our Lord would successfully guide his journey to the fullness of the faith in the Catholic Church.
- **For a convert in Maryland** who is struggling with a lot of faith-related issues, that Jesus in the Eucharist will give her clarity.
- **For an agnostic in New York**, that our Lord Jesus Christ would reveal His reality to him in an unmistakable manner.
- **For a Baptist in Georgia** to find an excellent RCIA program where she can receive good answers to her doubts and questions.
- **For Simon**, who is very drawn toward the Catholic Church but his wife doesn't share his interest, that he will know how best to proceed with his journey.
- **For Sarah** and her many questions and concerns about what becoming Catholic would entail.
- **For a Methodist**, that her husband will be willing to go through a convalidation so she will be able to partake of the sacraments.
- **For a woman in Ohio** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for years, that her husband will begin to share her desire to become Catholic.

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

have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:52-55). If it’s just a symbol, then it should be no big deal.

It was at this point that I began to have more in-depth questions about communion — never mind the strange idea that something “symbolic only” isn’t really real. It seemed like a lot of effort was put into making sure that we knew that it was only a symbol and nothing more, but it didn’t explain why Christ would leave us with just a symbol that wasn’t for real. In contrast, miracles were all over the Scriptures, throughout both the Old and New Testaments, and whatever Christ said became real. These and other questions plagued me to the point of despair. It must all make sense, but things just were not adding up for me.

In the same vein, if Baptism was only symbolic and not real, why did we make such a big deal and fanfare out of performing baptisms? Scripture says, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, *now saves you*, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21). If Baptism was just a symbolic profession of faith and didn’t really save you, then this verse completely contradicted it.

Unanswered Questions and Anti-Intellectualism

The questions that troubled me were met by people telling me that I just “needed to have faith,” and that faith was a feeling, not in your head but in your heart. It was presented to me that faith was a knowledge found in the heart. I didn’t deny that is partly true, because French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal famously said that the “heart has its reasons of which reason knows not.” I had honest, heartfelt, and sincere questions, however, and no one had satisfying answers. I felt quite alone, because my questions obviously bothered other believers. I thought maybe I should just stop asking questions. I thought that, if God created us with both a soul and an intellect, then faith as humankind’s response to God should make sense to both the head and the heart. I wholeheartedly identified with the father in Mark 9:24: “Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, *“I believe; help my unbelief!”* (emphasis added).

Atheism and Agnosticism

When I graduated from high school and moved on to college in North Georgia about an hour outside of Atlanta, I developed a sense of not believing in God at all, because the idea of salvation by “faith alone” didn’t make any sense to me, comparing it with

Scripture, nor did symbolic-only Baptism and communion or the understanding that the spiritual was “good” and the material was “bad.” I was unaware of other versions of Christianity at the time and didn’t look into any other churches. While working at Home Depot during the summer, though, I met a pastor from upstate New York. I had a series of conversations with him about faith and reason, and he challenged me. I ended up reading Josh McDowell’s *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and an atheist turned Anglican, C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. These two books were turning points in my faith development, because they spoke to me from a skeptical, thinking man’s perspective. I saw the incoherent nature of atheism. You cannot logically maintain the “positive-negative” of atheism. Atheism was a dead-end, and agnosticism was the only intellectually-honest form of lacking a belief in God.

Seeds of Catholicism

In 2004, I had the opportunity to see some 15th and 16th-century Catholic churches in the Spanish colonial style, and the very first Catholic church that I ever set foot in was the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City where the Virgin had appeared. It was an interesting experience at the time but I didn’t pursue it further. I attended my first Catholic Mass during another study abroad experience in Mexico and it did plant somewhat of a seed in my mind. I was interested enough to take a few RCIA classes when I got back to the United States to find out more about what Catholics actually believed between my two study abroad experiences in Mexico.

God Exists! So, What About Other Religions?

Now that I had established a firm belief that God existed. I began to examine what other faiths might have to offer if I were going to be intellectually honest and follow the truth at all costs. In that case, I couldn’t just blindly accept a “tradition” of Christianity that had been handed down to me and decided to do some research for myself. I began to study Bud-

dhism and Islam. In Buddhism, I learned about the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Eightfold Path*. But I didn’t feel that achieving Nirvana by breaking the cycle of desire (desire causes suffering) ultimately answered the questions I had. Creation exists; therefore, there must be an ultimate Creator. Buddhism didn’t have that.

Islam had answers to the questions to some doubts that I had as a Baptist, such as the Trinity. This was an attractive concept, because it seemed in line with the faith of Abraham and Moses, as Deuteronomy 6:4 says: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.” Christians and Muslims taken together comprise almost half of the world’s population. So, there must be something

Atheism was a dead-end,
and agnosticism was the only
intellectually-honest form of
lacking a belief in God.

...Journeys Home Continued...

special about Christ if both Christians and Muslims believe that He is coming again. Muslims hold Mary in high esteem as there is an entire chapter dedicated to her in the Quran. I was intrigued by the bodily component of worship in Islam, where the faithful prayed in prostration, placing one's head on the ground in submission to God. Still, I had no answers as to why Christian worship didn't involve the body, since we will be resurrected in our bodies. The physical component of prayer and regular organized daily prayer pattern in Islam made sense to me. The absolute oneness of God made sense to me as well and the call to prayer was beautiful. Islam seemed like an ancient faith and a very simple one because it was 5 pillars: a profession of faith, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and a pilgrimage to Mecca. So, I made my profession of faith and became a Muslim. I was graduating from college around this time, and it was time to move on.

Prayer For Truth ... My "Aha!" Moment

After a couple of years of researching other religions and after a year and a half of being Muslim, I was in deep spiritual and mental despair of finding the truth. I began to wonder why in Islam, Christ was coming again at the end of time if He was only a prophet. Why was it Christ? He is called the "spirit of God" and the "word of God" (obvious parallel here with John 1:1) in the Quran. At this point, I was being spiritually torn between Islam and Christianity. Christianity had Jesus as more than a prophet and Islam had the physical prayers. Keep in mind that the only Christianity that I knew personally was "once

saved, always saved" and not much else. I had been searching for many years to find a faith that made sense to the head and the heart. Was there no faith that made sense? In one final effort, I prayed to the Lord that He would just show me the truth. The next morning, I got up, and as I was having my coffee, I saw a video on YouTube. It was part of a BBC documentary about ancient Christianity. I watched it and saw monks in a

Coptic Orthodox Christian monastery in Egypt praying by prostrating and putting their heads to the ground. This was the same prayer method that I had seen Muslims and Buddhists use. So, Christians did pray this way after all! This was my big "aha!" moment. I decided to check out my local Coptic Orthodox Church, where I learned that St. Mark the Evangelist had founded the Church in Alexandria, Egypt.

I pulled up in the parking lot of the local Coptic church on a Sunday morning and walked in. As soon as I arrived, I heard chanting in a mixture of Arabic, Coptic, and English. There were icons, candles, and lots of incense. People were bowing, and they were making the sign of the cross. It seemed like a representation

of heaven on earth. I knew I was home! I wish I had known that this existed; it would have saved me many headaches.

An Egyptian lady came by and helped me understand what was going on in the liturgy, and another lady, working as a greeter at the church, asked me if I had ever tried out the Catholic Church, because they taught similar doctrines. That conversation planted a seed in my mind — I had never given the Catholic Church a fair shake. I had heard that some Catholics were "saved," not because of the Catholic Church, but despite it. All I knew is that they had some "unbiblical" doctrines, and it had been portrayed to me as a bad, evil, dark place to be. But after all, Rome was one of the five ancient sees of Christianity, according to the Orthodox. I was, however, enamored with Eastern Orthodox liturgy. After all the searching I had done, and my prayer had been answered, there was no going back.

Reception into the Orthodox Church

The priest recommended that I read *Becoming Orthodox* by Fr. Peter Gillquist. He was part of the Campus Crusade for Christ back in the 1970s. Soon afterwards, I was chrismated (confirmed) into the Orthodox Church in America and received Christ in the Eucharist for the first time in 2009.

But I couldn't dismiss Catholicism completely, since the Orthodox did see the Bishop of Rome as the first among equals. Shortly after I became Orthodox, I went to a Romanian Orthodox church. A lady there also wondered why I hadn't tried the Catholic

Church. This kept popping up in my interactions with Orthodox Christians. They kept recommending that I go to a Catholic church, pointing out that they had all the sacraments.

In the summer of 2009, I packed up and moved to Houston, Texas to work on my Master's degree. I began attending an Orthodox church there, and while I loved it, I found it challenging to fit in culturally. I began

to wonder if I shouldn't actually check out the Catholic Church, since the meaning of the word *catholic* is "universal." That word is in the Nicene Creed and was mentioned by Ignatius of Antioch in AD 107 in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*. I scheduled an appointment with the Catholic priest at the university. He suggested that I read Scott Hahn's *Rome Sweet Home*, so I did. Dr. Scott Hahn addressed many of the issues that I had long been questioning. For example, the most profound thing that struck me in his book was the fact that the Bible never says that Scripture is the "pillar and foundation of truth." Instead, in 1 Timothy 3:15, we see that it is the Church that is the "pillar and foundation of truth." He was able to explain that *sola fide* is unworkable and isn't actually in the Bible. This was a huge relief to me, because *sola fide* never

I began to examine what other faiths might have to offer if I were going to be intellectually honest and follow the truth at all costs.

made sense to me. I always knew that faith had to be more than just a mental transaction. But I was very reluctant to convert to the Catholic Church, because it was supposed to be this medieval, dark, evil place. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church had all seven sacraments, just like the Orthodox. I found out there were 23 different *sui juris* Churches in the Catholic Church, and many of them were in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and had the same liturgies as the Orthodox!

So, I decided to become Catholic. I was received directly into the Church through a profession of faith at a local Mass. Finally, I could embrace all five ancient sees of Christianity by coming into full communion with Rome.

Not long after I became Orthodox, and then Catholic, at age 26, I began to drift away, because I really didn't connect into a parish. I had some difficulties, questioning why I became Catholic, because it seemed weird. *Why Catholic?* I started to push Catholicism aside, despite the answers that I had found. It was literally the last place I had looked for an answer. I also began to think about what was so wrong with me, that I couldn't just be like all of my family and go to a "regular church." I thought to myself, *why make life difficult?* And I went through a period of about three or four years where I just drifted through life, not taking my faith seriously, because I wasn't sure how to live it out. I got married and divorced after two years and moved back closer to family near my hometown in north Georgia. Not long after, I met a wonderful woman, Jessalyn, who is now my wife.

A Gem Recovered

A few months into my marriage to Jessalyn, I began to really think about what I had thrown away. After all that I had researched and prayed for, I had just stiff-armed Catholicism, so that I could be "normal" like everyone else in my family. But with many questions and many strange coincidences to get to this point, I couldn't just throw it away. I had to get it back. I told my wife my situation, and she agreed and was amenable to going to my church. I was comfortable with both Orthodoxy and Catholicism, and we went to a Greek Orthodox church for about a year and a half. My wife almost became Orthodox. But she brought up a point that I had considered several years earlier and brushed aside. Culturally, it was challenging to fit in completely. I can't solve what the Orthodox and Catholics have not been able to reconcile after the Schism of 1054.

I decided to give Catholicism another go and returned to the Church. It was the last place that I thought I'd end up. In the end,

reading Vladimir Soloviev's *Russia and the Universal Church* was compelling enough to choose to be in communion with Rome. What ultimately compelled me to return was his push for unity and reconciliation with Rome, because Soloviev argued that it was impossible to be truly universal without the office of the papacy. The East needed the West as much as the West needed the East.

The Church may have been through some stormy seas, but it remains afloat today, capable of uniting Christians worldwide and speaking with a unified voice. The universality of the Church made an impression on me.

Jessalyn went through RCIA and decided to join the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church at the Easter Vigil of 2018. Both of us have been Catholic ever since. We had our marriage convalidated after I received an annulment for my previous marriage outside of the Church for lack of canonical form. We took a trip to Rome, visited all four basilicas in the Eternal City and got to see some other unique historical sites in the churches of Rome. It was surreal standing in Saint Peter's Square looking at the basilica built on the tomb of Saint Peter, according to the

words of Christ's promise: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). The Church may have been through some stormy seas, but it remains afloat today, capable of uniting Christians worldwide and speaking with a unified voice. The universality of the Church made an impression on me.

My story has a few twists and turns, but I am thankful to God that I made it here. I am thankful for the gift of faith I received in the Baptist church and the gift of an awareness of early, apostolic Christian faith in Eastern Orthodoxy, along with robust, intellectual answers to my questions in the Catholic Church. I am also thankful for the hospitality of Muslims whose pattern of prayer gave me awareness of the unity of the physical and the spiritual. I am thankful to God for all of these experiences, good and bad, which ultimately brought me to where I am, in communion with Rome and in the universal Church of the saints that have come before us. ■



TONY BARRETT, Ph.D. is an aspiring author, blogger, and educator. He enjoys reading, golf, and being outdoors in his free time. You may read his articles on his blog at cloudsofincense.blogspot.com.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

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

The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

REGISTER NOW!

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/ or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org or **740-450-1175**.