



## September 2021 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## The Authority of Scripture

By Vivian Centurion

Why would a Bible-believing Christian join the Catholic Church? I wasn't ignorant of Scripture; on the contrary, I was marinated in Scripture. It fueled me. I taught a small Bible study group for women for many years. I knew how to research and look into commentaries. But I did have reservations, questions, and difficulties I put on the back burner because I found no answers or the answers I found were unsatisfactory. But then, I was looking for answers everywhere except the Catholic Church. My experience with meeting Catholics was that they were superstitious and ignorant of Scripture — and even their own doctrines, unable to give an intelligent answer to support their beliefs. So I thought they were at best simpleminded and at worst heretics.

I've been a Christian my whole life. My father came from the Orthodox Faith, and my mother was Protestant. I was baptized as an infant in Lebanon, in the Syriac Orthodox Church, coming to America when I was five years old. In America, my faith formation took place in various Protestant denominations and also via the radio, commentaries, and other books. We visited the Orthodox church only a few times a year, for special occasions, until I was about eight or ten. We weren't "practicing" Orthodox since my mother was the spiritual driver in the family. She would take all five of us kids, usually walking to various churches, depending on where we lived, but they were always Protestant.

When I was two years old, there was an incident with my eyes. My teenage cousin was playing with me and accidentally poked my eye, which became infected. That event left me cross-eyed for eight years. My maternal grandmother would anoint my

head with oil often and pray over me, and my mom and many others did the same. When I was about ten, we were watching TV. A group was visiting the Holy Land and talking about Jesus' empty tomb. My mother told me to touch the TV screen and ask God to straighten my eyes. I did so, and immediately my eye, after eight years of living with crossed eyes and taunts, became straight. It was the first time in my life that I saw myself with straight eyes.

My extended family thought I had had surgery; they wouldn't believe that God had performed a miracle. This event planted a seed in me. Time passed, and like many teens, I became less fervent in my faith, trying to find my footing and where I fit in this world. The world pulls you one way and God calls you in another direction. I didn't realize the significance religion would have in my later life.

When I was 18 years old, I read the Bible for the first time, "rededicated"

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*Journeys Home*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

my life to Jesus and was “re-baptized” in a Foursquare church. I did backslide for a few years, but God brought me back to Him. For the next 30 years, I lived as a Protestant — Foursquare, Baptist, and non-denominational Evangelical. I read through my Bible and devotionals regularly, attended and later taught Bible Studies, and was grateful for every sermon that nurtured my faith. It was a culmination of all those years of whetting my appetite that drew me to want and pursue something more. My thought was: never be satisfied with the progress you have made, because God is greater; so keep on pursuing Him.

By 2002, I was married with three kids, living in our current home in Northridge, California. In the chaos of raising kids, I discovered the solace of Scripture. In reading my Bible, I loved the way both Testaments connected to each other. God’s cleverness orchestrated everything and brought about unity and perfection. Yet something was missing. Many times, a question would pop into my mind, prompting me to chase down the answer. It’s thrilling to find answers and connect dots. Before I knew it, over the years — especially the last five years of it — my Christian journey evolved from a journey into an obsessive quest. I was drawn to find out how we got here. Why so many denominations? Who’s right? Can we ever be reconciled? Did Christ establish one visible Church or an invisible Church?

I owe a lot to my husband, Scott, a cradle Catholic who never once tried to push me into Catholicism. What he did was much more profound: he remained steadfast. Although we loved each other, we would argue a lot. The first six years of our marriage were cyclical arguments about religion. The more I prayed for God to change Scott, the more God changed me.

It’s hard when you can’t share conversations about your intimate faith. Instead of bringing us together, faith was like a wedge in our marriage. We eventually moved past the hostility and rested at acceptance of one another’s perspective on faith: we agreed to disagree. When I surrendered to God and trusted Him with my husband, then my husband didn’t feel attacked. So we slowly moved into a better place in our marriage. But while we were united in many areas of our marriage, we were separated in the most central part.

### ROOTS OF THE REFORMATION

*Roots of the Reformation* is a powerful summary of the issues that led to the Reformation and their implications today. Karl Adam gives a historically sensitive and accurate analysis of the Reformation that stands as a valid and sometimes unsettling challenge to the presuppositions of Protestants and Catholics alike.

Go to [chresources.org](http://chresources.org) to order this book and other resources about the Catholic Faith!



We had three little children and agreed that going to church as a family unit was important. There were many years when we attended both a non-denominational church on Saturday nights and a Catholic Mass on Sunday mornings. Somewhere along the line, I started to feel more at home in the Catholic Mass when I actively listened to the readings and prayers. I didn’t fit in our non-denominational church any more, yet I didn’t think I fit in at the Catholic church, either. I couldn’t go against my conscience and convert just to make peace. However, the more I listened and participated in the Catholic Mass, the more I fell in love with the reverence and worship of the liturgy. As the kids started to attend Catholic school, we volunteered and were involved in various activities. We started to attend less at my church. Meanwhile, God was opening the doors for my husband to minister in various Bible studies at our parish. Through the years, I also helped in various areas. As I gradually came out of my bubble, I began to see that there were Catholics who were “real Christians.” They were actually no different than Protestants in their genuine and deep commitment to Christ. I started to see the similarities in our faith, that we have much common ground. God planted us in a great parish, with a wonderful pastor and warm parishioners. Our priest welcomed me, even though I wasn’t Catholic and didn’t intend to convert. He loved me and allowed me to use my talents there.

It wasn’t only that my conversion was slow — at this point I had been with my husband for 24 years and attending this parish for 14 years — it also came with much wrestling and reflection. As I attempted to discover who God was, I was beginning to get a deeper and wider picture of His Church. It wasn’t just about “me and Jesus,” but about an entire Christian family. Jesus prayed for us to be a family, praying for us to be one as He and the Father are one (see John 17). God wasn’t just calling me to Him; He was calling me to His family, both here and in heaven (see Ephesians 3:15).

From about five years before my conversion, we were only attending our Catholic parish. We stopped going to my church. I didn’t need to attend the non-denominational church to hear a good sermon; I could do that on TV or radio. I was divided with my own identity, because I questioned whether I needed to go to church to be a Christian. Why did I need to go to church, especially a megachurch? I really didn’t get anything out of it. I already did my own in-depth Bible study on my own. Sermons were designed to bring people forward to an altar call to receive Christ, to rededicate one’s life, or to prayer. That might be beneficial for those individuals, but after years of church it didn’t make sense for a seasoned Christian like me to sit through a sermon, then watch an altar call. On most days, I was familiar with the topic preached, and I’d even add in my own notes while the preacher was talking. Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to neglect gathering with believers. So I thought to myself, if I had a Bible study group, wouldn’t that count? I figured, if it really didn’t matter whether I went to a church service, then I would just go with my husband to Mass.

I also began to question what worship meant. Was worship a song and a sermon? The songs began to feel more like concerts, and the sermons felt like a Bible lesson at best and a motivational

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## ON THE JOURNEY

# Is *Sola Scriptura* Workable?

## Part I: The Birth of *Sola Scriptura*

By Ken Hensley

The battle cry of the Protestant Reformation and, really, the foundation of Protestant Christianity, is *sola Scriptura*, the conviction that “the Bible, nothing more, nothing less — and nothing *else* — is all that is necessary for faith and practice.”

For me, as for so many who have made the journey from Protestantism to the Catholic Church, one of the most important factors was coming to believe that “Bible only” Christianity wasn’t *biblical* (that it isn’t the teaching of the New Testament), that it wasn’t *historical* (meaning that it wasn’t the faith and practice of the early Church), and then (our topic this month), that it isn’t *workable* — that it hasn’t worked, doesn’t work and indeed cannot work.

### Bristling with Plausible Quotations

St. Vincent of Lerins wrote his *Commonitorium* (mid 5th century) specifically to offer guidance on how a Christian might distinguish orthodox Catholic teaching from the teaching of the various heretics active at the time. I remember feeling a little embarrassed when I first read the passage I want to quote here in full.

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.

Well, if Catholics in the fifth century weren’t practicing *sola Scriptura*, it certainly sounds like the heretics were!

I thought of all the books written by all the Bible teachers, each of them bristling with plausible quotations from Scripture and I felt that St. Vincent was raising a question here that I had been struggling with for some time, a question inevitably raised by the commitment to *sola Scriptura*: how is the average disciple of Christ, who works and is raising a family and spends his Saturdays watching Little League games and attending birthday parties and is lucky to have a little time each day to read the Bible — how is he to distinguish true teaching from false?

Here’s the problem: Protestantism begins by insisting that the Bible is both “materially” and “formally” sufficient — that everything God wants us to know in terms of divine revelation is in the Bible and that it is set forth *clearly enough* that anyone of average intelligence who reads the Bible and does a bit of study *can know* what it is teaching.

If this is the case, why, one wonders, do we have so many Protestant denominations and sects that disagree with one another on all manner of doctrinal issues, even on important issues?

As soon as we raise that question, though, we’re told, “Well, while the Bible is indeed all that is needed for doctrine and morals, it has to be properly interpreted and to properly interpret the Bible you need to have some knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew in which it was written, the various literary genres, the cultural, historical, and religious context in which the authors were living, etc.”

“But I thought you just said the Bible was clear and that anyone can read it and see what is being taught!”

Of course, the problem is that there are men and women in every denomination and sect who are engaged in the scholarly study of the Old and New Testaments and doing everything described above and *still* disagree on basic issues of Christian theology.

Given this, how is the individual Christian to know?

### The Answer of the Fathers

Last month, we looked at the answer the early Church Fathers gave to the question of how true teaching is to be distinguished from false.

Their answer was this: Scripture is the *sole* inspired written record of the Apostles’ teaching. But their letters were not written to summarize Christian doctrine and this is why scholars can study them for decades and not agree on what is being taught. Because of this, Apostolic Tradition — meaning the teaching of the Apostles as it was preserved in the doctrine and liturgy of the Churches they established — is needed to provide “the interpretive key” to Scripture. Apostolic Tradition provides, if you will, the “lens” through which the teaching of Scripture is brought into focus.

As we saw, this is how St. Irenaeus in the second century understood the answer to our question. This is how Tertullian and Origen understood the answer in the third century. And this is how St. Vincent understood the answer to the question in the fifth century. Quoting again from the *Commonitorium*:

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and, so to speak, universal rule I may be able to distinguish

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the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical depravity. I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or anyone else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law [meaning, the Scriptures], and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

As it turns out, the position of the early Church Fathers, the position of St Vincent, was *the position* of the Church in the sixth century, the seventh, the eighth, the ninth, the tenth, the eleventh ... all the way up to the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

So how did the change to *sola Scriptura* come about?

## The Birth of *Sola Scriptura*

Although there were all sorts of contributing factors, *sola Scriptura* was born in the conflict that erupted between the Protestant Reformers and the hierarchy of the Church in the early 16th century.

Luther is usually seen as the one who struck the match, as it were. Luther was an Augustinian monk, a Catholic priest, and a professor at the Catholic university of Wittenberg, Germany. Now, he had a number of issues with the Church, but the key issue for him became the doctrine of justification. As he lectured through the Psalms and Paul's epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, he came to a view of how one is justified in the sight of God that was different from what the Church taught and held to be true.

As he began to teach his views and publish them, he ran into conflict with the hierarchy. The Church said, "You're wrong." Luther said, "No, you're wrong." The Church said, "But Martin, what you are teaching about how one is justified before God *conflicts with the settled teaching* of the Church on this subject!"

At this point the foundational issue of authority was touched and Luther faced the watershed question: what did he believe about *who ultimately has the authority to determine Christian doctrine*?

He really only had two options: he could stand with the Church and say, "You know, it sure *seems* to me that my doctrine of justification is the teaching of St. Paul, but I must be missing something. I must be wrong." Or he could abandon the Church's authority and teaching on this matter and stand on his own interpretation of St. Paul.

We all know what Luther did from his words at the Diet of Worms.

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by evident reason ... I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, *which is my basis*. My conscience is captive to the word of God.

At the moment Luther spoke those words, the *foundation* of the Catholic worldview — the light of Sacred Scripture, viewed through the lens of Sacred Tradition, interpreted by the authoritative teaching office of the Church — was rejected. And the foundation of the Protestant worldview was laid: the Bible is the Christian's *sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith and practice*.

## Practical Implications

It's nearly impossible to overstate the implications of this critical moment in the history of Christianity. From now on, each Christian would have the right to do what Luther had done: to read the Bible, to study and pray and ultimately decide *for himself* what he believed the true teachings of Christianity to be — without being bound by any authority on earth: any tradition, any pope, or any council.

Protestants refer to this as the "right of private judgment" or the "right of private interpretation." As Luther put it, "In these matters of faith, to be sure, each Christian is for himself pope and church" (cited in Robert Sunkenis, *Not by Scripture Alone*, p. 363).

Now, it's important to emphasize at this point that Catholics also believe in the "right of private interpretation." There are plenty of Catholic Scripture scholars learning Hebrew and Greek and devoting their lives to the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. It's just that Catholics hold the right of private interpretation to be a limited right, a right that is practiced within the limits of what the Church has already formally defined as being true.

To use an analogy I picked up from Peter Kreeft, we Catholics are like children playing in the playground. We're free to swing and slide and hang from the bars. We're free to sit in the sandbox of Sacred Scripture and throw biblical texts into each other's eyes. But for us there's a fence around the playground that keeps us from wandering out into the street and being run over by every passing theological fad. That fence is the settled teaching of the Church.

Essentially, Luther took the fence away. "At the end of the day," Luther basically said, "I don't care what the Tradition of the Church has been. I don't care what popes and councils have decided. My conscience is captive to what I see being taught in the Word of God!"

He took what had been a limited right and made it an absolute right. And when you think of it, this is reasonable given his premise. I think this follows inescapably from the idea that Scripture is our "sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith and practice!" After all, in the absence of a Church in which one believes the deposit of faith has been preserved by the Holy Spirit and can be known, what's left but to say that each Christian has to right to decide for himself?

## The Unraveling of the Church

This isn't hard to understand. It's also not hard to anticipate what would come of this: doctrinal chaos.

When Luther and Melancthon and the other Reformers began preaching *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment, almost immediately there was an *explosion* of interpretations of Scripture and with this an explosion of divisions *within* the Protestant movement. The immediate result was *doctrinal chaos and division*.

This is simply an historical fact. Luther himself complained about what he saw happening everywhere.

There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads.

This fellow will have nothing to do with baptism; another denies the Sacrament [that is, the Holy Eucharist]; a third believes that there is another world between this and the Last Day. Some teach that Christ is not God; some say this, some say that. There is no rustic so rude [no farmer in his field] but that, if he dreams or fancies anything, it must be the whisper of the Holy Spirit, and

he himself a prophet .... Noblemen, townsmen, peasants, all classes understand the gospel better than I or St. Paul. They are now wise and think themselves more learned than all the ministers (cited in Patrick O'Hare, *The Facts About Luther*, p. 208).

It's hard not to see the fruit of all this in the present. The divisions within Protestantism that began to emerge almost as soon as Luther took his stand have continued to where after 500 years the earth is now *filled* with Protestant denominations and sects, independent churches and churches so independent they don't even want to be called churches — each of them basing their teaching on Scripture alone, each insisting that the Bible is clear and therefore sufficient for faith and practice, each presenting a different set of doctrines, each rooted historically in the teaching of someone who at some point decided, to quote again from St. Vincent, to “cast away the universal and ancient faith of the Catholic Church.”

And why? Because “It is written!”

Now I was still a Protestant pastor. But I looked around the Evangelical landscape and I saw the chaos. I saw megachurches led by young charismatic men who had no clue what the Church of the second, third, and fourth centuries believed and who really couldn't care less. They had the Bible, and what else is needed?

I walked into the pulpit of my Baptist church every Sunday to teach the conclusions of my personal study of Scripture. I thought about how just up the street there was a Lutheran pastor, no doubt smarter and holier than I, who was contradicting me. Around the corner there was a Presbyterian pastor who was contradicting *us both*. A block or two further down there was a Church of Christ pastor who was contradicting the three of us! I was coming to see that *sola Scriptura* not only doesn't work, but cannot in principle work.

A passage that really hit me between the eyes was Ephesians 4:11-16. In this passage St. Paul talks about how God gave pastors and teachers to the Church to build the Church up in the unity of

the faith so that we would “no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.”

It suddenly struck me that what Paul had in mind here *could only work* if there was some authoritative teaching to which pastors and teachers were all bound. In that case, when they taught, wherever they were scattered throughout the world they would be building the Church up in unity. On the other hand, if all pastors are free to study the Word of God and decide for themselves, as Luther had decided for himself, wouldn't many of them inevitably disagree with one another and begin teaching different doctrines? Wouldn't the pastors and teachers, given to create unity, become the very forces stirring up the winds of doctrine and tossing God's people to and fro?

I wondered: how did Luther and the other Reformers respond to the division unleashed by their own teaching of *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment? What did they do?

This is the question we will look at next month. ■

## 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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## SHARE THE NEWSLETTER!

The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends to encourage them to join our mailing list. They may also request to receive our mailings by using the response card included with this newsletter.

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## 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

#### September 6

Deep in History Roundtable with Dr. David Anders and Ken Hensley\* (re-air from 2/4/19)

#### September 13

A tribute to the late Dr. Thomas Howard\*

#### September 20

Adam Crawford\* (former non-denominational pastor)

#### September 27

Fr. Peter & Judy Davids\* (former Plymouth Brethren & Episcopalians)

#### October 4

Mark McNeil\* (former Oneness Pentecostal) (re-air from 2/25/19)

\*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).



# CHNETWORK RETREAT IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

## Oct 11-14, 2021

### *Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center*

Coming Home Network Retreats are opportunities to meet (or catch up with) the CHNetwork staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion, prayer, and worship. *Intended for both converts and those on the journey to Catholicism*, whether lay or clergy, the goal is to promote Christian fellowship among the attendees, assist in discernment for those who are facing tough questions or decisions, and to encourage all in an ever greater walk with Christ.

**Registration is limited. Register now.**

For more information or to register please contact Ken Hensley at [kenh@chnetwork.org](mailto:kenh@chnetwork.org) or 740-450-1175.



## Joyful Journey Updates

**From Sarah, on the journey**

"Yes, everything is going great with RCIA. We will be coming into the Church within a few weeks hopefully. Thank you for your prayers. They are greatly appreciated. My adopted sister started her RCIA journey about 4 months ago and my mother began her RCIA journey last week. God has been wonderfully answering prayers. We still have many of our family members we are praying for to come to the knowledge of Christ and His true Church."

**From Jorge, on the journey**

"So I already contacted a Catholic church in order to start the RCIA as soon as possible. This time I'm not joining the Catholic Church because I'm angry at a

pastor or the church I'm in or because I feel lonely. No, this time I'm joining the Catholic Church because it is the only true historical and apostolic church that Jesus Christ founded. Therefore, I can definitely say this time that I am finally coming home for the glory of God!"

**From Susan, a recent convert**

"Every day, I learn something new about the Catholic Faith and it is so exciting! The depth and overwhelming beauty in the Church that Jesus established is mind-blowing. The fact that I have been led into the Church by the Holy Spirit and can experience the fullness of the Christian faith is very humbling. The opportunity to experience the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist in every Mass

— is indescribable. Nothing compares to the power and presence of Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass! In the Protestant churches I've been part of, I've had many wonderful experiences. We've had some of the best music provided by professional musicians, eloquently spoken sermons, and I have witnessed miraculous healing in prayer services. However, none of that compares to being able to receive the true presence of Christ — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharist. Nothing. The well of the Church is deep. Deeper than I ever could imagine. I treasure what I've found." ■

# Prayer List

## Clergy

■ **For Jay, a non-denominational pastor** who was baptized and raised Catholic and now finds himself drawn back toward the Church, that the Lord will lead him and give him courage.

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

■ **For an Anglican priest** drawn to the Catholic Church and struggling very much with family who is strongly opposed.

■ **For a Baptist pastor** firmly on the road toward the Church and wrestling with how to teach his wife all that he has learned.

■ **For Bryan, a Baptist pastor** looking to come back to the Church, that the Lord would show him the way.

■ **For Will, a Lutheran pastor** who has made the decision to resign his ministry later this year and enter the Church and is actively looking for some way to earn a living once he does this.

■ **For Eduardo, a former Presbyterian minister** who resigned and entered the Church last year and who has been asked to launch a Catholic TV Show in Brazil, that the Lord will bless this work to reach many fallen-away Catholics.

■ **For James, a Lutheran pastor** who wants to convert but has serious obstacles including the need for an annulment from a previous marriage.

■ **For Jeff, a Presbyterian pastor** who is only beginning to work through what it would mean for him and his family to convert to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Donald, a former Protestant pastor** who wants to return to the Church but has remaining questions and concerns about purgatory and Mary, that he will find the answers he seeks.

■ **For Mark, an Anglican priest** who is drawn to the Church but has some theological issues that need to be ironed out.

■ **For Gary, a Baptist pastor** intellectually convinced of the truth of Catholicism but who has developed an extensive ministry and has a lot to take care of before he can resign to the enter the Church.

## Laity

■ **For an American Baptist**, that he may find his path into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

■ **For a convert in Florida** who struggles accepting the Church's authority to teach doctrine.

■ **For Christopher**, that he will continue seeking truth and discern whether God is calling him to become Catholic.

■ **For a Presbyterian in Kentucky** who is struggling with her husband not wanting her to become Catholic, that they will both be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

■ **For Eduardo, an Evangelical**, that he may successfully work through the annulment process and be able to return to Jesus in the holy Mass.

■ **For Joanna**, who recently returned to the Church, that she will continue to grow in her faith.

■ **For Mack in Virginia**, that he would find guidance in his study of the *Catechism* as he prepares to begin RCIA in the Fall.

■ **For a Baptist in the south** to have a firm resolution as to what direction to pursue in her faith journey.

■ **For a Baptist in Kentucky**, that the Holy Spirit would guide his journey and that his wife would become open to the Catholic Faith.



■ **For Jennifer**, that the Lord will guide her path forward and be close to her in her struggles.

■ **For Dawn and her husband** to find ways to foster mutual understanding and respect though they don't share the same faith life.

■ **For Bryan, an Anglican**, that the love of the Lord Jesus would guide him in his journey to the Church and to a possible vocation in the priesthood.

■ **For Clara** who has connected with a local parish and is beginning faith formation classes.

■ **For Jeff, a Charismatic Christian**, that the Lord Jesus would answer his questions about the Catholic Church.

■ **For an Evangelical on the journey** who is struggling to answer her friends' objections to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Richard in Texas**, that he may have his dream fulfilled to worship Jesus in spirit and truth at the eucharistic altar of our Lord Jesus.

■ **For Elaine on the east coast** to find a strong, welcoming Catholic community where she can grow in her faith.

■ **For Thomas, an Episcopalian**, that he may find faithful guidance to the fullness of the truth in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Danny, a member of the Assemblies of God**, that the Lord would bless the RCIA experience of him, his wife, and also his mother-in-law.

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...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

speech laced with humor at worst. As beneficial as those can be, I had to ask: was that worship? Communion was a symbol to help us remember what Christ did on the cross. Was that worship? I began to feel curious about how the early Christians worshiped. What did worship mean to them?

I began to notice the differences between our churches. At the Catholic church it was assumed everyone in the pew was a Christian, since there was never an altar call; no one came forward for prayer — just the opposite from the Protestant church, where it was assumed that everyone needed to be evangelized.

There was more happening at the Mass. Although helpful, the sermon or homily wasn't the reason one went to Mass. You went because Jesus is there. A lot of Protestants have a problem with the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, but this Presence wasn't a crazy notion to me for two reasons: 1) My limited understanding of the Orthodox faith was that they believe in the true Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, although they refer to it as a Mystery, not a Sacrament. 2) I believe that, when receiving communion, Jesus is there with me in that moment of time. That's why we're taught in Scripture that receiving communion while in the state of sin is dangerous. St. Paul warns us not to participate in an unworthy manner (see 1 Corinthians 11:27). I likened it to the curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience that Moses gives the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 28). There's a saying that the same sun that hardens the clay, warms the wax. So the blessing and the curse come from the same source. It never made sense that communion was just symbolic if judgment was attached.

Not fitting in anywhere, I started looking into different churches in our area, trying to find some middle ground to the Catholic Church. Something that *felt* Catholic without *being* Catholic. I called myself “the woman without a country.” Nothing felt right. Some churches had a liturgical ambiance, but something was missing. Frustrated, I grew jealous of my husband and his faith. He knew where he belonged, and he sincerely believed he was part of the Church that Christ established. I was miffed at the Reformers. It's not my fault the Church had schisms — several and counting. I felt like the child of a divorced family. Why did the Church have to break up? We threw the baby out with the bathwater. Just to be clear, I was not looking at the Catholic Church with rose colored glasses; I was familiar with her history. But as my husband would say, 2000 years later the Catholic Church still stands — not because her members are spotless, but because the “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18).

By now, I wasn't just reading to grow in faith. I was in pursuit of something. I couldn't articulate it, but the Catholic Church was

nowhere on my radar. My journey was intentional; I had to find answers. Unsettled, I had to know “the truth,” even if it turned out that I was wrong about my beliefs. This was my prayer for years. As I was reading my way into the Church, I did so with fervent prayer.

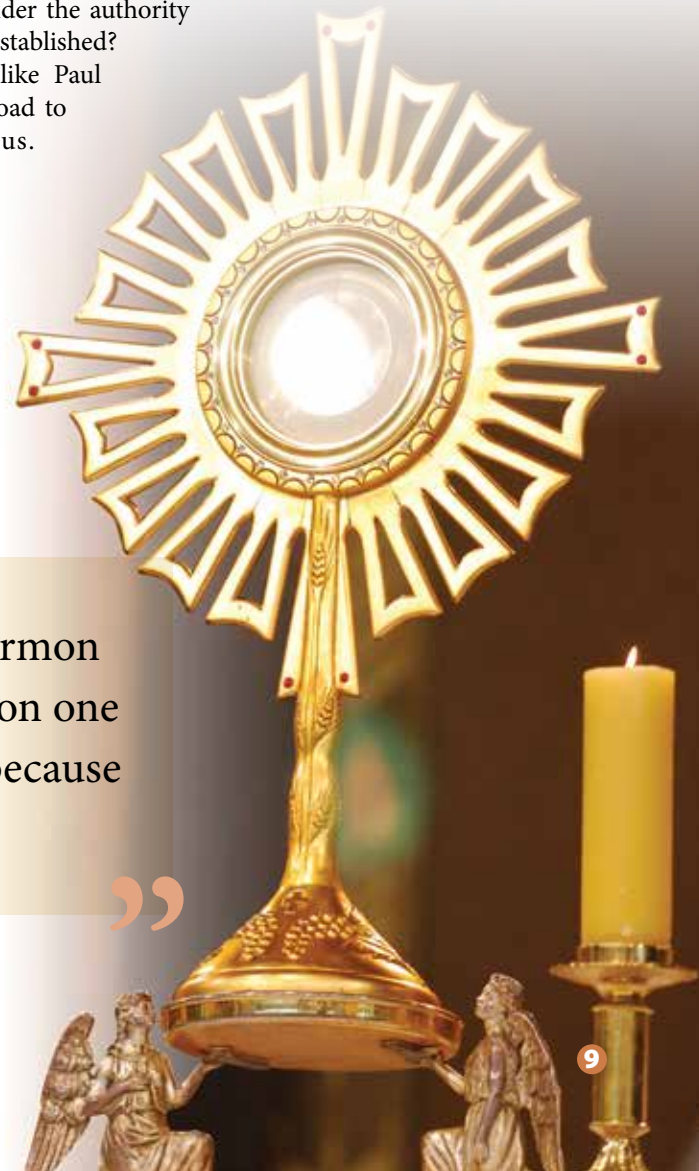
In the meantime, I was still attending Catholic Mass, and periodically I would be lost in prayer as I began to see things in the Mass that I had read about in the early Church Fathers. My conversion started out intellectually, with reason, logic, and facts, but even with all the knowledge I acquired, I couldn't surrender until I had a profound experience.

At this point I had been going to a Catholic parish for about 14 years. Yes, I was stubborn! I was unsure of His Church and what worship was supposed to look like in the 21st century. On June 10th, 2019, my interior dam broke. All I remember is one word that came to me with clarity: *authority*.

I never would have guessed that my stronghold was authority. I thought my issues lay with the saints, Mary, purgatory, and other doctrines that Protestants commonly object to. But the concept of authority connected my head with my heart. It wasn't easy to accept. My prayer of wanting to know the truth, even if I'm wrong, came back to me. If Christ is the ultimate authority, why wouldn't I come under the authority He had established?

I felt like Paul on the road to Damascus.

Although helpful, the sermon or homily wasn't the reason one went to Mass. You went because Jesus is there.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I had been fighting God all these years and didn't know it. I was judging His saints and children as if they were lost, but it was they who were faithful to His authority. I was physically sick in bed for a week. I wrestled with the flood of emotions from this stronghold that had broken within me, feeling an entire spectrum of emotions, like the joys of liberation and heaviness of regret. God had broken through my preconceived assumptions and ingrained prejudice — which I didn't know I had until I was face to face with them. God humbled me. But now that He had my attention, He also began to rebuild (see Hosea 6:1).

I devoured Catholic apologetic books one after the other. Meanwhile, my husband was quiet. You'd think he would have been jumping for joy when I spoke to him about what was happening to me, but he was quiet. I later asked him why he wasn't excited, and he responded that he was "cautiously optimistic." He didn't realize how close I was to a decision. He knew I had been searching and struggling for a while, but with this strange sight before him, he needed time to process what was happening to me.

I was now listening to understand rather than listening to find fault. This attitude profoundly affected me, because if the enlightenment was from God, then I must wholly surrender.

But what if it was all from the devil and I was being deceived? That thought occurred to me on several occasions, but it didn't last. It didn't even get a chance to stake its ground, because I had already arrived at the conclusion of my search. I was so overwhelmed by the evidence and so humbled by God's grace that all doubt drained away.

I used to find it insulting when Catholics would say that they had the fullness of the faith; now I understood. In Peter Kreeft's book, *Catholics and Protestants: What Can We Learn from Each Other?*, he writes, "when a Jew becomes a Christian, he comes to believe more, not less. He loses nothing in Judaism but fulfills it .... When a Protestant becomes a Catholic, he loses nothing positive in Protestantism but perfects it" (p. 61). I was becoming more Christian. It could not be a deception. It was a work of the Holy Spirit drawing me closer.

I read a book by Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. This hit home. It helped me to see how my faith was influenced and shaped by Fundamentalist teaching. Without knowing it — never having attended a Fundamentalist church — the effects of Fundamentalism were present. I recognized that I had absorbed

anti-Catholic teaching, intentional or unintentional, planted throughout my formative years. I had listened to a lot of Christian radio sermons from various denominations. When they made accusations, or distorted Catholic teaching, or spoke as ex-Catholics about why they left the Church, I had simply received their teaching. I had no reason to doubt them, since they were respected pastors. Over time, I acquired the idea that the Catholic Church was

dead wrong, and thank God for the Reformers, who saved Christianity. Until confronted, I didn't know these were part of my belief system. All along I wanted to avoid being deceived by the Catholics, and now I felt at least misinformed and at worst cheated by Protestantism. As I mentioned, authority was my stronghold, and God just crumbled that stronghold and everything it represented.

Links from various videos led me to Peter Kreeft videos, and from there, I found the Coming Home Network. In a moment, I was home. No longer "the woman without a country," I couldn't read and watch enough stories. They all made the same difficult deci-

sion, many at a great cost to livelihood and relationships. I was overwhelmed. I saw my own story in the countless narratives. I had thought I was alone, that no one had had my experience or could relate to my dilemma, that I was the only one who didn't fit in any church. What did God tell Elijah when he thought he was alone and wanted to die? You're not the only one, there are seven thousand like you (see 1 Kings 19:18). Well, it turns out that there are many more like me.

Catholicism answered my long-time questions. I began to connect the dots. After my moment of profound grace on June 10th, when God humbled me and showed me that my issue was authority, everything was clear. I didn't need to object or argue against Catholic doctrine any more. In listening to understand, I could receive what God was trying to give me. It was very liberating to submit to authority when I read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, I discovered that it is woven with Scripture throughout. The same arguments that didn't make sense before now made complete sense. I didn't even feel the need to defend my views, because it was more important to come under the authority that Christ had placed over me. I stopped hurtling my opinions and just listened.

We made an appointment to speak with our priest to find out what the next step would be for me. I was nervous and excited, but it was easy to approach him because I had known him for over

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

10 years. He said I didn't need to attend RCIA classes since I had already done the research and studying on my own. We decided to wait a few months for the right timing. The religious sister who was director of RCIA was on summer vacation with her Order, and my sponsor, who was a long-time parishioner and close friend, needed to be there. I think it was good to wait and let it sink in. Four months later, on October 6th, 2019, I was confirmed. However, I did join the RCIA group before and after my confirmation, because there are always things we can learn, and some things are not taught in books.

All the studying I had done over the years wasn't in vain. I thought I would have to start over and re-learn my Bible, but that wasn't the case. I did need to correct my flawed theology, but God doesn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. I started to put everything together and am still amazed by how much there is to learn. I found many of my answers in my own New King James Bible, where I had underlined or circled many passages. God really does meet us where we are; He speaks our heart language. My heart language is Scripture. He met me there and connected the Old Testament to the New Testament in a way I hadn't seen before, because the Catholic Faith connects them. The Bible came to life in a profound way.

Regarding the Eucharist: I now saw the Catholic Mass as an extension of Jewish roots. Jesus said He didn't come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (see Matthew 5:17). If the Old Testament is a copy and shadow of what was to come then the New Testament would be the fulfillment not another copy (see Hebrews 8:5-6). The institution of the Eucharist is the fulfillment of Passover and of the manna in the desert. They can't just be more symbols. In John 6, Jesus was clear (despite all those years that I glossed over it) that we were to eat His Body in order to abide in Him. The Israelites in Egypt ate the Passover lamb, which was symbolic of Christ. In the desert they ate the manna, which was symbolic of Christ. Now that the Messiah has come, are we to eat another symbol in order to commune with Him? If we eat another symbol, how is that fulfillment?

Paul spoke of great consequences for those that receive the Body and Blood in an unworthy manner (see 1 Corinthians 11:24-30). It didn't make sense that severe consequences would be attached to a symbol.

Regarding Mary: I began to prayerfully meditate on her role in salvation history. I studied her in Scripture and other books. *Behold Your Mother* by Tim Staples was very helpful to me. I had to flesh her out, to think of her as more than a painting or a statue. We regard the Blood of Jesus as power and salvation; I began to think about that Blood. Where did it come from? His DNA was of Mary. His Body and His Blood came from His mother, since He had no biological father. She was the first Christian. She "communed" with Him for nine months — then for 33 years. What conversations they must have had during that time!

Regarding purgatory: I was taught that 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 is speaking of your "works" not "you." Yes, my *works* are being judged in this passage, but the judgment is coming down on *me*.

Who I chose to be, how I lived my life, my earthly attachments — they are all part of me, so I am what is being judged here.

This passage is speaking of a believer, not a non-believer. Therefore, only those who are "saved" will be judged in this way. When will this happen? Experience tells us that it doesn't happen in our earthly lifetime, so it is obviously speaking of the afterlife. Revelation 20:11-12 speaks of the judgment from the great white throne. Books will be opened *and* the Book of Life. We know the Book of Life has every believer's name; it's our reservation to heaven. What are the "other books" about? We will be judged by our works (see Romans 2:6-8). After all, we were created to do good works (see Ephesians 2:10). Have we lived that out?

It makes sense that this moment of burning away our work (that had the appearance of kingdom work, but when tested burned away) would be painful to me, since it's my life work. This aligns with the idea of the purifying of the person before one enters heaven. It's not a punishment, but a cleansing of all that I thought was holy and good; all that I thought was kingdom work. A time to rid myself of earthly attachments and misconceptions. I think this will be the kind of pain that's followed by rest, a consoling. It only hurts as it's happening, but then it feels good to be cleansed, purified, and sanctified. That's how I have come to think of purgatory. It is Christ completing His sanctifying work in me (see Philippians 1:6). As a Protestant, I believed in sanctification. But now I see that its development to completion can be called purgatory.

I am now confidently convinced that in the Church there is order, logic, history, and a bigger picture of God's family. I'm home.



*VIVIAN CENTURION is a wife and mother. She lives with her husband and three grown children in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. She came into full communion with the Church on October 6, 2019.*

Continue the **JOURNEY**

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