



July 2020 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



From Agnostic to Baptist to Catholic: The ABCs of Conversion

By Ian Murphy Ph.D

Odd that someone with a quintessential Irish Catholic name like "Ian Murphy" is a convert into the Church; yet I am. Initially, I doubted whether God existed; eventually, I became a Baptist preacher; now I'm Catholic.

In one sense, I suppose I have what people call "one of those dramatic conversion stories." A physical encounter with spiritual warfare brought me out of my atheistic doubts, and my sense of justice in my Protestant years inspired a federal law from the U.S. Congress. I can certainly understand somebody deeming this journey a dramatic conversion.

At the same time, all Catholics are ongoing converts, and I believe that each individual's encounter with Jesus Christ is dramatic — precisely because it's *an encounter with Jesus Christ*. The unusual aspects of my own conversion are probably attributable to my stubbornness. Had I been more humble and cooperative with God's grace, the Lord wouldn't have allowed my journey to become so intense.

As the second of five children, I grew up in a Christian home. My dad and mom were both Christians of strong faith and sincere friendship with the Lord. Odd as it may seem, we didn't join a church and attend services on a regular basis. My parents were hippies.

They weren't flag-burning revolutionaries, but they did participate in peace communes, and they traveled the country camping. Family life eventually grounded my parents, as child-rearing became their priority. What remained deeply instilled from

the hippie culture was a suspicion of institutions, including religious institutions.

My parents taught us that institutionalized religion couldn't be trusted. While distancing themselves from church membership, they did teach us about Jesus and always stressed the importance of the Bible.

I remain grateful for the perspective my parents gave me, and for the desire for authenticity that it cultivated within me from a very young age. At the same time, by not growing up with regular church attendance, there was a lot I didn't know or realize until I was older.

When Mom explained to me what the Bible was, I was moved in the core of my tiny being to read that book.

At four years of age, my reading was very limited. I began with the ten-volume set of Arthur Maxwell's *The Bible Story*. Since it had pictures, I would find words I knew and match them to the scene. As my reading improved, I kept going and had nearly completed the entire set by the time I was eight years old. Problem was, I couldn't believe it.

The Gospels sounded too good to be true. I wanted to believe them, but at that point, I wondered if I had spent the last

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

four years reading an epic fable. In the second grade, I asked myself the scariest questions ever: “What if there is no God? What if I’m just an accident?” These doubts and questions would increasingly haunt me for the next six years.

I realized that if I have a Creator who designed me for a loving relationship with Him, then building that friendship is crucial to life’s purpose. If there is right and wrong, if there is an afterlife, if I am accountable for the way I live, then all of that impacts how I live right now. If God truly showed up in His own creation, evidenced by Christ’s rising from the dead, then I am responsible for how I respond to that. But what if, when I die, I simply blink out of existence with no awareness that I was ever here?

All of this existential turmoil was indeed a lot for a little second-grader. But this burden wasn’t constant, at least not throughout my elementary-school years. My doubts and fears surrounding God, purpose, and the afterlife filled me with a dreadful anxiety, but only periodically, in an otherwise happy childhood.

When I was five years old, my family moved into the house that I would call home for the next thirteen years, until I left for college. It was a beautiful Tudor-style A-frame with extensions, located atop one of the foothills of the Appalachians in western Pennsylvania — fairly close to Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous Fallingwater. Beautiful surroundings and an abundance of love made for a joyous boyhood.

This childhood happiness was interrupted when, at fourteen years old, my previously periodic anguish over questions regarding God’s existence became constant. Oh, how I wanted the Gospels to be real! As J.R.R. Tolkien once said, “There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true.” However, I realized that desire by itself was insufficient for me to have faith. Like the

Apostle Thomas, I needed *proof*. Lacking the tangible evidence I sought, I realized that I was officially an agnostic, a non-believer.

Throwing God into doubt, in turn, threw my whole self-image and purpose for living into doubt. I didn’t know what the meaning of my life was or why I existed. Reaching an unprecedented place of turmoil, I finally cried out the following prayer: “God, if you exist, then I need to touch the spiritual realm for myself, in order to have faith.” As people sometimes say, “Be careful what you pray for, because you might just get it.”

One night, I was awakened by an invisible, sinister presence. Wide awake, I was fully aware that I was no longer alone, and that something else was there with me in my bedroom. I couldn’t see it visibly, but I could tell where it was. It’s as though it was cloaked, but its cloaked presence left a haziness just enough to be detectable. Its malevolence was palpable. It felt evil.

Hovering above me, in front of the door, it spoke. The speech was not audible; it was clearer than that. This preternatural entity was able to plant messages directly into my mind. Its telepathic form of communication left no room for misunderstanding. These were intrusive messages, transmitted with perfect clarity, from *someone else*.

It said, “I just woke you up. I am here. I intend you harm.” I could sense its wickedness, its desire to hurt me, and its hatred for all people.

I asked, “Why can’t I see you?”

It answered me, “I have the ability to travel invisible to your human eye, but I am here. I am about to show you. I want you to die.”

The cloaked entity began moving toward me. By watching the hazy trace of its presence, I was able to follow its movement

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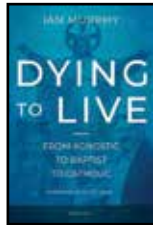
SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.



Becoming Deep in History CD

Are you a Christian living in continuity or discontinuity? In this talk from a *Deep in History* conference, former Presbyterian pastor Dr. Kenneth Howell discusses the importance of and strategy for learning and living deep in the history of Christianity.



Dying to Live — By Ian Murphy

Newly released! Ian Murphy describes his free-spirited Christian parents, his early doubts, the influence of faith-filled relatives and friends, and the spiritual encounter that made him a believer. At a young age, Murphy went from strength to strength as he sought after truth, grew in prayer, and shared his faith with others. But his doubts resurfaced when his friend and mentor, the leader of a Protestant college group, was murdered. After his trust in God was restored, Murphy became a Baptist minister in the Bible Belt, and from there his spiritual journey led him into the Catholic Church. The unexpected twists and turns in Murphy’s extraordinary story show that when a man gives his life to Christ, the Lord never lets him go.

\$35

Receive *Becoming Deep in History* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *Dying to Live* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *Becoming Deep in History* CD and *Dying to Live* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Finding Your Place in the Pew, Part 2:

FAITHFULLY CATHOLIC

By Mary Clare Miller, Publications and Pastoral Care Coordinator

Last month we discussed some ways we can practically become more at home in the Catholic Church. We hope that those ideas have been helpful to new converts and even those who are long-time Catholics who might need a bit of encouragement in their faith journeys. In this article, we will look at various means Catholics have at our disposal to continue to grow closer to Jesus and learn more about His Church.

A Sacramental Life

The most important thing for new and longtime Catholics to remember is that the sacraments are here to strengthen us and give us grace. Take advantage of all that Jesus wants to give you through frequently going to Communion and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. With the recent Coronavirus pandemic, Catholics have been reminded just how we should never take for granted these opportunities of encountering Jesus. Even if going to Confession is hard or feels uncomfortable, remember that it's a beautiful encounter with the mercy of God. While the requirements for Catholics to go to Confession are rather minimal (once a year if you have serious sins to confess), making a point to go at least every month is a good way to foster a healthy awareness of our sinfulness and regularly repent and be forgiven. In addition to frequent Mass and Confession, finding a regular confessor or even spiritual director can be immensely helpful in growing in our faith. Also, making a retreat (yearly or even more often) is another way to take time for God and going deeper in our relationship with Him.

Rosaries upon Rosaries

Another sometimes unexpectedly hard part of being Catholic is finding your way through the plethora of Catholic devotions. In making the journey to the Catholic Church, you might be confused or overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of options within Catholic devotions. Have you ever wondered how many rosaries a day you need to recite to be a good Catholic? Or how many novenas you need to pray in order to be granted a petition (*and what if you miss a day?*)? How do you pick and choose what devotions to "make your own"? We encourage you to prayerfully discern God's leading in this area of your life and focus on devotions that are particularly meaningful to you and that attract you. You might find yourself drawn towards one devotion but not another, or your devotional life might change from one year to another. And that is fine. The point of every Catholic devotion is to enrich your faith and draw you closer to God. It's not a laundry list of to-do items that you must check off before entering heaven. Start simply. Be consistent. If something doesn't appeal to you after you've tried it, by all means feel free to explore other devotions or prayers. Some of the most popular Catholic devotions are Eucharistic Adoration, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and there are numerous novenas and prayers to saints. We offer resources on our website at [chnetwork.org/answers-to-questions/catholic-](http://chnetwork.org/answers-to-questions/catholic-devotions/)

[devotions/](http://chnetwork.org/answers-to-questions/catholic-devotions/) that help guide you in learning about various devotions and how they fit into a Catholic spiritual life.

Aside from nourishing our faith life through the sacraments, retreats, and devotions, we also need to give our spiritual life the opportunity to grow through feeding it with good material. We are singularly blessed in having an abundance of ways to learn more about our Faith, both in print and online. Online portals such as Formed (formed.org), the Saint Paul Center for Biblical Theology (stpaulcenter.com), the Knights of Columbus (kofc.org), the Institute for Catholic Culture (instituteofcatholicculture.org), and, of course, our website chnetwork.org have a multitude of resources that allow us to learn more about Christ and His Church — often for free. There are a number of good faithful Catholic publishers too that provide excellent written material. Try reading one spiritual book a month for the next year and you will be amazed at how much richer your faith will become.

Building up our Faith

As social beings, we also need to make time to further our faith life within our local community. Joining (or starting!) a local Bible study or faith formation group is another favorite way to both learn more and make friendships. The Great Adventure Bible Study (ascensionpress.com/pages/the-great-adventure) and Catholic Scripture Study (cssprogram.net) are a couple of Catholic Bible studies that might be available in your area or you could always form a group yourself. Men's and women's groups are also excellent means to grow in your faith through your local community. Two examples of such groups are That Man is You (paradisusdei.org), for men, and Endow (endowgroups.org), for women. Even asking a few other people from your parish over for dinner and to pray the rosary once a month is an easy way to foster fellowship and build up one another's faith.

Becoming Catholic is often a big paradigm shift. Converts can lose friends along with the support of their faith communities, and need to re-orient a large part of their belief system. New Catholics are blessed in so many ways in experiencing the depth and richness of our Faith but that doesn't make the transition easy. In these struggles, the CHNetwork wants to encourage you and pray for you. Please reach out to us at chnetwork.org, join our online community, and connect with a staff member if we can be of help. Know that we pray for all those connected with our apostolate and that we are happy to support you in your continuing faith journeys. ■

Deep in History & On the Journey: Two New Web Series from CHNetwork

By CHNetwork Staff

At the November 2019 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic bishops, something almost unheard of happened: the bishops voted unanimously on a resolution.

The issue that received such unified support from the bishops? A decision to support the Archdiocese of Lyons in its efforts to have St. Irenaeus of Lyons declared a Doctor of the Church.

Of course, many were disappointed to learn that St. Irenaeus wasn't already a Doctor of the Church; but we at the Coming Home Network were encouraged to see one of our own board members, Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson, addressing the room full of bishops in thanksgiving for the resolution, and quoting St. Irenaeus: "For where the Church is, there also is God's Spirit; where God's Spirit is, there is the Church and every grace."

For a number of years, we at the Coming Home Network have been exploring the concept of being "deep in history," most notably through a series of conferences, which can be revisited at deepinhistory.com. But we've wanted to do more with the idea, and so when we saw our own Msgr. Steenson present for a USCCB vote on a Church Father, we decided the time was ripe to plan a new project exploring what it means to be "deep in history," starting with St. Irenaeus himself.

Our *Deep in History* web series is one of a few projects that we've launched or revisited in recent days, as we continue to make better use of the web and social media tools at our disposal. The episodes, which are available on YouTube and a number of podcasting platforms, are an ongoing conversation between Marcus Grodi and Msgr.

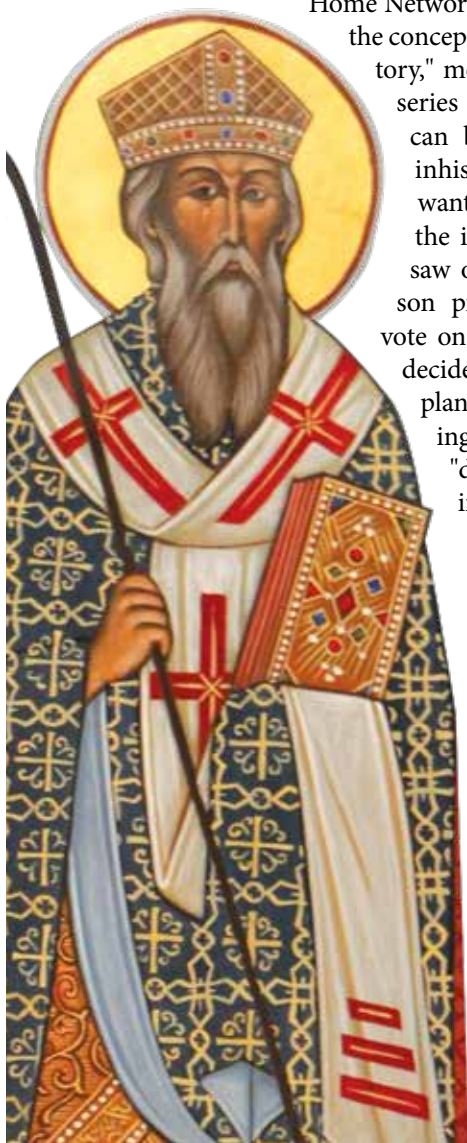
Steenson (who for a number of years taught patristics to seminarians) about the early Church, and what the witness of the first Christians teaches us about being faithful witnesses to the Gospel. So far, Marcus and Msgr. Steenson have done a few episodes unpacking *Against Heresies* by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, and it's been an uplifting and eye-opening series! The full archive of *Deep in History* episodes can be accessed at deepinhistory.com.

In addition to *Deep in History*, we've also launched another brand-new web series, *On the Journey*, featuring Matt Swaim and Ken Hensley. Like *Deep in History*, it's available on YouTube and a variety of podcasting services, and has gotten strong positive feedback since it launched in April of this year. As a former Baptist pastor, Ken's articles on the various questions that led him to the Catholic Faith have been extremely popular over the years, and *On the Journey* provides a new outlet for those topics to be discussed in a fun, engaging, and informative way. Ken is joined for these discussions by Matt Swaim, a former Nazarene and Free Methodist, who some of you may also be familiar with as host of the *Son Rise Morning Show* on EWTN Radio.

So far, episodes of *On the Journey* have covered a variety of topics, including the nature of the early Church, the Catholic understanding of the Communion of Saints, and a multi-part series on whether or not the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is itself taught in the pages of Scripture. Rather than being a strict apologetics approach, Matt and Ken look back at the thought processes that led each of them to the Catholic Church, and try to connect their own experience of questioning to those Christians of good will from other traditions who might be asking their own questions about Catholicism.

To view the full archive of *On the Journey* episodes, visit chnetwork.org/onthejourney.

Of course, some of you who've been watching the *Journey Home* over the past few months may have noticed that a few episodes of our EWTN program have featured segments from our longest-running podcast, *Deep in Scripture*. Over the years, Marcus Grodi has recorded hundreds of episodes of *Deep in Scripture*, featuring conversations with *Journey Home* guests and CHNetwork staff members about passages from the Bible that have particular meaning to them. Lately, Marcus has been joined on a number of these episodes by his son, JonMarc Grodi, the Chief Operating Officer of CHNetwork. JonMarc's background in philosophy and his interest in the classical virtues brings a



St. Irenaeus icon photo by bobosh_t (Flickr)

wonderful element of application to these familiar, and sometimes unfamiliar, passages from God's Word.

Themes that have been explored over the years on *Deep in Scripture* include "Verses I Never Saw" (verses that Protestant guests never noticed until they started studying Catholicism), "Hard Verses" (verses that caused our guests difficulty until they looked at them through Catholic eyes) and "Memorable Verses": verses that our guests have committed to memory and which have been deeply formative in their walk with Christ. Episodes are available going all the way back to 2006 at deepinscripture.com.

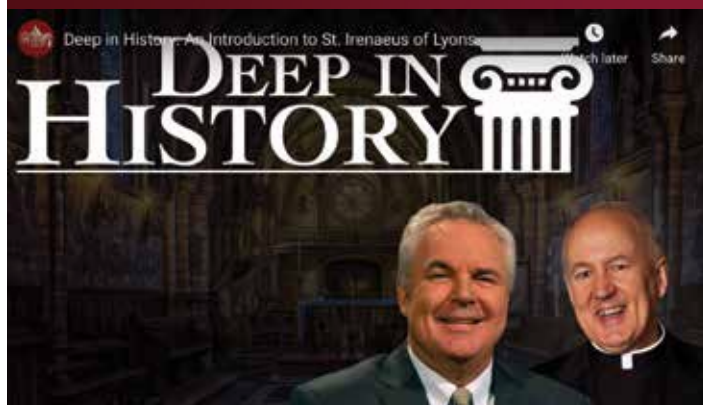
In the Second Vatican Council's decree on social communications, we are told:

The Catholic Church, since it was founded by Christ our Lord to bear salvation to all men and thus is obliged to preach the Gospel, considers it one of its duties to announce the Good News of salvation also with the help of the media of social communication and to instruct men in their proper use. (*Inter Mirifica* 3)

As the mission of the Coming Home Network continues to adapt and expand to meet the needs of our members, especially those exploring the Catholic Faith, we hope that these new and updated projects will help us mature as stewards of the call to help people see the truth and beauty of the Catholic Faith. So please, help us spread the word! You can find all of the new episodes of *Deep in History*, *On the Journey*, and *Deep in Scripture* through our website, chnetwork.org, as well as a number of other web platforms, including YouTube, Google Play, iTunes, Spotify, and more. Thank you for providing us with the support to make these projects possible! ■

DEEP IN HISTORY: A NEW SERIES WITH MARCUS GRODI AND MSGR. JEFFREY STEENSON

Marcus Grodi and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson kick off a new series for the Coming Home Network, explaining how the study of early Christianity and the Fathers of the Church helped guide each of them to the Catholic Faith. Go to chnetwork.org/deepinhistory to learn more.



CHNetwork.org/DeepInHistory



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

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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.

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NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE



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

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. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are copyright © 2020 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

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.

CHNETWORK RETREAT

Please consider joining us!

OCTOBER 12-15, 2020

CHNetwork retreat in Houston, Texas

Go to chnetwork.org, call 740-450-1175, or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org to learn more.

CONTACT THE CHNETWORK



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Network International



www.chnetwork.org



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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 2 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Sunday 7 PM ET

RADIO

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

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

July 6

Matt D'Antuono*
(former Evangelical Protestant)
(original air date 1/15/18)

July 13

Philosophy Roundtable with Dr.
Rachel Lu & Dr. Jonathan Fuqua*

July 20

Dr. Brian Besong*
(former Baptist and Presbyterian)

July 27

Fr. Boniface Hicks, O.S.B.*
(former atheist)

August 3

Dr. John Bergsma*
(former Christian Reformed Church
minister)

*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 Ruth, on the journey "I met with the priest today at one of the local parishes and we prayed and discussed my faith journey at length and the many things that have led me back to the Catholic Church in my truth-seeking, Bible discovery journey. Just some of which include the work you all are doing through the Coming Home Network, all the work EWTN is doing, Scott Hahn's conversion story, Leona Choy's book detailing her conversion to Catholicism, Dan Burke's Spiritual Direction online resources, Matthew Kelly, the Jesus Prayer, Eucharist, and so, so many other things. We came up with a plan — he will meet with my husband and me over a series of visits and we will have our marriage convalidated as soon as possible, so that I can be return to the Catholic Church and receive the sacraments ... My husband is 100% supportive and on board. I am so incredibly grateful. I know this is just one of many steps in deepening my spiritual walk with Christ, but I feel it is the most important first step. Praise God! Thank you for all your support and prayers."

From Tom, a convert "Things are going great for me and my family, thank you. My wife and I are enjoying our faith being born again as Catholics, and our boys (9, 6 and 2) are all baptized too. The Lord has done so much in my life and I'm so grateful."

From Debbie, a convert "I am doing well. I've become active in my parish womens' group called Martha and Mary. I've come to love reading the *Magnificat* daily. Of course, Mass continues to delight me — so full and beautiful and peace-giving. Very content to be Catholic; home at last."

From Brian, on the journey "Thank you for the resources! The summary about icons and praying to the saints made it super easy to talk with my wife about it and I think it helped! I've been diving deeper into the theology of the Church to really wrap my head around things and I had an 'aha' moment ... I am bursting with joy these days because I finally feel like I've discovered the fullness of truth that I'd dedicated decades to find. I told my priest that I'm that dog on the end of the

leash just waiting to be let go so I can run to my Master. Thank you for your emails, your prayers, and your time."

From Sam, on the journey "I just wanted to give you an update. We have been corresponding through the last few years and though my wife and I had been Protestants, we started a journey to becoming Catholic last July in the RCIA program. It's been through people such as yourself that have such a sweet spirit about them, that God has used to draw us nearer to Him ... The continued prayers from individuals such as you have made it all possible. I just wanted to say thank you! I pray that God will continue to bless and help you in continuing His ministry. From our home to yours, thank you so very much and we look forward to finally becoming confirmed Catholics." ■

SHARE SHARE YOUR STORY!

The CHNetwork **always welcomes** those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their **written conversion stories** of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to chnetwork.org/converts to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

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Prayer List

Clergy

■ **For a pastor in India** to find a way to support her family as she explores the Catholic Church.

■ **For Bobby, a former mission pastor** on his way into the Church, that the Lord will show him how his calling to preach may best be used.

■ **For a Reformed Baptist seminarian** who is preparing to tell his superiors that he has decided to become Catholic.

■ **For an Eastern Orthodox priest** who is drawn toward the Church but cannot imagine leaving what he believes to be his vocation to ministry.

■ **For Aaron**, who wants to become Catholic and is struggling with losing his income and how he will support his family.

■ **For Will, an Anglican priest** who desperately needs to find a way to support his family as he seeks to become Catholic, that the Lord will show him the way and provide something for him.

■ **For a non-denominational pastor** whose wife is completely opposed to the Church, that he can find a way to share with her what he is learning and correct the misconceptions she has about the Catholic Faith.

■ **For a former Protestant minister** who is struggling with loneliness as a Catholic and tempted at times to return to his former life.

■ **For Dave, an Anglican priest** on the journey who is looking into the Pastoral Provision and Ordinariate in the hope that he might be able to become a Catholic priest when he enters the Church.

■ **For a Luthern pastor** who has made the decision to become Catholic, that he will find answers to the few questions he has remaining.

■ **For Kent, a Protestant seminary student** who is soon to enter the Church, that the Lord will open up new doors for him.

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

■ **For Eduardo**, who recently resigned his ministry as a Presbyterian pastor and was welcomed into the Church, that the Lord will bless him as he seeks God's will for his future and the future of his family.

■ **For a pastor and son of a Pentecostal televangelist** who is on the journey into the Church, that the Lord will continue to open the hearts of his parents and fiancée to understand the decision he has made.

Laity

■ **For Larry**, that he may be guided to accept not only Jesus as his Messiah but also the Church that He founded and its teachings.

■ **For a former Catholic in New York**, that his love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary would bring him back to the graces of the sacraments.

■ **For a non-denominational Christian** in Texas who has decided not to pursue becoming Catholic at this time, that she will continue seeking truth.

■ **For Steve, a Lutheran**, that, as he continues to study Holy Scripture and the *Catechism*, he may be guided home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For a Fundamentalist Christian in Slovakia**, that the Holy Spirit might guide him as he works through his many concerns about Catholic doctrine.

■ **For a woman in Canada** who is not moving forward with her faith journey at this time on account of her husband's hostility, that he will become more open to her interest in Catholicism.

■ **For Andrew**, that our Lord Jesus may bring him healing and enable him to return to the faith of his youth.



■ **For Steve, a non-denominational believer in Texas**, that his desire for clarity may be fulfilled in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

■ **For Clare**, that she will have a peaceful and smooth journey to the Church.

■ **For Brian** as he fosters a Catholic devotional life, that he will be led fully home.

■ **For Rita**, that the obstacles preventing her from coming into full communion with the Catholic Church be speedily resolved.

■ **For Phyllis**, that she be able to move ahead with her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ **For James**, who is searching for truth, that he will have a definitive direction to pursue.

■ **For a man in Oklahoma** who desires to return to the Catholic Church but doesn't see a way for him to convert unless his wife becomes more supportive.

■ **For a Presbyterian in Kentucky** who is struggling with knowing how and when to let her family know of her interest in becoming Catholic.

■ **For an Episcopalian in the south** and for her husband to be more open to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Amanda**, that her family will become supportive of her conversion.

■ **For Maureen** to be drawn fully to the Catholic Faith.

■ **For a Mormon** who is struggling with leaving her current church, that the Holy Spirit will guide her fully home.

■ **For Janet** as she continues to watch EWTN, that she will have clear direction as to how to proceed with her journey.

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

through the air. It moved away from the door, directly above me, descended down on top of me, and then it gripped me physically. With this sudden exertion of tremendous force, it pushed me downward, with me lying on my back against the bed. Then it started crushing me to the point of suffocation. It was utterly terrifying.

At the same time, it was undeniably fascinating. I watched the physical compression that was being exerted by an invisible entity with intelligence and will, one that could communicate mentally, and I was amazed. This experience constituted a tangible contact with the spiritual realm. Like the Apostle Thomas, I was able to touch it. I was now physically accessing an invisible reality with my natural senses. Now I knew that there was more to reality than meets the eye. Now I knew there was something on the other side of the veil. There is a bigger picture!

I knew what to pray. “God, I know you’re there, and I know you can hear me. I need your help.” To the thing that was crushing me, “I command you: Go away, in the name of Jesus.”

At that name, the thing was gone! It released me instantly, fleeing in panic out of the house. I was no longer scared of it, but I was in awe of the One it feared. I sucked in a gulp of exquisite air, threw off the covers, and leaped out of bed. I raced down the hallway into my parents’ room, woke them up, and told them everything that had transpired. Praying together with my parents, I asked Jesus into my heart. No words can describe the love, hope, joy, and peace that washed over me in that sacred moment.

The sinister presence — the one who had communicated its hatred while attempting to crush me to death — had fled in terror at the name of the Lord. Whatever that thing was, it answered to Jesus Christ. This made Jesus and His Resurrection real to me. Jesus is called the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, God with us, and the firstborn from among the dead. And no one can explain Him away. Cutting through all religious agendas that attempt to tame Him, and through all the futile efforts across history to discredit Him, there He is. Not doctrines about Him, but He Himself, with love, power, and life for whoever wants it.

The risen Lord had saved my soul, and had literally saved my life. Under the newfound assurance of spiritual reality, my heart broke for other skeptics, as I used to be. I pored over apologetics — defenses of the Christian Faith — and was astonished how much tangible evidence is already available throughout history to substantiate Christ’s Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, and His sending of the Holy Spirit. With copious amounts of apologetics and a powerful testimony in hand, I launched an unofficial ministry to other doubting Thomases.

This ministry reached a climactic moment back in 1993, during my senior year of high school, when I was named valedictorian of my class. When asked what I wanted to give my commencement speech about, there was no hesitation. I wanted to tell my classmates about Jesus. However, after reading my speech proposal, the graduation advisor told me that I was not allowed to say Jesus’ name at commencement. I explained respectfully

that we live in a free country, where the Bill of Rights protects my freedoms of religion and speech. I explained to her that I am free to say what I believe, as the audience is free to disagree with me; and that these *costly* liberties make this nation great. The speech advisor said in reply that I was forbidden to give my speech, and that she would pull the plug on the sound system herself if I said the name of Jesus at graduation.

Following intense prayer, I decided to ask the local newspaper if they would be willing to print my valedictorian speech so that my community would have it available.

With my parents’ approval and prayer support, I picked up the phone and called the newspaper. They quickly escalated my call, transferring me to the larger tri-state area newspaper. After only a few seconds on hold, a robust individual came on the line:

“All right kid, what’s your story?”

“My high school won’t let me give my valedictorian speech at commencement because I talk about Jesus,” I said.

“They WHAT?!”

At that point, he tried to muffle the phone, and yelled, “Weeeee’ve gotta a hot one! — Where do you live?”

The news van arrived in fifteen minutes, and to this day, I’m puzzled by how he found us so fast. The man interviewed me for over an hour, taping everything on his recording equipment.

When I arrived at school the following morning, a group of people was marching around the school parking lot with signs.

“That’s weird,” I thought.

I went to my locker, and several of my classmates complimented me for how good I sounded on various radio stations that morning.

That’s when my girlfriend walked up to me holding the tri-state Tribune Review newspaper. On the front page was a gigantic color picture of me beneath the headline “Commencement Speech about Religion Rejected.” At that point, it started to occur to me what was happening.

Through the Associated Press, my interview from the day before not only made the front page in a paper whose reach extended into three states, but it was picked up by popular radio stations that played it over the airwaves all through the morning.

Within hours, my life was thrust into a bona fide three-ring media circus. If you have ever seen footage of the paparazzi thronging some Hollywood actor, it was just like that. A frenzy of flashing bulbs, reporters, television cameras, and microphones in my face became a common phenomenon at school, at my house, and even on the streets. As I would soon find out, not even the men’s locker room in the high school gymnasium was a safe hideout.

Media organizations from across the country picked up the story. People mailed me copies of newspapers from a number of different states, including Texas, New Hampshire, Colorado, Maine, California, and New York, all reporting the event. I was a guest on television and radio news programs. When my family drove from Pennsylvania out to Michigan for my uncle’s wedding, Channel Four News dispatched a helicopter news crew to follow us, in hopes of securing the first live interview. From vet-

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erans' organizations to churches, I was praised for being "the free speech kid."

The media genie I had unleashed was a powerful ally, to be sure; however, it had a mind of its own. Not all the attention I received was positive. Across those two unforgettable months, I also received multiple threats and acts of physical violence. I became the enemy of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which was actively campaigning against my speech, arguing in a public debate with me on live radio that the Bill of Rights applies to everybody *except Christians*. In turn, the American Center for Law and Justice, which had battled the ACLU before, came to my aid.

In the end, the school administration reversed their decision and allowed me to give my speech at graduation, now televised before a throng of TV cameras. According to God's paradoxical handiwork, multitudes got to hear the Gospel because people had attempted to silence the name of Jesus. One of my classmates even gave her heart to Christ after hearing my commencement address.

The news coverage solicited the attention of Senator Arlen Specter. Inspired by my stand for freedom of speech, he drafted a bill to the U.S. Congress. Later ratified, the law officially protects graduating seniors from such unconstitutional attempts at censorship. I suppose I gave new meaning to the term, "Murphy's Law."

This launch into the public eye simultaneously launched my unofficial ministry to agnostics. I was never hurting for invitations to speak, because the recent media blitz afforded me with multiple opportunities to tell people about the Lord. During graduate school, while seeking an MA in Theology at a university in Texas, this ministry became official. I found myself the licensed and ordained head pastor of a local Baptist church. The problem is that, at this point in my career, I was convinced of the truth of the Catholic Church. How does one work as a Baptist preacher while persuaded that Catholicism is true? — by living a double life.

The spiritual journey that led me from the Baptist tradition of Christianity into the fullness of sacramental Catholicism is complex. It's a journey that certainly includes important doctrinal questions and their resolution; at the same time, it's a journey that transcends doctrine, dealing with the grace, mysterious set-ups, and interior workings of the Holy Spirit.

Originally, I had despised the Catholic Church. Better stated, I despised what I *thought* the Catholic Church was. My father loved Jesus, but he despised the Church. Based on some insidious tracts, which he would make us read and distribute, Dad called Catholicism the "Whore of Babylon." I literally grew up hearing the Church called a whore.

Across my Christian growth, I started to see that everything I'd been taught about the Church was wrong. Catholics don't worship Mary. The worship of Mary — the heresy of Collyridianism — was stamped out by the Catholic Church in the fourth century. In fact, it was so thoroughly rejected by the faithful that the matter never required resolution at the level of the papacy.

Catholics don't claim that the Pope is the head of the Church; they affirm that Jesus Christ is its head. Catholics don't claim that a man, rather than God, is the one who forgives your sins. They don't worship statues; actually, they teach that statue worship would constitute sinful idolatry. They don't believe that one enters heaven according to his own merits rather than God's grace. And they don't claim that we humans don't need to be saved. They say the opposite. Whenever I asked hard questions about the Catholic Church, she always had the answer. Everything I'd been taught was false.

When I turned the tables and started asking hard questions about my own Protestant tradition, its inconsistencies and incompleteness became obvious, especially with regard to the matters of unity and authority. In a word, it all came down to authority. If Christ left an authority in this world to help guide His one Church, then no splintered-off fragment made sense. I longed for the *freedom of authority*, in which I would be free to grow in my personal relationship with Jesus as opposed to wondering which fragment had got it right — out of thousands of contradicting beliefs, all claiming the same Holy Spirit's inspiration.

I remain thankful to my Baptist friends. They are my brothers and sisters in Christ, always. They introduced someone who didn't grow up in church to the substantial truths of God's covenants — His Fatherhood and His *loving relationships* with people across history. I am forever grateful for that.

My becoming Catholic was a process of addition, not subtraction. All the beautiful and life-transforming truths of the Baptist tradition were also in Catholicism, along with all the *other* truths that I'd been missing. It's not that the Baptist tradition was *wrong*, so much as it was *incomplete*. Breaking off from the authority of Christ's Church as it was originally established, resulting in disunity with the rest of the body, were my concerns.

The various Protestant denominations seemed to have serious disagreements about every Christian doctrine. How and when to baptize, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the nature of Communion, the question of eternal security, the relationship between grace, faith, and works, the place of justification, sanctification, and righteousness in the Christian life, and countless other doctrines were matters of serious and sometimes heated debates between the different denominations.

Feeling troubled, I once picked up a handbook of Protestant churches and was stunned to discover over two hundred distinct denominations. Moreover, these various denominations were expressed across thirty thousand different individual churches with unique nuances and a host of doctrinal disagreements between them.

The Bible says that there is "one body and one Spirit ... one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6). Through what I had become convinced was truly inspired and inerrant Scripture, the Lord calls His Church to strive to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). We

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are not supposed to divide. Rather, the Bible calls us to remain gentle and patient, “forebearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2).

It also calls us to speak the truth in love, but this is not an excuse for starting a quarrel, for “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

The Bible repeatedly calls believers to loving unity. It speaks of one body, one faith, and one Baptism. It didn’t talk about thirty thousand different bodies, faiths, and baptisms. God is not the author of confusion. I thought to myself, “How could I remain part of a system of denominational fragmentation, when the Bible clearly calls for unity among Christ’s followers?”

Yes, in this fallen world, disagreements arise. The Lord is no stranger to this fact. But when Jesus encountered problems among the people of God, He didn’t abandon ship. Rather than protesting against Judaism because of real problems within it, He fulfilled it, always offering His criticisms *from within* as a faithful member of the people of God. Through both teaching and example, Christ showed me the importance of bearing with one another in love, avoiding division, and staying united.

The particular Catholic doctrine I had the most trouble with was the Communion of Saints. Asking for prayers from the dead — from saints among the Church Triumphant — was a struggle. I had no doctrinal issue with the practice; after all, I ask for prayers from the living all the time. Furthermore, the Book of Hebrews affirms that those who have passed on surround me like a great “cloud of witnesses” cheering me on to finish the race (see Heb 12:1). Soliciting their prayers makes perfect sense. But my father had instilled in me from a very young age that the practice was evil, and this nurtured sense was difficult for me to shake off. God went to work on this issue with style when a couple of miracles proved to me how real the Communion of the Saints truly is and healed my former aversion. Previously disinclined to requesting their prayers, now it’s getting me to shut up that’s the problem.

Living a double life, as anybody who’s tried it knows, cannot last. I finally decided that I needed to find somebody to talk me out of Catholicism and tell me that thing I must have overlooked in my research, that *thing* which would justify my remaining Baptist. My income, livelihood, professional network, reputation, and parsonage were all on the line. Although I desired the fullness of Catholicism — hungry for sacrament, unity, and authority — the practical consequences of leaving behind my entire world as a Baptist preacher were overwhelming.

The first person I approached to talk me out of Catholicism was the president of a Baptist seminary. “Ian,” he said, “I’m convinced the Catholic Church is true! That’s why the Holy Spirit brought you to me. I should enter RCIA myself.”

“Well, that didn’t work,” I said to myself.

The second person I asked was the president of my undergraduate Christian group from college. If anybody could talk me

out of Catholicism, it was he. I called him up after losing touch for years, and asked him my question: “What have I overlooked here? Why is the Catholic Church wrong?”

He answered, “Ian, I’m Catholic! I converted last Easter Vigil. This is great, that’s why the Holy Spirit led you to call me. The fullness is awesome.”

“Well, that didn’t work,” I said again.

The third person was a professional theologian who knew Greek, the head of New Testament Studies at a Baptist University. With the dice loaded in favor of the outcome I was seeking, I asked him my question.

He replied, “Ian, I’m Catholic! I converted a few years ago. That’s why the Holy Spirit...”

I finally got the point.

When I entered RCIA and went public, all hell broke loose. I lost my house, my job, friends, income ... it got *bad*. But I don’t like to focus on that. Because as all hell was breaking loose around me, all heaven was breaking forth within me! I had the sacraments. I had the unity and the freedom of authority I had been longing for. I was *home*.

I feared that in becoming Catholic, I was giving up preaching. Yet in dying to self, I found life. In fact, I have been able to do more preaching as a Catholic than I ever did as a Protestant. God also opened doors for me to complete a Ph.D. in Theology at Duquesne University, to serve as a religious studies professor at multiple universities, and to host several seasons of a radio program.

As a Catholic, I’m learning to appreciate the redemptive meaningfulness of life’s sufferings and the peace of knowing that God has everything covered — not peace as an *absence* of trouble, but peace as a *presence* in the midst of trouble, the Lord’s presence.

This text was adapted from: Murphy, Ian (2020). Dying to Live: From Agnostic to Baptist to Catholic. Ignatius Press: San Francisco, CA. ■



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