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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



"To Whom Shall I Go?"

By Doug Beaumont, Ph.D.

I did not receive a very religious upbringing. I was, however, indirectly taught that God existed, and I retained some vague belief in Him until high school, when I became a practical agnostic. With thousands of religions in the world, and even science constantly changing its mind about "truth," I didn't feel a pressing need to commit to any faith. More importantly, I liked my life without religious rules. Further, it seemed to me that whenever Christians would attempt to evangelize me, they could never answer my questions to my satisfaction. I wasn't going to change my life if I didn't have good reasons to do so.

Although my faith in God wavered, my commitment to truth never did. Near the end of my high school journey, a couple of Christian evangelists managed to engage me. They actually knew their faith and rather handily took my arguments against Christianity apart. My disbelief became merely a matter of the will, and it did not take long for me to give up and give in. I prayed for God's forgiveness and put my trust in Jesus for my salvation — but I didn't know what to do next.

The summer before college I got a job at a Christian summer camp and finally began to actually learn my faith. This was followed by several years of being ministered to at various Christian campus groups. During this time, I was mentored by some faithful leaders who helped me move from student to teacher. By the time I graduated from college, I was being prompted to go to seminary. A formal theological education sounded interesting, but in the Evangelical world, one usually went to seminary to become either a pastor or a missionary, and I was not interested in either role.

Then I heard about Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES) on a popular radio program. One of my heroes of the faith, Dr. Norman Geisler, was featured as a guest. He said he had started a seminary in North Carolina dedicated to defending the faith. The decision felt like it made itself! I might have packed my bags the next day, but at the time I was dating an incredible woman named Elaine, who I thought might be my future wife. I told her that if we remained together, she'd be moving across the country with me for seminary. Three years later we married and took a 3,000 mile road trip to North Carolina in an overloaded pickup truck to begin classes.

The next several years were simply amazing. I was stretched in directions I didn't know existed, made many lifelong friends, and felt my faith solidifying in ways that were both intellectually satisfying and even fun. In my second year, I was asked by Dr. Geisler to be his grader and research assistant, and after graduating at the top of my class, I was hired full-time at SES.

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

For several more years I served variously as Director of Distance Education, Recruiter, Webmaster, and, finally, as a professor.

By the time I began my doctoral studies (again with SES), I had been ordained, published, and was speaking at Evangelical churches, conferences, and campuses across the nation. I felt I had nearly reached “Evangelical Rock Star” status. From the outside it appeared that I had “arrived” and that my future was in the bag. That very well might have been, but there was another side to the story.

This problem had begun working its way into my life when I read a letter from a friend and former SES employee who announced that he had become Catholic. *Catholic!* The faculty and staff were shocked — many even felt betrayed. I was mostly bewildered. He had gone through the same program I had and had read Dr. Geisler’s book on Catholicism. How could this have happened? I replied to his letter, and we embarked on several months of dialogue and debate. During these theological duels, I came out the worse more times than I wanted to admit. I eventually had to shelve the discussion until I could devote the time that I apparently needed to get the better of this budding Catholic apologist. The Catholic conundrum remained at the back of my mind for several years until a series of distressing events threw it back to the forefront.

After 15 years of living the Evangelical life, things began to fall apart at SES. Although SES looked good from the outside, behind the scenes there was a church split (*splintering* would be a more accurate term) in addition to theological debates, firings

both professional and ministerial, political maneuvering, and all manner of internal strife that tore the faculty and staff apart. Unsurprisingly, this eventuated in the school falling on hard times. It was an emotional time, but, objectively speaking, it was Evangelicalism’s inability to authoritatively settle these problems that troubled me the most. Having had my eyes opened to the reality behind the rhetoric I had bought into for so many years, I became disillusioned. What followed was a five-year journey of discovery that eventually led me out of Evangelicalism.

I wasn’t looking for an escape — I was looking for answers. Why did we Evangelicals (specifically, baptistic, dispensational, non-charismatic, moderate-realist Evangelicals) think we had it all figured out when, apparently, no other Christian group had got it right in nearly 2,000 years? How did we know that only the books in the Protestant Bible were inspired? Why was Evangelicalism in such bad shape doctrinally and morally? Why could “orthodox” Christians disagree on everything but the “essential” truths when the Bible did not say what counted as the essentials? I had been asking these questions for years. What was different this time around was that I was not going to settle for easy replies.

The first big issue for me was how we knew which books belonged in the Bible (the canon of Scripture). I knew good apologetic arguments for “the Bible” — but not everyone agreed on the exact contents of the Bible, so who was right? SES taught me that the Church only “discovered” the canon; it did not “determine” it, as Catholics believed. The explanations I was given of the process of putting the canon together were basically “re-

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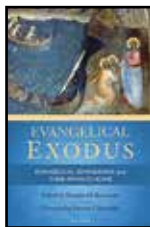


Evangelicalism and the Early Church CD

In this CD, Marcus Grodi welcomes Rod Bennett, a former Baptist and Evangelical, to discuss the “verses he never saw” as an Evangelical Christian. Rod was brought into the Catholic Church through the writings of the early Church Fathers. Marcus and Rod particularly delve into the issue of *sola Scriptura* within Evangelical traditions, as well as the topics of authority, personal interpretation of Scripture, and tradition.

\$35

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Evangelical Exodus: Evangelical Seminarians and Their Paths to Rome — Edited by Doug Beaumont

Over the course of a single decade, dozens of students, alumni, and professors from a Southern Evangelical Seminary converted to Catholicism. These conversions were notable as they occurred among people with varied backgrounds and motivations. What could have led these seminary students, and even some of their professors, to walk away from their Evangelical education and risk losing their jobs, ministries, and even family and friends, to embrace the teachings they once rejected as false or even heretical? These converts discuss the primary issues they had to face: the nature of the biblical canon, the identification of Christian orthodoxy, and the problems with the Protestant doctrines of *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”) and *sola fide* (“faith alone”).

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— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain resources by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/respond.

VIRTUAL RETREATS!

The Coming Home Network has begun regularly offering virtual retreats for those who are on the journey to the Catholic Church or for converts/reverts who would like additional support. These retreats are opportunities to connect with CHNetwork staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion and prayer. Our 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.

**Space is limited for
each online retreat.**

To learn more or to register, please go to
<https://community.chnetwork.org/>
or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org
or 740-450-1175.

“Tradition” Isn’t a Dirty Word

By Dave Armstrong

Many Protestants hold the view that Scripture and sacred, apostolic tradition are somehow unalterably opposed to each other and, for all practical purposes, mutually exclusive. This is yet another example of a false dichotomy which Protestantism unfortunately often tends to create (e.g., faith vs. works, matter vs. spirit). The Bible, however, presupposes tradition as an entity prior to and larger than itself, from which it is derived, not as some sort of “dirty word.”

It is one thing to wrongly assert that Catholic tradition (the beliefs and dogmas which the Church claims to have preserved intact passed down from Christ and the apostles) is corrupt, excessive, and unbiblical. It is quite another to think that the very *concept* of tradition is contrary to the outlook of the Bible and pure, essential Christianity. This is, broadly speaking, a popular and widespread variant of the distinctive Protestant viewpoint of *sola Scriptura*, or “Scripture alone,” which was one of the rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. It remains the supreme principle of authority, or “rule of faith” for evangelical Protestants today. *Sola Scriptura* by its very nature tends to pit tradition against the Bible.

First of all, one might also loosely define tradition as the authoritative and authentic Christian history of theological doctrines and devotional practices. Christianity, like Judaism before it, is fundamentally grounded in history: in the earth-shattering historical events in the life of Jesus Christ (the Incarnation, miracles, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, etc.). Eyewitnesses (Lk 1:1-2, Acts 1:1-3, 2 Pet 1:16-18) communicated these true stories to the first Christians, who in turn passed them on to other Christians, under the guidance of the Church’s authority, down through the ages. Therefore, Christian tradition, defined as authentic Church history, is unavoidable.

Many Protestants read the accounts of Jesus’ conflicts with the Pharisees and get the idea that He was utterly opposed to all tradition whatsoever. This is false. A close reading of passages such as Matthew 15:3-9 and Mark 7: 8-13 will reveal that He only condemned *corrupt traditions of men*, not *tradition per se*. He uses qualifying phrases like “*your tradition*,” “*commandments of men*,” “*tradition of men*,” as opposed to “*the commandment of God*.” St. Paul draws precisely the same contrast in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to *human tradition*, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and *not according to Christ*.”

The New Testament explicitly teaches that traditions can be either *good* (from God) or *bad* (from men, when against God’s true traditions). Corrupt pharisaic teachings were a bad tradition (but many of their legitimate teachings were recognized by Jesus; see, e.g., Matt 23:3). The spoken gospel and the apostolic writings which eventually were formulated as Holy Scripture (authoritatively recognized by the Church in 397 AD at the Council of Carthage) were altogether good: the authentic Christian tradition as revealed by the incarnate God to the Apostles.

The Greek word for “tradition” in the New Testament is *paradosis*. It occurs in Colossians 2:8 and in the following three passages:

1 Corinthians 11:2 (RSV) Maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. (NRSV, NEB, REB, NKJV, NASB all use “tradition[s]”).

2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

Note that St. Paul draws no qualitative distinction between written and oral tradition. He doesn’t regard oral Christian tradition as bad and undesirable. Rather, this false belief is, ironically, itself an unbiblical “tradition of men.”

When the first Christians went out and preached the Good News of Jesus Christ after Pentecost, this was an oral tradition proclaimed by “word of mouth.” Some of it got recorded in the Bible (e.g., in Acts 2) but most did not, and could not (see Jn 20:30; 21:25). It was primarily this oral Christian tradition that turned the world upside down, not the text of the New Testament (many, if not most, people couldn’t read then anyway). Accordingly, when the phrases “word of God” or “word of the Lord” occur in Acts and the epistles, they almost always refer to *oral preaching*, not to the written word of the Bible. A perusal of the context in each case will make this abundantly clear.

Furthermore, the related Greek words *paradidomi* and *paralambano* are usually rendered “delivered” and “received” respectively. St. Paul in particular repeatedly refers to this handing over of the Christian tradition:

1 Corinthians 15:1-3 Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, [2] by which you are saved, if you hold it fast — unless you believed in vain. [3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Jude 3 Contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (cf. Lk 1:1-2; Rom 6:17; 1 Cor 11:23; Gal 1:9, 12; 2 Pet 2:21)

Far from distinguishing tradition from the gospel, as evangelicals often contend, the Bible *equates* tradition with the gospel and other terms such as “word of God,” “doctrine,” “holy commandment,” “faith,” and “things believed among us.” All are “delivered” and “received”:

- 1) Traditions “delivered” (1 Cor 11:2), “taught ... by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thes 2:15), and “received” (2 Thes 3:6).
- 2) The Gospel “preached” and “received” (1 Cor 15:1-2; Gal 1:9, 12; 1 Thes 2:9).
- 3) Word of God “heard” and “received” (Acts 8:14; 1 Thes 2:13).
- 4) Doctrine “delivered” (Rom 6:17; cf. Acts 2:42).
- 5) Holy Commandment “delivered” (2 Pet 2:21; cf. Matt 15:3-9; Mk 7:8-13).
- 6) The Faith “delivered” (Jude 3).
- 7) “Things which have been accomplished among us” were “delivered” (Lk 1:1-2).

Clearly, all these concepts are synonymous in Scripture, and all are predominantly oral. In St. Paul’s writing alone we find four of these expressions used interchangeably. And in just the two Thessalonian epistles, “gospel,” “word of God,” and “tradition” are regarded as referring to the same thing. Thus, we must unavoidably conclude that “tradition” is not a dirty word in the Bible. Or, if one insists on maintaining that it is, then “gospel” and “word of God” are *also* bad words! Scripture allows no other conclusion: the exegetical evidence is simply too plain.

To conclude our biblical survey, we again cite St. Paul and his stress on the central importance of oral tradition:

2 Timothy 1:13-14 Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; [14] guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

2 Timothy 2:2 And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

St. Paul is here urging Timothy not only to “follow the pattern” of his oral teaching “heard from me,” but to also pass it on to others. Thus we find a clear picture of some sort of authentic historical continuity of Christian doctrine. This is precisely what the Catholic Church calls tradition, or, when emphasizing the teaching authority of bishops in the Church, “apostolic succession.” The phrase “deposit of faith” is also used when describing the original gospel teaching as handed over or delivered to the apostles (see, e.g., Acts 2:42; Jude 3).

The Catholic Church considers itself merely the custodian or guardian of this revelation from God. The New Testament itself is a written encapsulation of primitive, apostolic Christianity: the authoritative and inspired written revelation of God’s new covenant. It is a development, so to speak, of both the Old Testament and early oral Christian preaching and teaching (i.e., tradition). The process of canonization of the New Testament took over 300 years and involved taking into account human opinions and traditions as to which books were believed to be Scripture.

Thus, the Bible cannot be separated and isolated from tradition and a developmental process. As we have seen, Scripture does not nullify or anathematize Christian tradition, which is larger and more all-encompassing than itself.

In Catholicism, Scripture and tradition are intrinsically interwoven. They have been described as “twin fountains of the one divine well-spring” (i.e., revelation), and cannot be separated, any more than can two wings of a bird.

DAVE ARMSTRONG is a Catholic apologist and author. Dave was received into the Catholic Church in 1991 from Evangelical Protestantism. He was a longtime moderator of the CHNetwork online community. His complete conversion story can be found in *Surprised by Truth* and he has authored numerous books, including *Biblical Evidence for Catholicism* and *100 Biblical Arguments Against Sola Scriptura*. This article was published on his blog *Biblical Evidence For Catholicism on patheos.com/blogs/davearmstrong* and is reprinted with permission. ■

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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.

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

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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ONLINE COMMUNITY



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

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



TELEVISION

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

The Best of The Journey Home: Saturday 6 PM ET

RADIO

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

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

September 7

Matthew and Elisabeth Akers*
(former Anglicans)
(re-air from 2/19/18)

September 14

Anniversary Special with Dr.
Scott Hahn* (former Presbyterian
minister)

September 21

Andrew Petiprin* (former
Episcopal priest)

September 28

Sr. Miriam James Heidland,
S.O.L.T.* (revert)
(re-air from 11/6/2017)

October 5

Dr. Bud Marr* (former Evangelical
Protestant)

*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 Lynn "I have always had a hunger for God's Word and studied and taught extensively before, but, as I related in my talk at our spring retreat, when I read as a Catholic it was like having cataracts removed! ... *The Journey Home* has been such a help in my coming back to the Church and even now as an encouragement in this new leg of that journey. I am so pleased to be a monthly supporter of Coming Home Network, and I want you to know that you are all in my prayers. Thank you for your ministry, and I continue to pray for an abundant harvest for the Kingdom!"

From Cat "I appreciate all your support during this long journey. It has taught me to trust in God instead of being so rigid about time & how things should be done. That's always been a fault of mine — perfectionism! Now I say 'Jesus, I trust in you!'"

From Chris "Thank you for checking in, that is very thoughtful of you ... My entering into the Catholic Church has caused many great strains on my closest relationships, but I trust

God will take care of all of this in due time. Other than that, I am finding many good resources to continue my transition deeper into the Catholic Faith. It is a bit disorienting to navigate the complexities of the Church today, given that much of what I learned about Catholicism that drew me into the Church isn't what I always see practiced in the Church. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church ... is the true Faith, and there are so many great resources that I am finding in the Church that help me grow in knowledge of the Church and grow closer to God. Thanks again for all your time and sharing your knowledge with me to help me with my journey into the Church. I would not be here today if it weren't for your help and the help that the Coming Home Network provides."

From Benjamin "I'm glad to tell you that my parents and my sibling, along with her husband and child, were received into the Catholic Church through the rite of reception on the last Sunday ... I have prayed for my family for more than a year that they cross the

Tiber and return to Rome sweet home. God has received my prayer and also intercessions from Our Lady. Even though I'm happy that I have successfully brought them back to the Church, I keep on reminding myself that it was God's power that brought them back to the Church, and I have nothing to boast, and we still have a long way to go before reuniting with Him in heaven. Please pray for me and my family that we will continue to have our faith in God and His Church and be loyal to Our Lady."

From Norman, "I have to say since we're having this conversation, I'm so grateful you guided us on the journey to Catholicism. Being a Catholic has been the most important and joyful aspect of my life despite the crosses that come with conversion. But I don't think Tania and I would have swam the Tiber if not for you. You were our first meaningful encounter with a Catholic so it was a grace that you were always warm, generous, and charitable towards us. Thank you as well for your prayers, I know I need them now." ■

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 Joe**, who is moving to enter the Catholic Church after decades of pastoral ministry as a Baptist, that his wife will come to understand what he's doing.
- **For a Presbyterian pastor in Brazil** who wants to return to the Catholic Church and is struggling with how to deal with everything this will mean for his family and livelihood.
- **For Ryan, a Protestant seminarian** who has been reading and learning and wants to become Catholic, that the Lord would soften his wife's heart to consider the Church.
- **For a former Lutheran pastor** who entered the Catholic Church last year. She has a ministry position within the Church but struggles with the unorthodox environment she finds in the German Catholic Church.
- **For Mark, a pastor on the journey** toward the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him wisdom in dealing with his family as well as a congregation he loves very much.
- **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.
- **For a Lutheran pastor** who wants to become Catholic but has a few remaining issues he needs to work through, that the Lord will help him to find the answers he needs.
- **For Gary, a Protestant pastor** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for many years but has struggled with whether he should become Catholic or Orthodox.
- **For Chris, an Eastern Orthodox minister** 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 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 Kent, a Protestant seminary student** who entered the Church this Easter season and is in the process of discerning the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church.
- **For 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 Will, a Presbyterian** 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.

Laity

- **For a Methodist in Kentucky**, that, as his wife and he grow in their faith in the Lord Jesus, they may be called to the Catholic Church.
- **For an Anglican in the south**, that she will be able to connect with a good priest to help her on her journey.
- **For Richard, a Lutheran**, that he may find a good and supportive RCIA program.
- **For Joshua, an Episcopalian**, that the Holy Spirit may draw him back to the Catholic Church and that his father be healed of cancer.
- **For an Old Order Amish man on the journey**, that, by God's grace, he may find and follow the path back to full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For Mary** to be able to find a good, supportive parish and a way to get to RCIA.
- **For Alvin, a Methodist**, that the Lord may give him a hunger for Jesus that can only be satisfied in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For Jim, a non-denominational Evangelical**, that Jesus would call him to go deeper into the fullness of the faith found in the Catholic Church.



- **For a Baptist in Kentucky** as she moves forward with reading about the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide her studies.
- **For Joseph**, that, as he reads ever more deeply into the history of the Church, he will be granted a desire to join the Church that is ever ancient and ever new.
- **For Karen's family** who are still greatly opposed to her and her husband's conversion, that their faithful witness will bear fruit.
- **For Stacy**, that her husband will be more open to the Catholic Church and conversion.
- **For a Seventh-day Adventist**, that, with joy, he be granted the grace to embrace all the truths of the Catholic Faith.
- **For a married couple who are Presbyterians in North Carolina**, that, as they read and pray, they may be called home to the Catholic Church.
- **For a Southern Baptist** who wants to begin RCIA, but her anti-Catholic husband doesn't know of her faith journey.
- **For Elaine who has returned to the Church**, that she will find ways to go deeper in her faith life.
- **For Adrienne** who is drawn to the Catholic Church but isn't sure what next steps she should take.
- **For a Seventh-day Adventist** who doesn't see a way forward with her interest in the Catholic Church on account of her husband's reluctance.
- **For Ruth Ann**, that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will move powerfully in her life and remove all barriers keeping her from coming into full communion with His Church.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

verse engineered” speculations that turned out to be inaccurate or could not explain the entire Bible. As I studied the history behind the Bible, I kept running into the Catholic Church. Not only was it the Church that decided which books went into the Bible, the Church did so after several centuries of existence — so long a period, in fact, that by the time we encounter any authoritative canonical list, many of what were to me the most objectionable Catholic doctrines were already in place. It seemed inconsistent to trust the Church for the Bible but not for anything else it taught at that time.

Once I gained a greater understanding of where we got the Bible, the next question was how we knew we were interpreting it correctly. It was no secret that the theological world of Protestantism was one of chaos. I had shelves of books dedicated to Protestant doctrinal disagreements. Even Protestantism’s super-essential belief in salvation by faith alone was hotly debated among scholars who all claimed the Bible as their source.¹ At SES, we were taught that we were learning to defend the “historic Christian faith.” But many of SES’s distinctive teachings could not be counted as “historical” in any meaningful sense. Rather, it was a mish-mash of Anabaptist doctrines, post-Reformation theology, and even late 19th century beliefs. Right or wrong, these did not seem to constitute “the historic Christian faith.”

I gradually realized that holding to an authoritative and infallible Bible only made sense if we had an authoritative and infallible list of which books belonged in it. Furthermore, it did little good to agree on the Bible’s contents if Christians could legitimately disagree about practically everything it taught. It started to appear that without an authoritative and infallible tradition, Christianity could be lost to relativism. But which tradition? It seemed clear to me that if the Church *did* decide which books belonged in the Bible, and what counted as orthodoxy, then the answer was to be found in the Church. I finally decided that the Church which produced the orthodox creeds and the canon of Scripture was, objectively, the solution to these foundational issues. Of course, that did not leave many attractive options for one who remained a committed Protestant.

It is important to understand that at this time I was not reading Catholic apologists. Indeed, it was mostly Evangelical scholars who were bringing these issues to my attention.² Evangelicalism had so many in-house disagreements that it was practically

impossible to even define it, yet theological issues were not the only ones plaguing the movement.

It began to seem to me that many of the problems I had with Evangelicalism were a natural outcome of how it operated. I knew so many Evangelicals who were upset with what various churches, ministries, and leaders were doing, but they lacked authoritative responses. With any given church’s authority based on the collective opinion of its members, Evangelical ministries and leaders could only attain success by gaining and maintaining a fan base. This often required either compromise (to keep fans) or controversy (to expel non-fans). I knew there had to be a level of authority beyond the individual’s (or group of individuals’) private interpretation of Scripture.

I thought that perhaps this authority could be found in one of the older Protestant denominations. However, the process of choosing a Protestant denomination was basically to simply choose a group that agreed most nearly with one’s own interpretations of the Bible. Regardless of the historical pedigree or hierarchical structure of a given denomination, its authority was ultimately limited by each individual’s reading of the Bible. Protestant denominations, then, were just one step removed from Evangelical church authority — and thus were only removed by one degree from the same problems.

At this point, my questions and research were starting to raise eyebrows. I became convinced that the Church Jesus founded had to be authoritative and objectively, historically identifiable. While I was still well within the limits of conservative Protestant thought, my viewpoints on some teachings were starting to shift away from Evangelicalism on such issues as infant baptism and the real presence of Christ in Communion. Sadly, historical ignorance caused many of my own students to confuse even historically Protestant views with Catholicism, and complaints started coming in. Eventually I was called into an “inquisition” of sorts in front of the SES faculty and questioned about my faith. I managed to pass their test that day, but I could see that if my investigations over the last three years continued to lead me in the direction they were, I was likely not long for the Evangelical world.

In order to honestly continue my quest, while retaining job and academic security, I decided to distance myself from the SES crowd. My family and I began attending some Anglican churches. Both were conservative groups who had broken away from the liberal Episcopal Church. These faithful Anglicans aided in my exploration due to their appreciation of history, liturgy, the creeds, etc. However, although Anglicanism seemed to offer better answers to my incessant questions, the very existence of these breakaway groups was made possible by the same principles that undergirded any other Protestant denomination. Worse, neither Anglicanism’s *causes* (e.g., Henry the VIII’s desire for divorce) nor its *effects* (e.g., divorce, contraception, homosexual marriage and ordination, heretical bishops, etc.) were easily defensible. In the end, although I respected many Anglicans, I could not commit to Anglicanism. My Protestant prospects were starting to look dim.

1 See James K. Beilby, *Justification: Five Views* (IVP Academic, 2011).

2 E.g., Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Oz Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

...Journeys Home Continued...

I eventually had to admit that the problems I was having justifying Protestantism were not going to go away by sticking to the Protestant methodology that was causing them. Instead of using my subjective theological opinions to justify a tradition that affirmed them, I needed to identify the historic Church objectively by looking at how Jesus built His Church. In the first century, the Church was whoever followed Jesus. After His Ascension, it was identified by the Apostles. Once they passed, the Church was found in the successors to the Apostles. These latter were, I knew, the men who determined the biblical canon and theological orthodoxy. The only question now was which Church had these apostolic successors at its helm.

As it turned out, this was not as easy to discover in the second millennium as it was in the first.

The problem with this “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” was that it seemed to be a thing of the past. Just after the turn of the first millennium, the ancient Church divided into “Eastern Orthodoxy” and “Roman Catholicism.” While this meant more research (and, as I would soon discover, a new methodology), I was happy to discover that at least I wasn’t necessarily headed for Rome. Anything but Catholicism sounded good to me!

The difficulty was that both the Catholics and the Orthodox had a legitimate claim to being apostolic. Perhaps, I thought, at this point it would simply come down more to taste — and I had a taste for the East. Eastern Orthodoxy was not only ancient and apostolic, it was beautiful. Unlike Catholicism, Orthodoxy didn’t have to answer for the Crusades, Galileo, the Inquisition, or even the Reformation. Best of all, there was no Pope to deal with. Indeed, the faith was so mystical that most Protestants had no idea what it even taught. I eventually took classes in Orthodoxy at a local Greek church with several others from SES (several of whom became Orthodox themselves). My excitement over the Orthodox option, however, was not to last.

Although I loved Orthodoxy in theory, I found it problematic in reality. Orthodoxy was culturally divided to the point that I feared what would happen if I ever moved away from my local Orthodox church. Further, they seemed to lack the ability to make universally-binding judgments. Finally, I was not interested in fighting the East–West battle with the Catholics. For one thing, I doubted I’d have much of a chance against the Church of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas! Moreover, I could not see how it could be done without reverting to the problematic strategies I’d seen tear Protestantism apart.

That left only one viable option: the only Christian body to retain apostolic succession, dogmatic unity, and universal authority was ... the Catholic Church. Immediately my mind

swam with the objections I’d heard (and taught) for the last 20 years or so. Papal infallibility? Marian devotion? Prayers to the dead? Bowing before statues? Purgatory? The Apocrypha? Celibate priests (many of whom were apparently homosexual pedophiles)? It was a dizzying prospect to even have Catholicism on the table, and as it turned out my troubles were only beginning.

By this point I was heading into my fifth year of inquiry into these issues. Friendships were becoming strained. (I had never been the most gracious apologist, and after nearly four years of obsessive and aggravating conversations, I was not in a place most people could relate to any more.) My family did not escape the stress of this time either.

My wife, a fundamentalist Baptist from birth, was having a very hard time with the direction in which my thoughts were going. Our conversations regularly ended in tears, and I eventually made up my mind to stop having them until I was more settled. (In hindsight, this was a bad idea. But in my defense, I was simply trying to protect her from becoming upset over musings that might end up leading me nowhere.)

My relationship with SES was also strained to the breaking point. Several unrelated incidents had soured my view of the school’s ever-shifting leadership. The school was drifting farther and farther from its former greatness, and I was no longer on the inside. I knew it was time to cut the cord, so, as my 14th year with SES drew to a close, I did not accept the classes offered to me in the coming fall and told my Ph.D. director that I would not be finishing my doctorate with SES — a program I was instrumental in creating. I got a job in the secular world and embarked on what would be the final leg of my journey out of Evangelicalism.

I was desperate to find a way out of reaching a conclusion that now seemed unavoidable. So in the fall of 2013, I went to my local Catholic parish and signed up for RCIA — the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. I figured that if Easter came around and I had not discovered a way out of becoming Catholic, then the Church would have me.

Now, by this time I was certainly not alone. As my research took me farther and farther afield from SES-approved resources, I began to discover that SES had been producing Catholics for most of its existence. Indeed, although most of its graduating classes were in the teens or twenties, I found that a couple dozen former students and faculty had become Catholic over the years. I knew some of these folks; others I met along the way. In addition, there were a number of those at SES who were in various stages of investigating the Catholic Church. For the most part, we only discovered each other near the end of our own personal inquiries, but many an hour was spent alternately arguing for

I found Catholicism to be quite different from what I had envisioned from the outside.

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or against such a “conversion.” It was a wild and scary time, but in the end, a number of us entered the Church. (You can read about many of these journeys in the book *Evangelical Exodus*, published by Ignatius Press. See page 2 to purchase.)

Although I learned quite a bit during my time in RCIA, much time was spent *unlearning*. I found Catholicism to be quite different from what I had envisioned from the outside. Many “problematic” Catholic teachings actually made quite a bit more sense when I learned what they actually were. And many others seemed to be based on principles I already accepted as a Protestant but simply had never applied consistently. (This is the subject of my upcoming book from Catholic Answers, *With One Accord*.) I began to suspect that perhaps Catholicism wasn’t a cult after all!

To help me finalize my thoughts, I blogged, debated, taught, and discussed these issues as much as possible. Finally, after five years of study and discussion, I felt my investigation’s end had to come soon. Although I did not want to become Catholic for numerous reasons, I had not found a way out. Catholicism wasn’t disprovable *logically*, because true contradictions did not seem to exist (at least none worse than skeptics accused the Bible of having). Further, Catholicism wasn’t disprovable *scripturally*, because if the Protestant notion of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) could be reconciled with James 2:24, I did not see how Catholics could ever be trapped by a biblical contradiction! Finally, Catholicism wasn’t disprovable *historically*, because many of the Catholic teachings that Protestants denied were taught before the biblical canon and Christian orthodoxy were even settled.

In truth, Catholicism filled in so many of the holes I always had to step around in Evangelicalism, and the Catholic Church offered *more* of everything I already had and appreciated as an Evangelical. Becoming Catholic, I saw, would be much more about *receiving* than *relinquishing*. The final straw came when I read Thomas Aquinas’s explanation of heresy, which really convicted me of my theological autonomy: “He who adheres to the teaching of the Church, as to an infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches; otherwise, if, of the things taught by the Church, he holds what he chooses to hold, and rejects what he chooses to reject, he no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, but to his own will” (*Summa Theologiae* II.II.5.3). This description of heresy was dangerously close to how I had spent my Christian life up to this point. Although the object of my faith was the God of the Bible, I had put my trust in my own thinking all along. Becoming Catholic meant choosing to trust the Church God built instead of myself. I had to honestly ask myself if I could really do that — and what it would mean if I didn’t.

All my life I had, to the best of my ability, followed the truth. I was an agnostic because I really thought it was true that we could not know ultimate truths about God. I became a Christian because I really thought it was true that Jesus died for my sins and that the Bible was God’s revelation. I followed the Evangelical version of Christianity because I really thought it was the truest expression of the faith, and I left Evangelicalism when I no longer thought it

was true. In the end, the decision eventually made itself. If, and only if, I really thought Catholicism was false could I continue to remain outside the Church — and I didn’t think that. I resonated with St. Peter’s words: “To whom shall we go?” (John 6:68).

The end of my five-year conversion arrived with the 2014 Easter Vigil. Family and friends gathered at my parish for my entry into the Catholic Church. My wife was gracious enough to attend, even though she remained unconvinced of Catholicism’s claims. I received the Holy Eucharist for the first time and was confirmed as well. (It turned out that my Evangelical baptism was a legitimate sacrament, even though I didn’t believe in sacraments at the time!) That Easter morning, I awoke Catholic.

I close with an observation. During my time of inquiry, it seemed to me that the ex-Catholic Evangelicals I knew often tended to both hate and misunderstand Catholicism, while ex-Evangelical Catholics generally appreciated and understood Evangelicalism. I had a difficult time understanding this, but I can say that for many, myself included, Catholicism is not so much a rejection of past belief as it is development. As I concluded my chapter in *Evangelical Exodus*: “Although I have settled on a different shore than many of my fellow Christians, I appreciate, respect, and love them still. If you are eyeing the Tiber’s far shore as I once was, know that I am working on building bridges to aid you in your journey.” ■



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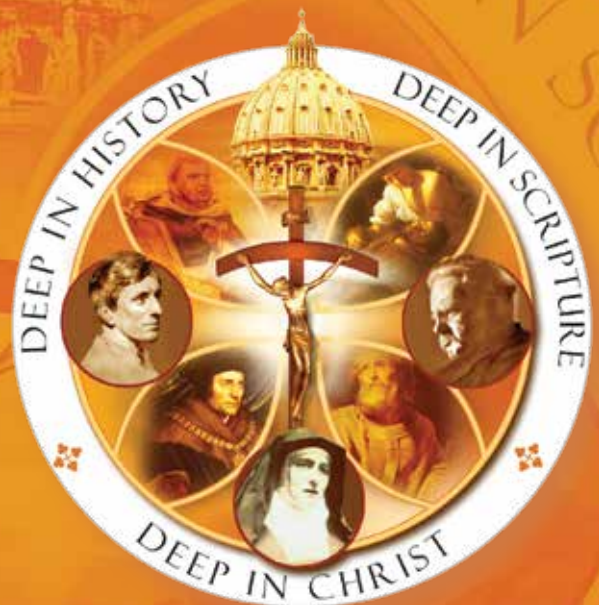
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