



September 2016 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Delving Deep in History Brought Me Home

By Adam Crawford

We’ve all heard the maxim, “Your starting point always determines your conclusion,” and ordinarily I would wholeheartedly agree. Yet there are exceptions to the rule. In theology and religion, these exceptions are typically referred to as *conversions* — that is, they involve people whose starting point (like Saul of Tarsus) very much does not determine their conclusion!

Having said that, I also want to say that I was extremely fortunate to be raised in a Christian home by parents who did an outstanding job of acquainting me with the Person of Jesus Christ and the holy Scriptures. Our Christian faith was the center of our life and identity as a family. Over the years, we attended various denominational and non-denominational churches, but they were all characterized by the idea that the Bible alone was our only basis for truth, faith, morals, and authority.

From a young age I was fascinated by the study of theology, and I would often engage in theological discussions with the adults I knew, probing them for answers to thorny questions. Nevertheless, I frequently found myself at odds with the accepted theological beliefs of our Christian friends, many of whom might best be described as Evangelical Fundamentalists. In particular, starting when I was about seventeen, I began to struggle with the idea of “the Bible alone.” I couldn’t seem to get a good answer as to where this idea had come from, or more importantly, where the Bible asserted this doctrine. I found myself at odds with the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* for primarily logical reasons. If it is “the Bible and the Bible alone,” as

every church we attended proclaimed, then where does the Bible make this claim?

When I studied the Bible, it seemed to argue against Scripture alone because it was full of instances when God spoke through direct revelation to His people, or even through intermediaries such as prophets, priests, judges, and kings. In Scripture, I saw that God revealed Himself through His creation, through His incarnate Son who dwelt among us, through His Church, and especially through His Apostles who, “delivered to [us] as of first importance what [they] also received” (1 Corinthians 15:3). In other words, with the notable exception of the Ten Commandments, He didn’t choose to simply drop a written user’s manual from heaven in order to communicate with us.

I also noticed that, even when Scripture was interpreted by those who were honestly trying to follow God and submit to Scripture’s authority in their lives, they invariably arrived at very different conclusions from one another. In other words, far from Scripture being the final authority, it really just opened the floodgates for division and a lack of certainty within the Church. This division, especially when it came to *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

our inability to agree on what constituted salvation, has always bothered me tremendously.

Since at that point I didn't have any frame of reference to categorize this issue and others as fundamentally "Protestant versus Catholic," I concluded that these were issues I had with Christianity in general — issues that most other Christians didn't share. I wondered if my faith was in some way lacking, and I was concerned that my views were "unorthodox," without realizing that they might more accurately be described as "unorthodox Protestant views." As it turns out, many of those views were entirely orthodox from a Catholic perspective!

I attended a year of Bible College but quit after getting married, and gradually my wife and I gravitated towards "Bible churches," like Calvary Chapel, and then non-denominational churches that avoided any doctrine that could be considered remotely divisive but fundamentally sought to bring people into a personal relationship with Christ. This could be both good (less divisiveness), and bad (a reduced ability to proclaim truth). These churches taught that a "relationship with Christ" was the ultimate truth — the only truth which really mattered ("no creed but Christ"). Many of the churches we attended might be summed up by the statement, "Just me, my Bible, and Jesus."

Through the years that followed, I was always involved in some kind of ministry; I really enjoyed studying theology and teaching others. We moved to Boise, Idaho when I was around thirty and became involved with a small non-denominational church in the town of Kuna. Many of the leaders there had ties to Boise Bible College, and one of the founding pastors was a professor there. During our time in that congregation, I had the opportunity to take non-accredited classes through Boise Bible

College and was eventually asked to move into a ministerial role, serving as one of the pastors.

Feeling led by God to move towards ministry as a full-time vocation, I applied and was accepted into a Master's of Divinity program through Fuller Seminary. Due to my previous individual studies and my ministerial experience, they were willing to make a special provision for me in spite of the fact that I hadn't completed an undergraduate degree. I was definitely moving along in a certain direction, and for me that direction did not include the Catholic Church!

In fact, I had always been somewhat anti-Catholic. I was raised in an environment that was dubious over whether Catholics were saved, and I had contact with an occasional Fundamentalist who was convinced that the Catholic Church was the beast of Revelation and the Pope was the Antichrist! If you had suggested to me a few years ago that I would one day be considering conversion to Catholicism, I would have laughed. I had no inkling that the Catholic Church would ever be even a remote consideration; I would have thought it as likely as my converting to Islam or Hinduism.

There was, however, a gradual softening over the years in my attitude towards Catholicism. In Idaho, I began to read authors like Henri Nouwen, Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Merton. I began to realize that some of the authors whom I most admired and who had influenced me the most were either Catholic themselves, or strongly Catholic in their theology, as was the case with the Anglican C.S. Lewis. As I read these Catholic authors, theologians, and philosophers, I discovered, to my great surprise, that not only were they Christians, but in many cases profoundly so. They were, in fact, some of the most deeply committed and in-

FEATURED RESOURCES

Deep in Scripture CD



The Apostle Paul once wrote to Timothy, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." This verse from 2 Timothy is the primary verse used to defend the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. But does this verse teach *sola Scriptura*? What does it say about the Bible we hold in our hands and which we consider so foundational to our faith now nearly 2000 years later? Marcus Grodi and guest Dr. Kenneth Howell discuss these topics in this classic *Deep in Scripture* program.

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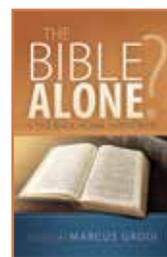
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The Bible Alone? *Is the Bible Alone Sufficient?*

— Edited by Marcus Grodi

The Bible Alone? presents a competing look at the biblical roots, historical precedent, and logic behind using only the Bible as an infallible source of truth. This short book affirms the importance of Scripture as a divinely given foundation for our faith and also encourages the reader to consider the need for an authority established by Christ for its trustworthy interpretation.

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sightful Christians, apologists, theologians, and philosophers I had encountered! This didn't change my mind on Catholicism, but it definitely began to soften my previously dismissive attitude.

As I continued to delve into Catholicism with a progressively more open attitude, I was surprised to find that much of what I

thought I knew about Catholic belief was either flat out wrong, wasn't fair to the nuances of their position, or was based on "straw-man" arguments.

I also discovered that many of the authors I had been reading were converts to the Faith. Men like G.K. Chesterton, Peter

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"It's Everything I Experienced as a Protestant, But More — So Much More."

INTERVIEW WITH KURT HOOVER (FORMER WESLEYAN METHODIST)

I met Jesus when I was four years old. My Sunday school teacher introduced me [to Him] during our Sunday School lessons. She proclaimed the Gospel to us — that we were sinners in need of God's mercy, in need of salvation. Jesus came to give us that salvation and she said that, if we asked Him, He would come into our hearts and be our friends.

I met Him then and, because my family was very much a Christian family, my faith was nurtured and sustained growing up. It wasn't until I was about 16 years old when I started to take a critical look and asked questions like, "What is it that we believe," "What do other people believe," and "Is there a possibility that perhaps what I've been taught is wrong?"

I started to look at Catholicism specifically through the intercession of a friend who brought me to Mass for the first time. The liturgy, the beauty of it, the ancientness of it: it smacked me in the face! It stopped me in my tracks. It lit a fire in me to pursue more knowledge about "What is Catholicism," "What is the liturgy," "Why do they practice what they practice?"

It was a very long process and series of events, some hard things, some good things, but at the end of the day I heard from the Lord that it was time to become Catholic. I entered the Church at the Easter Vigil at Franciscan University in 2010 and ever since then my life has been ... nothing short of incredible.

When I was a Protestant Christian I certainly knew the Lord and I loved the Lord. And the Lord spoke to me and made Himself known to me but nothing like what I've experienced as a Catholic. He is more real to me than anything I've ever experienced in my life through the holy Eucharist, of course, but also in prayer and adoration and most specifically through my Confirmation.

Exercising those gifts [of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation], I've seen His face ... the face of Jesus. In all the people around me, whether or not they realize it, I see so much the realization of this covenant that Christ formed with us at the Last Supper, what He completed on the cross and with His Resurrection. I see the fulfillment of that and the service that is done for others in the Church.

Personally my joy has been compounded. That doesn't mean that it hasn't been hard. There have been a lot of very chal-

lenging things. But my joy has been compounded. My peace has been compounded. My confidence in the fact that I am a son of God — not just a servant of God but His son, and God is my Father. Knowing that I share in this family bond, this kinship bond that started all the the way back with Adam, continued through Noah, through Abraham, through Moses, through David, through Jesus Christ — now made available to all men through Him.

Everything has become more certain, more clear, more vibrant, more wonderful, more joyful, more beautiful. It's everything that I experienced as a Protestant but more — so much more. More than I could have possibly ever imagined.

A good metaphor that I always go back to is from Dr. Scott Hahn. He talks about how as a Protestant, being able to read Scripture, being able to view the covenant, view God, was like reading the menu. You could see all the beautiful things that he talks about, all the beautiful things to come. But being a Catholic is being able to eat from the menu. Being able to enjoy the feast and that is exactly what it was like becoming Catholic. Instead of just reading the menu I experienced it with every one of my five senses, with my heart, with my soul. My intellect was awakened. My passion for the poor, for the marginalized was awakened. My love for my wife was deepened and my love for my daughter was brought to a supernatural level. ■



READ & WATCH
chnetwork.org

Be sure to share this short interview with friends and family. To find and share this interview video and Kurt's appearance on *The Journey Home*, visit www.CHNetwork.org/converts.

Social Media: Cultivating Greater Engagement with CHNetwork Community Members

By Matt Swaim, Communications Coordinator



One of the ways we've been having our CHNetwork members participate more directly in our mission in recent months is by posting a weekly question in our forums and on social media, and inviting them to respond based on their experiences. This question often has to do with some practice, belief, or experience that was part of their journey before considering Catholicism, and how it relates to their understanding of the Church today. We then sift through those responses, and select some of them to feature in an aggregate blog post each week, to help further the discussion. For instance, we recently posed the following question to our members:

"If your Christian tradition recited the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed, how did it treat the word "catholic" in those creeds? Was it omitted? Changed? Kept, but with an asterisk?"

Here's a sampling of the responses we received to this question:

JESSICA: *During my childhood, my family jumped around to various denominations. I've attended Pentecostal churches, fundamentalist Baptist churches, and a variety of Evangelical churches in between. Most of the churches I attended did not recite the creeds in the services, though I did hear them referred to in church contexts or at home. The use of the word "Catholic" in the creeds was always described to me as meaning Christians everywhere or all Christians. I actually remember a couple of people, perhaps they were Sunday School teachers or pastors, clarifying (as if to reassure me) that "Catholic" did not refer to the Catholic Church.*

DEDRIC: *We did recite one of the two (I don't recall which) in a non-denominational church I attended. It was tied to a specific message series topic, and not a common element of our services. I don't remember what wording we used at the time, but I do know that church uses that line as part of their statement of beliefs now, and "catholic" is replaced with "universal."*

FRANCIS: *In my almost 60 years as an evangelical Christian, the Creed, when said, had an asterisk next to catholic and at the bottom of the Creed you could see that it meant "universal." The pastor who followed me in my last pastorate changed the Creed to "I believe in the holy Christian church." I winced! I do remember that even before I was received into the Catholic Church and had the opportunity to recite the Creed I would say the word "catholic" — either a premonition of things to come or a deep longing to be part of the historical church.*

JONATHAN: *Going to a Lutheran church (WELS) for most of my life, the creeds were recited every week. As usual, there were some minor differences in the wording in some places, mostly as*

a matter of linguistic preference rather than doctrinal difference. In this instance, we stated "the holy Christian church," referring to the entire Body of Christ. The first time I found myself in a Catholic church for a family gathering, the word "catholic" was frankly upsetting. At the time, I did not know the definition of catholic, and so I felt as though the Catholics had been excluding me from the Body of Christ whereas I was including them. When I later understood it to mean "universal," my objection melted away, but I still remember the initial discomfort it gave me.

It's easy to see how getting this type of feedback from our members is extremely helpful in our quest to understand what kinds of backgrounds our journeyers are coming from. It also helps to illustrate the beauty of who we really are as a network; not just an elite band of marquee converts, but an ever-growing community of believers walking together on the path to truth.

Additionally, in highlighting a common point of misunderstanding regarding Catholicism, we're able to reframe the issue and illustrate what the Church teaches on a particular point. In the case of the above question, here's what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraphs 830-831) says about the word "catholic" as it appears in the Nicene Creed:

The word "catholic" means "universal," in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole." The Church is catholic in a double sense:

First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church" (St. Ignatius of Antioch). In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost and will always be so until the day of the Parousia.

Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race.

Sharing this feedback-driven catechesis on our site each week also gives casual visitors to the CHNetwork site a glimpse of what goes on in our Community Forums, where often the conversation goes much deeper, and gives us a chance to be more pastoral in regard to the specific situations presented to us by our members. To look back on some of the questions we've done over the past few months, we encourage you to visit chnetwork.org/blog, and to check out more of our member responses by going to chnetwork.org/forum. ■

Good Fruit, Good Heart

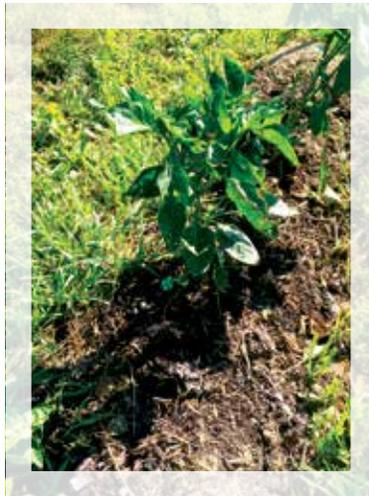
By Marcus Grodi

As I write this, it is now ten weeks since I planted our garden, and we are approaching the slow onset of harvest. When this appears in the CHNewsletter, it will be at the high point of harvest — so please, allow me to pass along yet another reflection on gardening.



In late April, we planted our garden in distinct roomy rows — snap beans, zucchini, squash, watermelon, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, green and banana peppers, potatoes, onions, and zinnias, for a splash of color. Weeding, watering, and cultivating have produced a fairly nice looking garden. One could look at the well-ordered and tended rows and assume all was well and awaiting harvest. And over the past few weeks, we have begun reaping zucchinis, squash, snap beans, onions, lettuce, and peppers, which I have thoroughly enjoyed due to my wife Marilyn's great skills in the kitchen!

But looks can be deceiving. Though a vast majority of our plants look green and vital, a significant portion show no evidence of fruit. It could be that I didn't balance the soil amendments for the unique needs of each vegetable, or that our growing season has been exceptionally hot and lacking of rain — or it certainly could be that I'm not a great gardener! Yet, like the picture to the right, some might argue the plants look just fine, so just be patient. As you read this, a month later, this might be true — I might be harvesting far more than we can use, especially of zucchini!



Those fine looking yet fruitless plants remind me, though, of Christians who look great on the outside, but whose internal spiritual dispositions are not producing fruit. Our Lord was very serious about this, and usually chose just such garden analogies. Besides His many familiar parables about sowing, He warned: “[E]very branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (Jn 15:2).

It's about producing fruit — why else have a garden? And a key to this fruit production, Jesus said, was good, healthy, sound plants. He warned, “So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound

tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits” (Mt 7:17-20).

How do you know a good plant? Not necessarily how good and healthy the plant looks, but by the quality, as well as the quantity (cf. Mk 4:8,20), of fruit. Carrying our Lord's analogy forward, it's the quantity and quality of the fruit of our lives that is the truest sign of the condition of our soul, our heart — not how we appear on the outside.

And it was St. Paul who most clearly delineated what constitutes the kind of “good fruit” we ought to be producing: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal 5:22-23).

There's nothing new or novel here, that we haven't heard preached or taught all our lives. However, this does speak specifically to our work in the Coming Home Network. The landscape of modern Christendom reminds me a lot of my garden: all different shapes, sizes, and configurations of what a good Christian is to “look like” and believe, and especially what kind of fruit they

ought to produce — if they need to produce fruit at all! A large portion of evangelical Christianity claims once a person has put faith in Christ, no additional fruit is necessary for salvation. Other Christians offer an assortment of overlapping and sometimes contradictory lists of what kinds of fruit constitute a good Christian life.

It's not for us to judge any of these people, of course — this will be done by Christ at the harvest. However, it is our responsibility to share what we have come to know is true, and one aspect of this is that the Church, established by Christ, was given to us as the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). Jesus warned that our reception and experience of new life, in this world and the next, depends upon our production by grace of fruit, and apart from the trustworthy teaching and guidance of the Church, we

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Chris, a Congregational minister in the south, that he be granted the grace to fully enter into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For a non-denominational seminarian in Indiana, that she may find good solid Catholic friends as she makes the transition to full-communication with the Catholic Church.
- For an Anglican priest in Texas that his wife would become open to the idea of becoming Catholic.
- For Connie, an Evangelical minister, that the Holy Spirit would guide her heart and mind as she considers becoming a Catholic Christian.
- For a non-denominational lay minister in Massachusetts, that the hearts of his family would be drawn closer to the Catholic Faith in the same way his has been.
- For Chuck, a United Methodist minister in the Midwest, that our Lord Jesus would guide him as he looks to return to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- For Lynn, the wife of a non-denominational minister in Michigan, that both she and her husband would develop a closer walk with God and be granted the gift of wisdom and be drawn into full-communication with the Church.

■ For a former Episcopal priest in North Carolina, that he may soon find employment so that he may support his wife and child.

■ For the wife of a Wesleyan minister in Colorado, that the witness of her newfound Catholic Faith would turn the heart of her husband to also consider the Church.

■ For Shane, a minister in North Carolina, that as he explores the Catholic Faith more deeply the Lord Jesus would show him where his calling will be in the Catholic Church.

■ For a Reformed minister in Florida, that her studies of history and the Bible would continue to advance her on the path to the Catholic Church.

Lay

■ For an atheist who was recently diagnosed with cancer, that he be open to the light of God's truth and come to believe in Him.

■ For a lady from a non-denominational background who is learning more about the Catholic Faith but still has theological questions that need answered.

■ For Alaina who wishes to begin RCIA, that her health permit her to follow through with her desire to become Catholic.

■ For an Evangelical in Illinois who watches EWTN and is intrigued by the Catholic Church but due to personal circumstances is not looking to move towards the Faith at this time.

■ For Joy who has been attending Mass and is beginning to connect with Catholics as she looks forward to beginning RCIA.

■ For Phyllis who is on the journey but struggles with Marian devotions and praying to the saints.

■ For Rachael who has encountered a stumbling block in her journey, that things work out for her to move forward with her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a convert in Texas who was recently received into the Church but cannot attend Mass regularly due to being homebound.

■ For Heather who desires to be Catholic and is attending a Catholic parish regularly, that God gives her the grace and strength she needs during this difficult time.

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.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org.

We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

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, Fridays 1 PM ET

The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 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-Thursday 12 AM ET

September 5

Brandon Vogt*
Former Evangelical
(re-air from 9/26/2011)

September 12

Joshua Clemmons*
Former Methodist

September 19

Kevin Vost*
Former Atheist
(returning guest)

September 26

Leah Darrow*
Revert
(re-air from 11/26/2012)

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 3

Kreeft, and John Henry Cardinal Newman. The latter once famously said, “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” While I am not sure that this maxim could apply to everyone, it was certainly true in my case.

I decided to teach a Church history class at the church where I was pastoring. I wanted to tie each portion of Church history to an influential Christian of that period, someone who had really made a difference in the life of the Church. My goal was to give attendees some familiarity with the heroes of the faith since the time of Christ and to provide positive role models who would inspire our congregation to live lives of heroic virtue themselves. I didn’t think of these heroes as “saints,” nor did I realize that this idea of a “communion of saints” was of Catholic origin.

It was an ambitious undertaking, especially since I had never intensively studied Church history prior to the Reformation. All my studies up to that point had either been broad overviews or thorough studies of one particular facet of Church history, such as the Reformation itself or the early American Revivals.

Like many Protestants, for me, Church history began in the Book of Acts and then in some vague and undefined way “veered off course” around the time of Constantine. Then there were even vaguer interludes of crusades and inquisitions, with Church history thankfully resuming some 1500 years after Christ with the Protestant Reformation! As I spent many hours preparing to teach my class, studying multiple Protestant Church history books, for the first time it came home to me that...

During the first 1,500 years of Christianity — for fully three quarters of all Christian history — to be Christian was almost always to be Catholic!

All of the early Church Fathers, saints, theologians, etc. were Catholic! With the exception of Orthodoxy, there was no other Christian church until the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries! I know that it may seem kind of dumb, but this floored me! I had never before taken the time to consider it from an intellectual perspective.

Even acknowledging the heartbreaking split between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in 1054, you still had Churches who were apostolic, sacramental, and unified in their teaching of the Christian Faith. From the time of Christ until some 500 years ago *there was no question* as to whether Catholic theology, teaching, and practice were an authentic expression of Christianity, because the universal or “catholic” expression of Christianity *was the only one that existed!* Perhaps I shouldn’t say that “there was no question,” because there have always been heretics and dissenters to the true Faith. But, heresies aside, the Church was one, holy, apostolic — and catholic — until very recently in history.

I will readily admit that reform was needed within the Catholic Church during the time of the Protestant Reformation; but in reality the Church *is always and in every age* in need of reform because she is composed of sinners such as myself. It is a historical fact that Luther didn’t intend to leave the Catholic Church but to reform it. Furthermore, his excommunication from the

Catholic Church was for his heresy, not for his reforming efforts. Consider the following quote from Luther himself:

“That the Roman Church is more honored by God than all others is not to be doubted. St. Peter and St. Paul, forty-six Popes, some hundreds of thousands of martyrs, have laid down their lives in its communion, having overcome Hell and the world; so that the eyes of God rest on the Roman Church with special favor. Though nowadays everything is in a wretched state, it is no ground for separating from the Church. On the contrary, the worse things are going, the more should we hold close to her, for it is not by separating from the Church that we can make her better. We must not separate from God on account of any work of the devil, nor cease to have fellowship with the children of God who are still abiding in the pale of Rome on account of the multitude of the ungodly. There is no sin, no amount of evil, which should be permitted to dissolve the bond of charity or break the bond of unity of the body. For love can do all things, and nothing is difficult to those who are united.” (Martin Luther — *An Instruction on Certain Articles*: late February 1519)

And this is precisely where I began to have my own problems, because when I looked at the five *solae* of the Protestant Reformation — the doctrines of *sola Fide* (by faith alone), *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *solus Christus* (through Christ alone), *sola Gratia* (by grace alone), and *solus Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone) that divide Protestants from Catholics — I found that I disagreed with most of them.

I’ve spoken to many Protestant friends who have agreed with me on various aspects of my objections to the five *solae*, but then they say that those aren’t the reasons why they reject Catholicism; they have their own reasons! Maybe they reject Catholicism because of its teaching on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; but Luther and Calvin still believed in the Real Presence after their split from the Catholic Church! In fact, this doctrine was the reason for the first of the divisions (the one between Luther and Zwingli) which have so plagued the Protestant movement over the past 500 years. Often my Protestant friends don’t realize how many Catholic beliefs and practices were held by the fathers of the Reformation, even after their break from the Catholic Church. The Reformers believed in the necessity of Baptism, the veneration of Mary and the saints, the value of Confession, and much more — not because these were Catholic beliefs, but rather because they were the historic, orthodox, and *scriptural* positions of Christians from the time of Christ forward!

The bottom line was that the more I looked at it, the more it seemed as if **the objections to Catholicism that the Reformers initially held weren’t objections that my friends or I shared!**

This led me to begin to study what the early Church actually believed when it came to Sacred Tradition, Confession, the Eucharist, Baptism of infants, the necessity of Baptism, the Communion of the Saints, and other Catholic positions. To my

shock, I found that virtually all Catholic doctrine has its roots in the teachings of the early Church — and almost all of it is attested to within the first two hundred years after Christ! There has obviously been an ongoing process of defining doctrine, along with the refinement and development of that doctrine, but I was shocked at just how many Catholic doctrines were actually early Church doctrines.

This obviously destroyed my previous assumption that somehow, around the time of Constantine or shortly thereafter, the Church was led into error, probably due to Roman influence, and that human reason and the traditions of men had gradually replaced the true authority of the Scriptures. Instead, I was forced to ask the question:

“If the early Church was wrong, was she wrong from the very start? If not, why have we dispensed with so much of what the early Church believed, practiced, and taught based on the say-so of Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers? We are still following the ‘traditions of men’ — just men of much more recent descent.”

That was my problem. There were logical inconsistencies with the arguments from the Protestant side that I just couldn't seem to resolve. You have men arguing against the authority of the Catholic Church and for the authority of Scripture alone. But ultimately, all they are saying is that *they, rather than the Church*, have the right to interpret Scripture and teach doctrine authoritatively. This requires us to believe that God *didn't* work through His Church to teach right doctrine and properly interpret Scripture, but instead to believe that God *has* worked through Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other Reformers to teach right doctrine and properly interpret Scripture.

Aside from the historical difficulties, I was also struggling with the lack of moral and religious certitude that Protestant-

ism was able to offer. This uncertainty had always bothered me intellectually, but it bothered me increasingly in practical ways as well. As a father of three boys, certain things were very clear; for instance, there must be no sex outside of marriage. Other things were much less clear: Is masturbation right or wrong? My father had been taught that masturbation was a sin; however, Dr. James Dobson, an Evangelical Christian psychologist, said that masturbation was natural and not a sin. Who was right?

To me, this issue of truth and certainty seemed to highlight a fundamental difference between Protestants and the Catholics. Within my Protestant upbringing there was no agreement, and therefore no certainty, on what is necessary for salvation: whether salvation can be lost, whether Baptism is necessary, whether works are necessary in addition to faith, or whether the gifts of the Holy Spirit are still with us. And so on.

This lack of certainty began to bother me even more profoundly when I became a pastor. I found it unacceptable to be unable to answer our congregation with any degree of certainty not only on doctrinal issues, but on questions of morality as well. Is masturbation wrong? Is birth control wrong? Is divorce and remarriage okay? What about homosexuality? For me, the answer could not be, “I don't know” or, “My opinion is ...” This was unacceptable to me both as a father and as a shepherd of God's people.

So, do I believe that we can know everything with certainty? No. Do I believe that we should be able to articulate what is necessary both for salvation and to live a life pleasing to God? Yes. Do I believe that we should be able to declare with all Christians everywhere the historic creeds of Christendom, confident that they are true and certain summaries of our faith? Yes.

We had moved to northern California and I had taken a new job, largely to allow me to begin work on my Master's of Divinity at Fuller's Sacramento campus. But suddenly I found myself at a crossroad. I had taken a step of faith and relocated my family so that I could get my degree and pursue full-time vocational ministry, and now I was seriously considering not only the claims of the Catholic Church, but also what claim that Church might have on my life.

Coming to the point of actual conversion was difficult. Not because of doubts; for the first time in my life I was receiving answers to my previously unanswerable questions! The difficulty was instead in accepting the words of Christ: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:34–39). The difficulty lay in forsaking friends and family and church for the sake of Christ, of letting go of my plans and dreams and desires and giving them to Jesus. Could I trust Him

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...Journeys Home Continued...

to lead me even when I didn't know where my final destination would be or why the journey there had become so difficult?

Throughout this process, our friends and family were incredibly gracious, but they were also concerned for our well-being. As I have remarked on my internet home page, "It is often difficult to describe to others all the individual steps taken along the path which have brought you along the way to where you are today. Many have perhaps misunderstood my decision as that of leaving behind one thing for something else, when in reality the experience has been one of adding to, not of taking away — of entering into the fullness of the Christian Faith."

Many have asked me why I felt that it was necessary to enter the Catholic Church, and I cannot find a more perfect answer than that of G.K. Chesterton: "The difficulty of explaining 'why I am a Catholic' is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true." I would add that, for me, there was also the indescribable joy of finding my home, of arriving at the place where I belong.

For me, the process was one of intensive study for almost two years before I finally told my wife, Missy, that I needed to begin attending Mass and exploring for myself the claims of the Catholic Church. I promised her that I would continue to go to church with her and the kids, but that I could no longer resist God's pull towards Catholicism in my life. When I said that, I honestly didn't know if she would agree to attend Mass with me or not. But she was willing to go for my sake, and for six months we attended a local non-denominational church in the morning and St. Teresa of Avila's parish in the evening as a family. (My kids really got a lot of church during that time!) Missy and I agreed to enroll in RCIA classes (the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), and nine months later, on Easter Vigil of 2013, we were all received together into the Catholic Church. I can honestly say that that Easter Vigil service was one of the most profound and joyful experiences of my life!

All of this isn't to say that I no longer have any questions at all or that I am under some delusion that the Catholic Church is perfect. She has obviously had her share of failings and problems over the years and will continue to do so — maybe even more so now that I am a member! There have been priests who were dismal failures, bishops and popes who were motivated by greed, selfishness, and a desire for power rather than love. The Church has done things both amazing and horrific in the name of God.

But ... she is Christ's bride, made holy and without blemish by Christ Himself and by the righteous deeds of His saints (Ephesians 5:25–27, Revelation 19:7–9). And like all brides, she has been joined to Him that the two may become one flesh. It is through this incarnational mystery that we, as the bride of Christ, become in that marital union of one flesh, the very Body of Christ, with Himself as our head (Colossians 1:18a, 24; 2:17–19).

You see, for me, the balance had shifted, and I could no longer in good conscious consider myself Protestant. As I pointed out in an article I wrote, entitled "Sola Scriptura — An Anachronism": "There is a theory which I have heard proposed in many different ways by many different groups over the years.

It is always vaguely articulated, but generally it loosely follows the same formula, namely, that sometime during the first 1,500 years of Christianity, the Church was led into error and that human reason and meaningless Church tradition gradually replaced the true authority of the Scriptures. At face value, I have a sizable problem with any theory that proposes itself in contradiction to the words of Christ, who said, 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18b). Every Christian denomination which has since split from that Church, has essentially proposed some variation of the theory above. Namely, that Christ was wrong, His Church was not preserved by Him, the gates of Hell did prevail against it, and it has now become necessary to split from the Church which He founded and start an entirely new church in order to return to the original teachings of Christ."

I have come to the conviction that it was indeed Christ who founded His Church — not Luther, or Calvin, or Zwingli, or the King of England, or John and Charles Wesley, or Joseph Smith, or Chuck Smith, or anyone else since that time.

I have decided to trust in the plain words of Christ preserved in the Scriptures for us. Yes, I have decided that — when He guaranteed His Church that He would be with her always, even to the end of the age; and when He promised her that He would preserve her against the very gates of Hell — He meant what He said. I have decided that if I am to be His disciple, then I should begin with obedience — and in obedience, belong to the Church which He established. And finally, I have decided that Christ is not into polygamy — He only desires one bride, one Church.

I will leave you with the words of G.K. Chesterton: "It is impossible to be just to the Catholic Church. The moment a man ceases to pull against it he feels a tug towards it. The moment he ceases to shout it down he begins to listen to it with pleasure. The moment he tries to be fair to it he begins to be fond of it. But when that affection has passed a certain point it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair." ■



A lifelong Protestant, Adam Crawford came home to the Catholic Church when he was 39 years old. He currently lives in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in northern California with his wife of over 20 years, Missy, and their three boys. Adam works for a company that provides custom complex power and manual wheelchairs, along with seating and positioning products for individuals with disabilities. He and his family are active members of St. Teresa of Avila parish in Auburn, California, where he helps to teach RCIA. He also enjoys blogging and podcasting with his wife at their site, A Faith-Full Life, www.afaith-fulllife.com.

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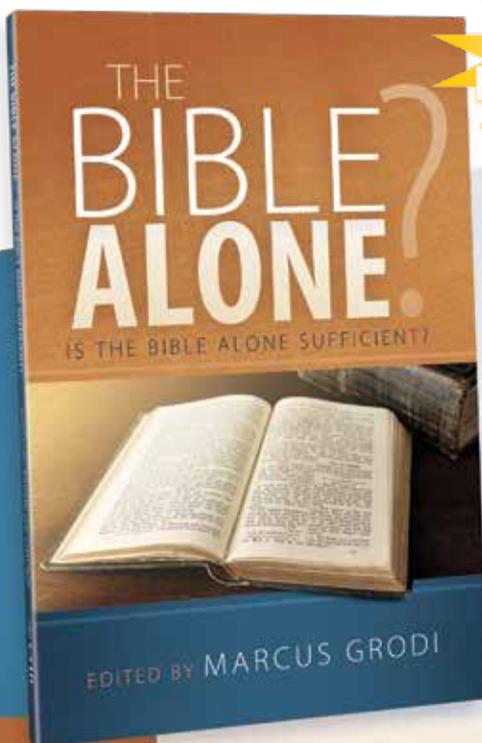
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