

Greg & Tracie's Story

Note: This story will be published in an up-coming issue of This Rock magazine. The catholic-convert message board also was very helpful in Greg's conversion process.

GREG & TRACIE YOUELL S CONVERSION STORY

Greg: It was in high school that I returned to the Lord. Although I was raised in a loving, Presbyterian family, by the time I reached 10th grade I had developed an inordinate ability to lie, cheat, steal, and deface property without the slightest questions of conscience. Praise be to God, some new friends from school introduced me to their Evangelical youth group where I learned about having a personal relationship with Jesus. I had heard the message before, but there it registered with me as never before. I knew I had found my home. Over the next several years I grew in my faith and was increasingly involved with campus ministries, churches, Bible studies, and mission trips. I was richly blessed by campus ministers, pastors, and friends who modeled how to live as committed Christian disciples on a daily basis. In college I met Tracie and, by graduation, we were engaged. Our faith was the foundation of our relationship, and as we took our vows on August 26, 2000, the future looked gloriously bright.

Tracie: I was raised in a conservative Lutheran church, going to church every Sunday and attending a Lutheran grade school. After participating in a Lutheran youth gathering in high school, I began to get seriously interested in my faith. In college, I became very involved in Campus Crusade for Christ and grew tremendously in my faith as I lead Bible studies and tried to share my faith with others.

Greg: Toward the end of college I became interested in the subject of baptism. The Christian groups we were involved with were comprised of folks from almost every conceivable religious background. As you can imagine, in this environment there were numerous views on baptism. In fact, we knew some friends who considered getting re-baptized after having a born again experience in college. Bound and determined to get to the bottom of the matter, I dove into studying the Bible, Scripture commentaries, and the writings of Protestant Reformers. The more I studied, however, the more I wondered whether I would ever reach a final conclusion. All sides persuasively employed Biblical passages to support their views, and if seminary-trained pastors could not agree, what hope did I have? I felt like the Ethiopian in Acts 8 who lamented, How can I [understand Scripture], unless someone explains it to me? Through the mysterious ways of Providence I stumbled across the Catholic Answers Web site on baptism. Catholic Answers took a refreshing approach: instead of relying solely on the Bible, they also cited excerpts from the Early Church Fathers. The Fathers fascinated me, and I marveled that I had seldom heard more than an occasional mention of them during sermons and Bible studies as a Protestant. In the writings, I discovered that without exception the early Christians believed that baptism was the washing of rebirth described in the Bible. I could not casually

dismiss the unanimous testimony of the very souls who had given their lives for their faith and converted the Roman Empire! However, this revelation shook some of my basic assumptions about Christianity. For this impacted the most fundamental question of all: How do we get to heaven? I knew I had some thinking to do, and began my pilgrimage into Christian no man's land. I continued to attend a Protestant church and Bible study with Tracie, but increasingly felt like a fish out of water. Although I still had many problems with Catholicism, for the first time it seemed like a realistic possibility. Things seemed to be moving awfully fast; and if they seemed quick to me, they were downright shocking to my wife!

Tracie: When only a short time into our marriage Greg told me that he was seriously considering Catholicism, I was flabbergasted, shocked, and angry. I had married this man because we had so much in common, most importantly our faith. Now he wanted to join the ranks of the unsaved. I lamented that I might never be able to become a mother because I would refuse to raise my children under their father's spiritual leadership if Greg became a Catholic. I never considered that I, myself, would become Catholic. My animosity toward the Catholic faith drew from several sources. First, I was taught that Catholics are wrong on many points of doctrine during my upbringing. Secondly, my sister married a Catholic and has had to face many struggles in her marriage and in raising their children as a result. I thought Greg's actions were unfair because I had chosen to marry someone with similar beliefs not a Catholic. In a Bible study with other young married couples from our church, I asked for prayer concerning Greg's search of the Church. The members were as shocked as I had been to find out about Greg's intense interest. The women in the group lamented with me and chose to fast with me for Greg to change his mind. They stood by my side and showed me Christian love through their support, but I still felt extremely alone. Although I had shared with them, I had barely scraped the surface of my feelings. I thought that no one else had gone through what I had been experiencing, yet I could not share my experiences or my hurts. I felt I needed to look into the Church because Greg was, but I had no desire to do so. His requests for me to read Catholic materials and books were met with dismay. Greg tried to discuss points of Catholic doctrine with me, but our talks would end in crying, yelling, and getting angry. It did not matter whether Greg made a valid point I would force the truth from my mind and find some way to question or construe error in his point. Our discussions were not very fruitful, and I now believe that it was my own unwillingness to listen to Greg or be open to exploring the Catholic Church my own hard heart that caused us such frustration. I questioned why God had brought us together if our marriage was going to end up like this. I could not bring myself to share how I felt with anyone because I wanted to portray a perfect image of our marriage, like newlyweds should be, I thought. From the beginning of his search, I prayed that Greg would find error and turn from it. I was sure that when he read the Church's teachings especially its teachings on Mary and Purgatory he would turn away and realize he was a Protestant after all. But, as he read, he only became more convinced that the Catholic Church was right, which made me fear for our marriage.

Greg: For nearly twenty months, my journey to Rome was a lonely one. While Tracie and I still prayed together, there was no mistaking that we now lived on separate planets spiritually. As I grew increasingly convinced of the claims of the Catholic Church, Tracie could only hold out hope that I would

miraculously change my mind. Because of Tracie's adamant opposition, I felt torn inside. With each new discovery and insight my excitement for Catholicism grew. On the other hand, intense sorrow accompanied not being able to share this joy with Tracie. She was the one person on earth with whom I wanted to share more than anyone else. I could not help but wonder if I were being led astray, as many suggested. I cried out to God and had to trust Him as never before to lead me to truth and protect me from deception the last thing I wanted to do was cause so much pain for nothing. But it was my heart's desire to know the truth and follow it, regardless of where it led me. I knew that if I stopped following where my conscience was leading I would cease being a faithful Christian.

Tracie: Greg's interest in Catholicism continued to grow, and he told me that he was going to begin meeting weekly with a teacher at the Catholic campus center to discuss theology. I asked him to meet with our pastor or some other Protestant so that his perspective would be balanced, and he complied. I also asked Greg to balance his reading by continuing to read anti-Catholic materials so that he would not be led astray by Catholic authors, and he tried to honor my request. Only now do I understand how hard it was for him to read Protestant books while he was falling in love with the Church.

Greg desired to attend Mass weekly, but I was opposed I had to protect him. Besides, it was too hurtful for him to go because I would sit at home alone and cry when he did. And so, Greg continued to attend our Protestant church and only attended Mass periodically. He finally convinced me to attend Mass one Sunday with him. This was an extremely hard experience. As he participated, I was just trying to grasp what was going on in the Mass and in our marriage.

Greg: I finally became convinced that ancient, historical Christianity and Protestantism were irreconcilable. The Catholic teachings on the Eucharist, the papacy, justification, Mary, and purgatory were all supported by the Scriptures and early Christian testimony. I read Cardinal Newman's masterful *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, in which he asserted that to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant. This certainly held true for me. Perhaps the most compelling argument of all was the authority of the Church. My struggle with baptism had sufficed to demonstrate that simply having the Bible and the Holy Spirit were no guarantee that you would discover the truth or else, how could there be so many Christian denominations teaching different truths? Some friends suggested that Christians agreed on the essentials, but that God never meant for us to have complete certainty on the non-essentials. But this line of thinking could never persuade me. For if that were the case, how could Christ have promised that the Holy Spirit would teach you all things and bring to your remembrance everything I have said to you (Jn 14:26). Or, if Christians are to be one as the Father and Son are one (Jn 17:21), should we not expect a way for Christians to come to agreement on doctrine? God knows that human beings are all too susceptible to being tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14), and He is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). Thus, it became clear to me that Jesus gave us the Catholic Church to be our safe guide amid the many pitfalls and heresies that were to come along over the centuries. I saw in the Bible and the Fathers that Christ shared His authority to govern the Church with the apostles, and that this authority passed on to their successors, the bishops and presbyters (priests) they ordained. The Bible said that the Church was the pillar and foundation

of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), was built on the rock of Peter (cf. Mt 16:18), and would last until the end of time. I was ready to convert right away, but sensed that it would be too tough on Tracie and decided to take it slowly. The best advice I received was to simply love Tracie and not push her. After reading True Devotion to Mary, I began praying the rosary and asking for Mary's intercession for the softening of my wife's heart toward the Church. I thought it would take years for my prayers to be answered; that we would enter the Church together the next year was unthinkable.

Tracie: My turning point came early in the Spring of 2002. Greg asked me to attend a Catholic apologetics conference with him where Tim Staples would be speaking about his conversion to Catholicism. Although I refused at first, he said it would mean a lot to him if I would go. For some reason, I decided to appease him and go. I heard arguments for the Pope that I could not refuse. I also heard about the Eucharist and Mary and thought there might be some truth in the Church's teachings. Most importantly, I met Catholics who knew their faith, were excited about it, and wanted to learn more. These Catholics were the first who said they would pray for us. Through the intercession of many my callused heart began to be softened. My attitude was transformed. I began to look into the Church on my own accord because I wanted to know what it taught. As I looked, I wanted to find Catholic doctrines in the Bible. I was shocked at what I found. Not only did I see the Church's teachings in the Bible, but I also saw the authority of the Church in defining doctrine. I could not deny the things I read, and I wanted to know more. After a while, Greg and I were attending Catholic churches every Sunday. Greg asked me to meet with his teacher from the Catholic Center to go through doctrine systematically. I was still a little leery of this idea, but after some prayer, I assented to his request. Our meetings were amazing. He explained doctrine so richly, beautifully, and thoroughly, all in language given to us by the Church. There was so much history, a deep understanding of the Old Testament, and connections to Judaism it was inspiring. At the end of the summer, we moved and could not continue our meetings. Our teacher suggested that we come back weekly for their RCIA classes since they had a strong, orthodox program. I had some reservations at first because I was concerned about what my family would think, but after prayer decided we had no other choice. I am so thankful that Greg looked into the Church. I never would have on my own. I didn't believe there was one ounce of truth in Catholicism why would I have ever turned to the Church to find it? Now I can trust the consistent teaching of the Church, and I am blessed with the fullness of the faith. I feel a greater call to holiness and accountability for my actions because I know that God must work out my selfishness and all that does not honor Him before I can be in His presence to worship Him forever. I also feel a greater call to prayer. I am reminded of His incredible love for me through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. God is no longer far off He is tangible and near.

Postscript: Far from the spiritually dead church we once presumed the Catholic Church to be, we have found many enthusiastic, committed believers. We are so excited to receive the sacraments and begin working toward the New Evangelization. We have truly found our home.