

## LESSON TWO



# A Good Beginning towards a Godly End

The great nineteenth century theologian and convert to Catholicism, John Henry Cardinal Newman, once wrote “to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” While not everyone reading this is a Protestant considering becoming a Catholic, most of us are hopefully respectful of history as a guide and as a model in helping us to understand who we are, and where we are going. Our Lord has claimed firmly that he was (and is) the Alpha and the Omega (the beginning and end), and Catholics see the Lord as the key to understanding history (both the past and the future). Catholics are fiercely proud of our history, even though we cannot claim that it is not without its darker moments, but taken as a whole Church history affirms the power of the Spirit that drives the Catholic Church throughout the ages, and even when we don’t deserve graces, they seem to come. Even when we are at our lowest

moments, saints emerge to draw us back towards our true path. And so, having some grasp of Catholic history is an important way of growing in our appreciation of the Church, and how the Lord continues to bless us. It might also be wise for those considering coming into the Catholic Church from a different Christian tradition to do some research into the founders of their own traditions, and to have some grasp of the history of their denomination.

The Catholic Church is at home in history, but again one must be careful where one finds one's "history." A popular cable channel that claims to present to us history can do (on occasion) a real hack job on the Catholic Church, and then follow it up with a program about Big Foot. My point is you just have to be careful where you go so that you can get a reasonably good presentation of history. One can get a grasp on Catholic history by reading a general history book, and we recommend that you order at least one of these books to read. With two thousand years of history, you can imagine it is not real easy to reduce all of that global history into one book, but if you read at least one of these, you will have a greater appreciation of the Church you are hoping to embrace as a whole. We can recommend a number of books:

- The convert to Catholicism from Anglicanism, H. W. Crocker III, has written a rousing history of the Church entitled TRIUMPH: *The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church; a 2,000-year History*. This is just shy of 500 pages, and retails for around \$30.
- Or HOW THE CATHOLIC CHURCH BUILT WESTERN CIVILIZATION by Thomas E. Woods, Jr. It is a great read at 300 pages, and for around (or under) \$25.
- Another book (which I have not read) is entitled A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH by Jose Orlandis. You can get this online for about ten dollars, and it has fewer pages than the COMPENDIUM (which you have already read). You may find this history (or perhaps even the others as well) at the website [www.aquinasandmore.com](http://www.aquinasandmore.com).
- Another possible brief history is the SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH HISTORY: *The Catholic Church Through the Ages* by Father Lawrence Lovasik, SVD which can be found online and costing less than ten dollars.
- Another book that may be helpful is by the Indian-American Dinesh D'Souza, who writes WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT CHRISTIANITY. This book is not specific to Catholicism exactly, but D'Souza is a Catholic, and he helps to unravel a lot of the popular myths about Catholic history in this book. This is just shy of 350 pages, and can be found for less than \$30.

Another less scholarly way you can begin to grasp Church history is through movies. While no serious historian would recommend you getting your facts through the cinema, the telling of *a story* is the very beginning of *history*, and so there are some films that will help you, if nothing else, to get a feel for certain historical epochs (even if the producers of these films may have taken certain liberties with the facts for the sake of the making of their film). While seeing one of these films is in no way a substitute for reading one of the history books, it can help to fill in the gaps in an entertaining way. We can recommend the following list (especially if you like old movies):

- THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST (released in 2004) is directed by Mel Gibson, and is a very graphic and very violent (albeit accurate) depiction of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Not everyone can watch it, but those who do will never forget it.
- BEN HUR (shot in 1959) is a work of complete fiction, but it gives us a sense of what it may have been like to have been a Christian at the time of the Caesars. If nothing else, *Ben Hur* is one of the greatest epic stories ever put to film, and it is, after all, *The Story of the Christ*.
- EL CID (1961) like *Ben Hur* this film (on the life of el Cid of Spain) stars Charlton Heston, and it is a great love story that takes place during the middle ages. It also stars the stunning Sophia Lauren, so if nothing else it is a beautiful film to watch.
- THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY (released in 1965) like *Ben Hur and El Cid* this film also stars Charlton Heston, who this time plays the role of Michelangelo, who is charged with painting the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in the Vatican.
- JOAN OF ARC (the one starring Leelee Sobieski) is a great film. Another film by the same name was filmed in the same year more or less, and the other one was not good, but I like this one a great deal. .
- A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS with Paul Scofield playing the lead role as Saint Thomas More in this 1966 film that grapples with the period of the English Reformation, when the English king Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church. This film won 6 Oscars and is one of the finest and most intelligent movies ever made.
- A TIME FOR MIRACLES: This film (starring Kate Mulgrew) is a bit dated, but it tells the story of Mother Seton.
- MOLOKAI: THE STORY OF FATHER DAMIEN: It isn't great art, but it is a good story about the holy leper saint of Hawaii.
- THE SCARLET AND THE BLACK (1983) is a film starring Gregory Peck, who plays a priest in the Vatican during the Second World War. Sir John

- Gielgud portrays Pope Pius XII. It can give one a sense of Vatican history, and what a priest's life is like in Rome.
- MOTHER TERESA: (staring Olivia Hussey) tells the story of one of the most beloved saints of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Homework Follows

- Explore online (if possible) the website entitled CROSS ROADS INITIATIVE ([www.crossroadsinitiative.com](http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com)), which can be a helpful source of information in your search for what it means to be Catholic. Another website that may be helpful for resources is that of the Daughters of St. Paul ([www.pauline.org](http://www.pauline.org)).
- Once you have read through most (if not all) of at least one of the above mentioned history books on the Catholic Church, you can call and schedule another meeting with the priest or the catechist. Write down any questions you might want to ask when you arrive, but also expect to be asked some questions yourself.
- Fill out the following questionnaire, and bring it in with you when you come.

# Third Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions, and return this information to us.

1. If you still owe the priest or catechist paperwork from before, make sure he gets that as soon as possible
2. Have you completed reading at least one of the history books recommended by Father Byrd, and if so, which one?
3. Do you have any questions regarding what you have read? If so, turn this page over and put write down those questions so you can discuss them at our next meeting.
4. Are you still attending weekly Sunday Mass at the parish?
5. If not, why not?
6. Have you continued your exploration of the on-line sites we have recommended, and if so, what are your impressions?
7. Did you see any of the movies recommended, and if so, what were your impressions?
8. How is your prayer going?
9. How do you assess your discernment towards full communion within the Catholic Church?
10. Do you feel like you are ready to commit to a more serious stage of discernment, where you can make a general commitment that you really believe you may be called by the Lord to become fully integrated into the Catholic Church?
11. Are you ready to learn more about this faith you seek to embrace?