How to Avoid Converting to Catholicism, in 8 Easy Steps

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As a Protestant convert to Catholicism whose journey culminated at the Easter Vigil earlier this year, I have some experience, oddly enough, in how to become a Catholic. For me, it was a particular, miraculous journey that I’ve been [writing about](http://www.thecordialcatholic.com/tag/conversion-2/) for a few months now. For me, I can trace certain lines—a certain narrative—through nearly a decade’s long journey. In my own journey, I can check off certain boxes and say, definitively, *yes, that made me become a Catholic*.

So, naturally, I wanted to help others to avoid a similar fate.

For me, it’s too late, but there’s hope for you. If you can, with the help of our Lord and your closest friends and family, avoid these certain *pitfalls,* while I can’t *promise*, I can assure you that you’ll have a much easier time avoiding [the trap](http://www.thecordialcatholic.com/truth-trap/) that I fell into.

Friends, I offer some unsolicited advice: here’s how to not become a Catholic.

**1) Don’t Read Scott Hahn**

One of the first mistakes I made as a Protestant was to read Scott Hahn.

Dr. Scott Hahn is a renown bible scholar, and Catholic convert. In the 80’s Scott and his wife Kimberly were part of a wave of famous Catholic converts from Protestantism. Dr. Hahn, a evangelical pastor, was radically converted to Catholicism and soon after his “conversion story,” recorded onto cassette tapes, started being passed around. The popularity of Scott, and then Kimberly’s, stories touched off a massive wave of Catholic conversions and encouraged the pair to write a book based on their experience called [Rome Sweet Home](http://www.amazon.ca/gp/product/0898704782/ref%3Das_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=15121&creative=330641&creativeASIN=0898704782&linkCode=as2&tag=thecordcath0e-20).

Do not read *Rome Sweet Home*.

What you’ll discover is that Scott and Kimberly are intelligent, well-read, and well-meaning people. Dr. Hahn is now a highly renown biblical theologian, a prolific author, and a voice of authority, compassion, and expertise in the Catholic Church. He’s brought his evangelical fervor to Catholicism and hasn’t slowed down. And you, poor evangelical, thought that Catholics didn’t know their Bibles—and certainly weren’t charismatic.

Reading a conversion story as fulsome as *Rome Sweet Home* is dangerous. In the story of Scott and Kimberley, and the stories of other converts to Catholicism, you’ll see echoes of your own faith journey. You’ll encounter questions you may have asked, or may not have, but you’ll sure be asking them now.

And, if you’re not careful, your road may begin to take a slight jog to the left and you may find yourself at the very beginnings of a Rome bound journey.

**2) Don’t Read Church History**

A second, major mistake that I made was to read Church history—the history of Christianity.

I did my best. I tried to select a truly academic, historical overview from as secular a source as possible. I didn’t want history tainted by an overly Catholic perspective, a heavily Protestant point-of-view, or a work of pseudo-historical merit. I wanted the real, scholarly deal. I’m a History major, after all, so I figured I could hack it. I chose the 800-page [Reformation](http://www.amazon.ca/gp/product/0140285342/ref%3Das_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=15121&creative=330641&creativeASIN=0140285342&linkCode=as2&tag=thecordcath0e-20)by Diarmaid MacCulloch (among other sources I’ve read since).

Do not read *The Reformation* by Diarmaid MacCulloch.

MacCulloch, a self-described lapsed Anglican, describes the time of the Reformation with sometimes mind-numbingly minute detail. It’s, truly, a thick slog and you could begin thesis work based on any of the small sub-sections MacCulloch includes. Suffice to say, however, his giant tome gives you a pretty intense overview of why the Protestant Reformers split from the Catholic Church in the 16th century and what was happening in culture and society in such a seminal time and place.

But reading Church History is dangerous.

From a fulsome reading it’s clear just how tenuous some of the decisions and attitudes of the Early Reformers were. How much of Martin Luther’s personal story of enlightenment is exaggerated. How much of his doctrine of justification and the very things he split from the Church over are driven directly by a manic personality. How so much of the Reformation was thrust forward by cultural, not religious, details. How politics, war, and the European dynasties proliferated and exacerbated tensions.

And, if you’re not careful, you might realize, like I did, just how shaky the foundation—the origin—of my Protestant faith truly was. And how adequate and immediate the response of the Catholic Counter-Reformation truly was in cleaning up places the Church of 1,500 years had gone awry.

**3) Don’t Read the Early Church Fathers**

A third mistake that I made was nearly fatal: I began to read the Early Church Fathers.

Understand, these are the apostles of the apostles, the Christians who were taught by the very first Christians that Jesus taught. These are giants of Christianity who had direct access to those who *heard* Jesus’s very words, and touched his flesh. As an evangelical I didn’t even realize that this material exists and when I did, I began to devour it.

Do not read the Early Church Fathers.

As a naive, curious Christian I began to read the Early Church Fathers only to find out that they were startlingly Catholic. The Fathers wrote about Jesus being *really present* in Holy Communion—not simply as a symbol. They wrote, endlessly, about the importance of submitting to Bishops and respecting the authority of the Church—a Church which, in their minds, Jesus began, the apostles continued, and then passed on to them, by appointing them into places of authority.

When I began to realize that the Early Church didn’t look like the evangelical tradition I had grown up in I was shocked, and then affronted. I was always told, as an evangelical, that “house churches” were biblical—that independent, small groups of Christians meeting in an “upper room” was what happened in the first centuries of Christianity.

Instead, the Early Church is decidedly Catholic in its doctrine and its hierarchical structure, and if you’re not careful, you may come to a similarly shocking conclusion as I did. And then what?

**4) Don’t Meet Any Great Catholics**

The next mistake you might make is to meet some great Catholics. Don’t do it.

You may have already come to realize, at this point in your journey, especially if you didn’t heed my earlier advice, that there are some pretty amazing Catholics out there. Maybe you’ve read people like Scott Hahn, Stephen Ray, G.K. Chesterton, Frank Sheed, or Robert Barron. Sure, they’re great, and they’re vigorous, enthusiastic Christians (who are also Catholic) but you haven’t *met* them you, so you’re still relatively safe.

Be careful though, don’t meet any great Catholics in person.

As soon as you meet great Catholics you’ll realize that right in your very neighbourhood, right in your workplace or your community centre or—heaven forbid—your local Catholic parish, there are *actual Catholics*. Catholics who might be trying, for real, to live out the Christian life. Catholics who are striving to represent Jesus to the people around them.

Catholics who are devout.

And those are the ones you certainly want to avoid, at all costs.

**5) Don’t Start Living Like a Catholic**

But, if you’ve already met devout Catholics there’s still hope, even at this late point in the journey I can offer this solid piece of advice: Don’t start *living* like a Catholic.

You’ve been warned.

Because at a certain point in my journey towards Catholicism I realized that for all the book learning I’d done, for all the lectures and stories I’d watched, and for all the conversations I’d had (mostly with myself) I simply had to begin to [live the Catholic life](http://www.thecordialcatholic.com/stop-debating-started-living-like-catholic/). I had to try it on for size and see if, living it out, it actually made any sense.

Don’t live like a Catholic!

Don’t start going to Mass or asking for the intercession of the saints (because you’ll get it!). Don’t try to pray the rosary (it’s shockingly easy to learn!). Don’t dabble with the Liturgy of the Hours or Eucharistic Adoration because you might fall in love with these decidedly Catholic practices and then there’s very little I, or anyone else, can do to help.

You may be, at this point, too far gone.

**6) Don’t Give God an Inch**

But maybe there’s still hope, maybe the slope is not yet too slippery. Maybe your descent into Catholicism can be halted and I think I have some suggestions that, even at this late hour, can help to prevent your seemingly inevitable conversion into the Catholic Church.

Here’s one idea: Don’t give God an inch.

Don’t, whatever you do, let up even the smallest part of your life to God’s control. He’ll run with it, and that’s the last thing you want.

Don’t yield your will. Stand firm, and refuse to be moved. I know, in the past, He’s gotten you through some tough times and difficult situations. I know you *think* you can rely on Him who is Eternal and All-Knowing to bring you through, safely, to the other side.

But you’re wrong!

The minute you give an inch to God, He’ll take a mile, and He may very well take you to a place you don’t want to go. A place of deep reverence, devotion, beauty and—on occasion if you’re lucky—sweet-smelling incense.

**7) Don’t Pray**

Also, whatever you do, *don’t pray*.

This could, ultimately, be your greatest mistake. You must simply stop praying altogether. If you insist and continue praying you may, accidentally, pray in a way you don’t mean to. Thoughts, petitions, or thankfulness are all well and good but something else might creep into your prayers and you might, by no fault of your own, pray for guidance in your faith journey.

You might pray for help, and then, friend, you’re done. Finished!

You may pray, like I did, for God to help lead and guide you and suddenly all barriers to the Catholic Church might tumble down like those mighty walls of Jericho. And you might find yourself marching right on in.

Because God answers prayers, of that you can (and probably are!) assured. In this area you need to be maximally alert and abide by the old adage: be careful what you pray for.

God gives very good gifts, and loves us very much. That’s exactly what you need to be worried about.

**8) Don’t Let Your Faith Be Challenged**

Finally, friends, if you’ve come this far I’m not sure what else we can muster up but I’ll surely try.

You’ve read some conversion stories, the history of Christianity and the shockingly Catholic Early Church Fathers. You’ve met some great Catholics both online and in the real world and you’ve started to make small steps in living the Catholic life. You’ve given up part of your stubborn will to God and asked Him for guidance in your journey. And now you’re here.

How, at the last bastion of common sense, the final battlefield, the great basilica of reason and sanity, can we make our stand?

We must, at this point, completely refuse to challenge our faith.

I recommend burying one’s head in the sand although successful techniques may vary.

In any case, we must refuse to be moved. We must dig in, friends, and dig in deep.

We must read all the authors we’ve always read. Visit all the websites we’ve always visited. Spend time in conversation with friends who only agree with our points of view and refuse, at all costs, to challenge the faith we’ve always known.

We haven’t grown complacent—no way!—we’ve grown *confident* in our faith. We know what we believe! We’re not *scared* to think about the Bible, the Sacraments, or the Christian Church in a new way. Nothing scares us, we’re simply too busy or too happy with the way things are right now. We won’t be challenged because we don’t need to be.

After all, Jesus taught that change is bad, complacency is good, and we can get to Heaven by doing what we’ve always done.

Right, Pharisees?

Although, if you’ve come this far, and all else fails, maybe you should just become a Catholic. I know I am.