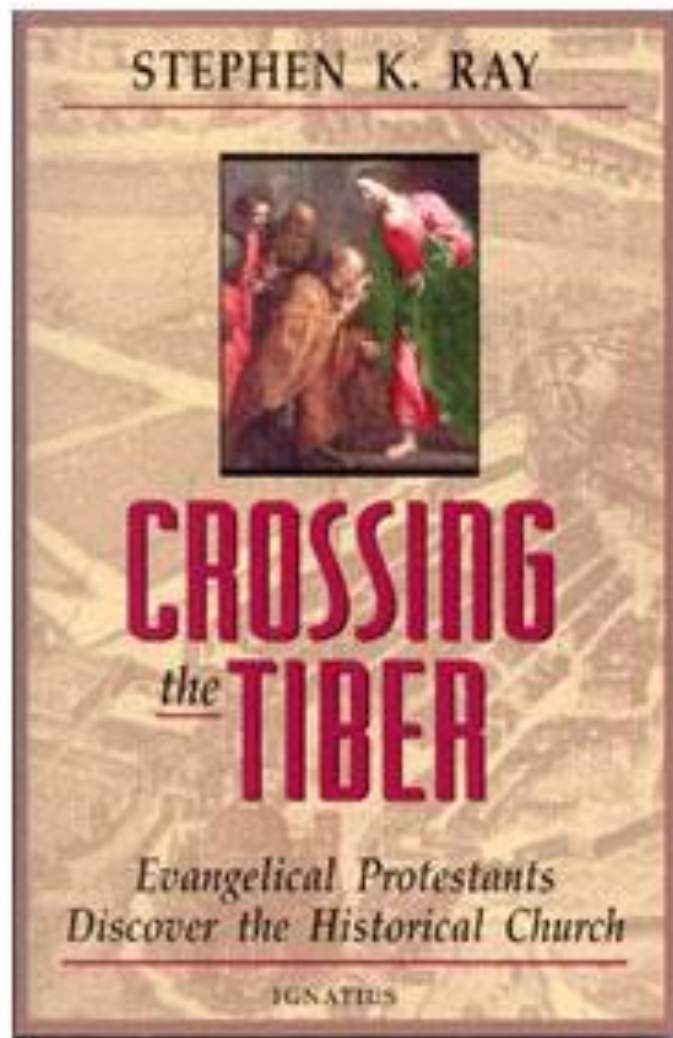


## A Summary of "Crossing the Tiber" by Stephen Ray



## A Summary of Crossing the Tiber, Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historical Church by Stephen Ray

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## About the Author

Stephen K. Ray was raised in a devout, loving Baptist family. His father was a deacon and led Bible studies. Steve himself was very involved in the Baptist Church as a teacher of Biblical studies, and he lectured on a wide range of topics. When a best friend, an Evangelical pastor, converted to the Catholic Church, Steve and his wife Janet decided to investigate the claims of the Catholic Church, taking a thrilling journey back in time that would eventually change their lives forever. After hundreds of hours studying the Bible and the writings of the early Church, they were convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was the Church founded by Christ, and they were received into the Church on Pentecost Sunday in 1994.

## General Overview

### I. Part One

#### *Our Conversion:*

This book is an attempt to give a brief defense of the author's conversion to Catholicism along with his wife. Stephen Ray and his wife had opposed the Catholic Church in clear terms and publicly. Their conversion, then, was a strong turning away from their fundamentalist Protestant backgrounds and a turning towards the historically verifiable truth of the Catholic Church.

#### *Our Inherited Protestant Roots:*

For Stephen, the protestant view of life and the Church was something he grew up with. He was raised with Bill Graham playing on the family television and with anti-Catholic books in his house. His parents were loving Christian converts who were zealous for their newfound Christian faith. His wife's family came from a long line of Protestant Christians who could trace their lineage back to the sailing to Plymouth Rock on the Mayflower.

#### *Why We Chose Christianity:*

Janet and Stephen, independent of one another, experienced a personal conversion to Christianity before they met one another, and each became ardent followers of Jesus Christ in the Evangelical traditions. Stephen attributes his personal commitment to Christianity as a desire for a deeper truth in the face of modern materialism and modernist philosophy.

#### *The Foundations of Our Evangelicalism*

Evangelical Protestantism was influenced and grew from a strain of Protestantism known as Fundamentalism. It emphasizes a literal interpretation of the Bible and belief in the Virgin Birth of Christ and the physical Resurrection. Its most common denominator within its various denominations is its universal condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church. It subscribes to the doctrines of *sola scriptura* (the sole sufficiency of the Bible), imminent rapture, eternal security (knowledge that once you have faith you will, no matter what, attain Heaven), blood atonement, the invisible unity of the Church, denominationalism, and so on.

Evangelicalism finds its oldest roots in the reformation by Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It stems from the two 'sola' doctrines developed at that time, namely: *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide* (Bible Alone and Faith Alone). *Sola Scriptura* states that the Scriptures alone are sufficient to provide all knowledge that God desired

for Christians to have. It also states that the Bible is perspicuous (interpreted by itself), and that anyone can come to a full knowledge of God's word by the help of the Holy Spirit and individual judgment. *Sole Fide* teaches that salvation is attained by faith alone. It was developed by Martin Luther, who went so far as to add the word 'alone' to the book of Romans to prove his point. Interestingly, the only time the Bible says 'faith alone' is in James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." These two incorrect doctrines eventually ruptured the unity of the Church and founded the Protestant movement.

The Sacraments of the Church were also redefined during the Protestant revolts, to the point that Fundamentalists and Evangelicals no longer even call them sacraments. They were believed to be nothing but outward symbols that are not efficacious in any real way.

### ***Our Thinking Begins to Shift:***

Stephen and Janet began in time to see the internal contradictions inherent in the Protestant theology they grew up in. They were grieved by the rival interpretations of the Bible that spawned numerous denominations and sects, and felt that this was an indication that something was wrong with Protestantism. Disillusioned with the over 18 denominations they tried, they thought of even beginning their own 'home church' to accommodate their needs.

### ***Our Evangelical Foundations Begin to Crumble:***

Stephen eventually discovered through personal study that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* was weak, unbiblical, unhistorical, and untenable. *Sola Scriptura* was not taught anywhere in the scriptures, neither was it even implied. Scripture never speaks of the idea that God's word is contained only in the written texts of the Bible, and this is further evidenced in that Jesus never wrote down commands for us (other than the unknown words on the ground), and didn't command His followers to write the Bible either. Jesus' "word" was orally transmitted to the apostles, and was orally transmitted for many years until the Bible was created in its entirety. Oral tradition was also established side-by-side with the Torah in the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant doesn't supersede the Old but builds upon it. The early Church absolutely depended upon apostolic tradition, and the apostle Paul referred to the Church (not the Bible) as the pillar and foundation of the truth in I Tim 3:15. Jesus never promised to give us an authoritative book, and neither did an apostle ever give us a list of the books to be in the Bible. Jesus did however give us an authoritative Church (cf. Mt 16:18-19, 18:15-20).

One of the most troubling things for Stephen as a Protestant was the knowledge that for almost 4 centuries after Christ there was no authoritative understanding of what the Bible was. The Bible itself does not contain a listing of what books are to be in it, and the Church was without the collection of books now known as the New Testament for almost 400 years. This is evidence that the early Church was in no hurry to produce a solely authoritative book, because truth was deposited into the Church itself. The Apostles understood this as they traveled the world instituting churches and teaching the Christian faith, and Paul even specifically charges the Thessalonians to hold fast to the traditions he gave them, whether in spoken word or in epistle.

As a Protestant, Stephen was forced to consider the question of what came first, the church or the Bible. It was a shock for him to discover that the New Testament is the "child" or product of the Church and it is the collected and inspired writings of the Apostles but it is not the sum total of all their teachings. This is further evidenced by early Church writings, such as that of Papias (c. 60-130), Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. Papias wrote: "I used to inquire what had been said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, were saying. For books to read do not profit me so much as the living voice clearly sounding up to the present day in the persons of their authors."

## ***Sola Scriptura and Private Interpretation of the Bible Bring Disunity:***

It should be noted that the Catholic Church has always taught the revelation ended with the death of the last apostle, and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only divinely inspired writings of God given to his Church. They are infallible and inerrant. The only conflict in doctrine between Catholics and Protestants as regards Scripture has to do with the word *sola*. *Sola Scriptura* has never been taught by the apostles, the Fathers, or the Church. It is entirely a product of the Protestant Reformation, 1600 years after Christ. It is this reformation principle of each man with his own bible and own interpretation that has brought about the tragic disunity we see today. In order to keep up with the growing number of divisions in the Church, Reformation theologians had to define the Church as an ‘invisible unity’. This concept is, just as *Sola Scriptura*, completely foreign to the apostle, Church Fathers, and the Bible itself. The Scriptures themselves teach us that no prophecy is a matter of private interpretation (2 Pet 1:20-21), and that many distort Paul’s writings to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:15-16). For the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* to bear any legitimacy, Protestant reformers had to drop all attempts at unity with the historical church. It is therefore commonplace for Protestants to skip straight from the Book of Acts to Martin Luther, as if the intermittent 1600 years didn’t even occur. Even the famous Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to them should think so little of what He has revealed to others.”

## ***Scripture, Tradition, and the Canon of Scripture:***

If the doctrines of the Reformation are followed, one must ask what basis Protestants have for trusting the twenty-seven writings that make up the New Testament. How is it that these specific 27 writings, which were amongst hundreds of epistles of the early Church, were specifically recognized to be inspired? The Holy Spirit did select the writings, but he selected them through men. Specifically, the Holy Spirit selected them through the Church. The only logical position for a Protestant to take in regards to what books should be in the Bible is that of R. C. Sproul, who said that the Protestant has a “fallible collection of infallible books.”

Until the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, there was no final list of canonical books. In the time between Christ and the finalization of the Canon of Scripture, Christians had grown to take over the Roman Empire, span across most of the known world and produce such great saints as Augustine and all of his predecessors. How was it possible for them to do this without their individual interpretations of their leather-bound New Testaments? It is a curious fact that Protestants are actually bound to Catholic Church tradition for their knowledge of what 27 books constitute the New Testament. The Church defined what books would be in the Canon of Scripture, and this was accomplished at the Council of Hippo and the Third Council of Carthage.

## ***Our Struggle with Other “Catholic Issues”:***

Just as the idea of tradition repulsed the Rays, so they were also repulsed by many other Catholic issues. Their perception of the Catholic Church had been tainted by years of Protestant indoctrination, and all of their knowledge about the Church came exclusively through anti-Catholic protestant sources. After doing some research into the things that had at one time repulsed them (especially research from unbiased sources), they found that they were more drawn to the Church than they had been before. These issues included: the universality of the Church in both space and time; her visible unity; her survival in spite of all her problems and tares; her undefiled orthodoxy and moral teaching. They found that the Catholic Church knows the Bible and teaches it in such a manner as to avoid the contradictory interpretations rampant in Protestantism.

As they continued their studies they found that the Church was absolutely correct in its liturgy as well as its moral teachings. Other doctrines soon became validated for them as they studied more, and soon they found themselves accepting such things as Marian devotion, Purgatory, the papacy, confession, bishops, the Eucharist, baptismal regeneration, prohibition on contraceptives, justification by “faith working through love”, veneration of saints, et cetera.

## ***We Begin to Discover the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church***

As their studies continued, they discovered that the early Church fought incredibly to maintain the unity of the Church against schismatics and heretics. There was a complete understanding in the early Church that the Church should be one, as Jesus had prayed. Stephen began to question how it was that as a Protestant they were okay with denominationalism and a fractured church. It became abundantly clear to him that the Reformation was not an act of reforming but abandoning, and that it fractured the church to the core.

## ***Shall We Accept Church Authority?***

The Rays had to face their own fear of submitting to the authority of the Catholic Church. As a Protestant, they had their own bibles and could be their own authority, but they found that submitting to the Church was in and of itself an act of independence. Submission to Christ in his Church was not an act of blindness, weakness, conformity or groveling, but it was an act of decisiveness and a willing choice.

## ***The Next Important Crossroads: Catholic or Orthodox***

Leaving the Protestant world behind left them with two choices, the Eastern Orthodox or the Catholics. After researching the issue exhaustively and even listening to debates between Catholics and Orthodox, they were convinced that the Papacy and the unity of the Catholic Church demonstrated its doctrinal superiority to that of the fractured churches of the East.

## ***The Final Stages of our Journey***

In 1990 a close friend of Stephen resigned his job as a pastor and joined the Catholic Church, much to the shock of Stephen and Janet. After a year had passed where the issue of his friend's conversion was simply ignored, Stephen and Janet asked him if he regretted his decision. His friend responded that it was the best decision he had ever made, and Stephen and Janet found that the Catholic Church arose for them as a real alternative to the Protestantism they were in.

## ***We Take the Plunge***

The Rays realized that the 'lone ranger' Christianity they had adopted was not an option that the Lord had left open for them. As they became more aware that He had established a specific Church and wished them to be part of it, they were drawn further and further to Catholicism.

## ***The Dawn of a New Year***

On December 31, 1993, Janet and Stephen entered into an apologetics argument with some friends of theirs. After vigorously defending the Catholic faith for some time, Stephen realized that he could no longer remain outside of the Church and told Janet he was ready to take the plunge. After telling his converted friends that he wished to join the Catholic Church, they invited Stephen and Janet to come to Mass with them. While their fears spurred by the horrible accusations of their anti-Catholic past made them nervous to attend Mass they went anyway. The liturgy was beautiful and they found themselves falling in love with the Church in the Holy Sacrifice of Mass.

## *We Finally Come Home on Pentecost Sunday, 1994*

They continued to regularly attend Mass for several weeks before asking how they could join, assuming it would be as simple as filling out a membership form. They were told they would need to take a year long RCIA course, and they immediately responded that they had catechized themselves through all of the reading they had done. After many meetings with their Pastor and 12 weeks of intensive lessons, their priest gave them a theological examination and allowed them to enter the Church on Pentecost Sunday, May 22 1994. Their children were baptized and confirmed, and they both also fully entered the Church.

## *Concluding Remarks*

The story of their conversion presented in this book was a mere skeletal framework of their journey. They created it to answer the questions of their friends and family who have been disturbed by their move to the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Stephen and Janet continued to be overjoyed with the Church, and their children have become active and faithful members as well.

**NOTE:** The next two parts of the book are entirely devoted to apologetics regarding Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Stephen sets out biblical passages and passages from the Church Fathers in their original so that the reader can come to their own conclusions. He summarizes in a short passage at the end of each apologetics section. This book summary lists the Biblical citations and then summarizes Stephen's commentary. The citations of the Church Fathers have been excluded so as not to create lengthy citation lists.

## ***Baptism in the Scriptures and in the Ancient Church:***

- Gen 1-3, 6-8, 17:10-13
- Ex 12:48, 14:21-22,30
- 2 Kings 5:1-14
- Ezek 36:22, 25-27
- Zech 13:1
- Mk 1:4-8, 16:15-16
- Mt 3:13-17, 28:18-20
- Jn 1:26-34, 3:1-7,22
- Acts 2:37-41, 8:27-38, 10:1,44-48, 16:25-33, 22:12-16
- 1 Cor 7:14, 10:1-4, 6:9-11, 12:12-13
- Rom 6:3-4
- Gal 3:27
- Eph 4:4-6, 5:25-27
- Col 2:11-12
- Titus 3:4-7
- Heb 6:1-4
- 1Pet 3:18-22

## ***Conclusion:***

This study of the doctrine of Baptism has drawn from the Old Testament, the New Testament, Church Fathers and the Councils. Keeping in mind that no verse can really and truly contradict another verse of the Bible, it becomes clear that the only acceptable understanding of Baptism is that of the early Church. Moreover, as we can see from the Church Fathers, the early Church's stance on Baptism is the same as the Catholic Church's now. Protestants might argue that the Bible teaches we are justified by faith alone and not by works or deeds of

the law. The appropriate counter to this is to point out that we are not in a position to argue with what Jesus teaches in the scriptures, neither does the Bible say that we are saved by faith alone. Also, it does not have to be an either/or case of 'either baptism or faith', but a both/and. It is both baptism and faith that work to justify us.

Also, objecting to the use of any sacramental matter such as water is somewhat Manichean in nature. Christ worked in this world through a real body, with real tools and implements. When He healed people, He would often use dirt, spit, or water. He changed water into wine. He said that His body would become bread. He took coins from a fish's mouth. He fed thousands with loaves of bread. Wouldn't it be inappropriate to infer from these actions that Christ was beginning a religion that had no use of this world but operated solely in an invisible 'faith alone' setting?

It is obvious from the Scripture readings, the Church Fathers and the Councils that the Church has always believed that Baptism was regeneration, a new birth, a washing away of sin, and the door through which one entered the Church. It is through Baptism that one becomes a member of the body of Christ, a son of God, and participates in the life of the Trinity.

### ***Part Three: The Eucharist in the Scriptures and in the Ancient Church:***

- Gen 14:18-20
- Ps 110:1-4
- Ex 12:5,7-8,10-11, 16:4,14-15,35
- Mic 5:2-4
- Mal 1:11
- Jn 6:4,10-14,43,51-55,66-68,70-71
- Mk 14:22-24
- Lk 24:13-17,25-33,35
- Heb 9:11-14, 13:10
- Rev 5:6, 13:8
- Rom 15:16
- Acts 2:41-42
- 1Cor 10:1-4,15-18,20-21, 11:23-27

### ***Conclusion:***

Studying the New Testament, the writings of the Apostles, the early Church, and the Councils shows a convincing amount of evidence that the doctrine and practice of the Eucharistic Celebrations were understood immediately and have remained the same since then. It is impossible to accurately interpret Jesus in any other way, and the early Church obviously believed in the Real Presence. The Catholic Church still teaches these same doctrines.

### ***The Real Presence: A Short History of the Resistance***

#### ***The First Resistance:***

We find absolutely no resistance from the Christian Church or Her writings for the first eight hundred years. The Gnostics did deny the Real Presence, only because they were Manichean in their theology.

### ***The Second Resistance:***

The first serious resistance to the doctrine came from a French monk named Ratramnus in 868. He was excommunicated and then repented of his ways and returned to the Church.

### ***The Third Resistance:***

Berengarius of Tours denied the Transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Eucharist. After disputing with many theologians the doctrine, he was reconverted and reentered the Church.

### ***The Fourth Resistance:***

In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, another sect arose that was Gnostic and Manichean in nature and denied the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It was eventually put down by the Church.

### ***The Fifth Resistance:***

John Wycliffe (1330-1384) disputed the doctrine of the Real Presence. His teaching was rejected by a synod, but his arguments began to spur on the eventual reformation that was to occur.

### ***The Sixth Resistance: The Reformers***

The Reformers were unanimous in rejecting Transubstantiation and the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, and they argued endlessly over the Real Presence. Ulrich Zwingli denied any Presence and called the sacrament a commemoration or symbol. Calvin accepted a 'presence of power' or spiritual presence. Luther believed in the real presence but not in Transubstantiation. He so vehemently opposed Calvin and Luther that he declared them damned and ministers of Satan. Luther eventually wished to remove the doctrine and, in his words, give "a great smack in the face to popery," but he declared that the Scriptures were too clear on the Real Presence of Christ to remove the doctrine.

### ***The Seventh Resistance: Present Day Protestantism***

There is no similarity between the present-day Evangelical view and that of the early Church. The doctrines are almost entirely opposite. The Evangelical presupposition is that the early Church went off track almost immediately after Christ, a supposition that is fraught with error and bad logic.