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#147 Catholics have questions

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Catholic listeners have sent in some questions for Tom, including: Will the elusive dream of Catholic and Anglican unity ever be possible? I'm reconsidering my conversion to Catholicism... should I take my 6 year old daughter out of the church? Justin Bass joins for a final time.

For the book 'Harvesting The Fruits' mentioned by Tom:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Harvesting-Fruits-Christian-Ecumenical-Dialogue/dp/1441162720>

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Transcript

Hi there. Before we begin today's podcast, I want to share an incredibly special resource with you today. If you're like me, life can get pretty hectic, pretty quickly.

But one thing that helps me slow down is connecting with God in new ways. And I'd like to share a resource that has really helped me do that. It's called Five Ways to Connect

with God.

And you can download it for free right now at [premier insight dot org slash resources](http://premierinsight.org/resources). I think you'll find refreshment for your soul. So go right now to [premier insight dot org slash resources](http://premierinsight.org/resources) and download your copy.

That's [premier insight dot org slash resources](http://premierinsight.org/resources). The ask NTY anything podcast. Hello and welcome back.

It's great to have you with us. I'm Justin Briley, head of theology and apologetics for [premier unbelievable](http://premierunbelievable.com) and joined once again by Tom Wright for more of your questions. This week, Catholic listeners have sent in some questions for Tom, including will the elusive dream of Catholic and Anglican unity ever be possible.

I'm reconsidering my conversion to Catholicism. Should I take my six year old daughter out of the church? So some interesting questions coming up and Justin Bass joining us for a final time on this week's edition of the show. Thanks to Reverend Rand out in the USA who says, I love the podcast.

I've been trying to navigate my way through following Jesus for many years. And the podcast is a light forward for my faith struggles. Thank you Bishop for your thoughtful reason and pastoral answers.

Thank you very much for getting in touch. Rev Rand. Don't forget today's show as ever brought to you in partnership with SBC K Tom's UK publisher and NT Wright online where you can find his video teaching courses.

We do love your feedback as well. So if you can leave a rating and a review for us, it helps other people discover the podcast. And if you register for our newsletter at [premier unbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com), you'll get the link to ask Tom a question for yourself plus all the other great stuff that comes with the newsletter.

The link is with today's show. Just a final reminder less than a week till our live online event with Tim Keller to walking with God through cancer takes place on Tuesday the 13th of December at 8 p.m. UK. That's 3 p.m. Eastern, 12 noon Pacific.

It's going to be a great chance to catch up with Tim on his journey over the past two years and to ask your questions of him and they could be on on anything really. He's a wonderful thinker, writer, speaker and apologist. Very influential Christian thinker.

So do register at unbelievable.live. The link is with today's show. Let's get into some of your questions. Welcome back to the show and today it's the final of a few episodes in which we've also been joined by Justin Bass who's New Testament scholar to talk through some of the questions that you've sent in and I thought we could do Catholicism this week, various Catholics with questions that we're going to feature on the show

today.

Justin before we get into them, when I picked you up from the airport and we were having a conversation about this ahead of time you said, I said what's your view on Catholicism? Obviously you come from a Protestant evangelical tradition and you said you're a kind of a mere Christianity guy. Do you want to just explain what you mean by that? Yeah, I shared a great quote from Ross Douthard on if you ever interacted with him. The New York Times writer strong Christian Catholic likes something he said.

He said a lot of us talking about his experience growing up, they would discover C.S. Lewis and then through Lewis they would discover Chesterton and then Chesterton would make them Catholic. He said that was his road and interestingly I had a very similar road as I said. I discovered into you right early but C.S. Lewis was one of my definitely mere Christianity was one of the most foundational books for me and through reading Lewis I found Chesterton.

Thought Chesterton was even better than Lewis but he didn't succeed in making me Catholic. I didn't go all the way with Catholicism. Chesterton almost thou persuaded me but not quite.

Obviously never quite persuaded you either Tom but let's go to a few people who were persuaded but have some questions since then. This is from Dan in Oyster Bay, New York. He says I'm a former Episcopalian and we could say Church of England on our side of the pond who converted to Catholicism 11 years ago.

Bishop Wright you spoke at our Catholic seminary on Long Island a few years back and it was extremely well received. Catholics our Pope's included have always had a soft spot for English Anglican luminaries like you, Archbishop Williams and of course St John Henry Newman. But my question is what hope do you hold for full communion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and what must both sides give and give up to achieve this elusive dream of Christian unity.

I'll start with you Tom. Wow, wow, wow. One of the things which happened when I was Bishop of Durham was that I got involved in quite a lot of dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics both with our local Roman Catholic hierarchy in the north east of England.

In fact the new Roman Catholic Bishop of Hexham Newcastle and I became good friends we used to play golf together. He's a lovely guy, sadly died young but I saw a lot of him and his colleagues but then also on the international stage I was asked to go and represent the Anglican Communion at the Cinder to Bishops in Rome in 2008 and several other things which flowed out of that. So I've been involved with this quite a lot and I'm constantly struck by two things simultaneously.

One is that the mere Christianity thing is true that these are people who believe in the Trinity, in the resurrection of Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, etc. etc. and we link arms on the things that I would say are things that really matter but then the other thing is that they have other things which they seem to be obliged to believe and some of them believe very passionately.

For instance about Mary which just make my eyes cross I think how can you believe that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven. That's a medieval idea at various other things etc. And things like Purgatory and I've had Catholic apologists explain Purgatory to me and how actually it goes back to the Bible etc which it really really doesn't and I think well sorry if it's a package deal and you have to take on all or nothing then I'm afraid quite a lot of what you've got in that all is not something that with any honesty I can accept.

So that's a problem. Now I do know that many Roman Catholics including many Roman Catholic theologians will say privately that actually the center of it is Jesus and his death and resurrection and that's what really matters and that they are prepared to sit loose to other things but as with any other great movement there is a spectrum of the hardliners and the people who are prepared to say well we'll sit loose to some of that but they can get in trouble if they say that in public. So I have said to them again and again to my dear Roman Catholic friends that as I read the New Testament in the letter to the Galatians which I think is the first letter to be written the doctrine of justification by faith itself is not just something we ought to be able to agree on it is the doctrine which insists that all those who believe in Jesus belong at the same table and it seems to me that sharing communion ought to be the road to greater unity rather than the cherry on the cake which you get when you've done all the other bits of unity.

So that would be my position and so when I'm at a conference with Roman Catholics if they will allow it I believe in inter-communion as a gospel imperative of course sometimes because of whatever the Pope says whatever that is not allowed but there are many Roman Catholics I know including some leading theologians who actually agree with me on this so that's the line that I would want to push. Your thoughts on do you think it will always remain an elusive dream as this this isn't a good set? On what you know aspects of maybe what what could be called the non-essentials I think I think so I don't think there's going to be an agreement on issues of justification on maybe you know Mary you know issues around Mary I think I think these things probably will always be you know divided you know debated at least in the higher structures but individuals on the ground I see the same thing with some Catholic friends and discussions I've had. I think what I'd really love to see and bring in the Orthodox as well I would just love to see all the Christian leaders in some way kind of do a mere Christianity you know here we are coming up to 2000 years since Christ was crucified and risen again wouldn't it be great if they all just you know take the Apostles Creed you know something that we could all just say hey we all agree because this is something I say to atheists and people

who challenge Christianity many times they'll say oh well look at all the different religion I mean all the different denominations and oh how can I believe this well what I emphasize it's what's amazing what's a miracle is what we all agree on we all agree on the essentials you know we agree on the author of the three.

There is such a book the book exists Walter Casper who was the cardinal who was in charge of the ecumenical department in the Vatican for many years excuse me and who my wife Maggie and I got to know quite well in our various trips to Rome he produced a book called Harvesting the Fruits you might want to find that Justin and put a link to it harvesting the fruits because he had worked on dialogue with Methodists with Anglicans with East North of Ox etc and he pulled together the results of all these different dialogues across the board and he said here is what we all seem to believe and it's maybe a bit dry because it's a kind of an academic exercise of here's all this with all the footnotes and it probably would take us yes Lewis or a GK Chesterton to say okay let's pick up these fruits and let's turn them into something a bit more appetizing than simply a rather academic list but that has that has been done the problem then you know when you talked about the non-essentials just in that's that's of course exactly the point that this is a philosophical thing that within so much traditional Roman Catholic thought particularly rooted in Aquinas and in so much Eastern Orthodox thought there is no such thing as essential and non-essential it's all one seamless whole it's like a sheet of glass and if it's broken it's broken and it's a peculiarly 16th century thing which the early Anglicans in the 1520s even in the 1530s were keen on because of the Eucharistic controversies to say look we agree on all the basics can we agree to disagree on what we mean when we say the body of Christ when we give somebody the way for all the bread in the communion and the Roman Catholics in the 16th century were not prepared to say we agree to disagree but the Elizabethan settlement was all about in Elizabeth's famous phrase not making windows into men's souls and that was not a free for all on every aspect of doctrine and ethics as people have sometimes imagined it was saying on this very specific thing this is a deep mystery and if you choose to interpret it that way and I choose to interpret it this way we are not going to fight over that and because we all believe that Jesus died for us and rose again and that's the really important thing so the question of the difference between essentials and inessentials is itself one of the problematic differences that we have to work at and Rowan Williams gave a lecture in Rome some years ago in which he said basically that he said look we agree about so much can you not now move to the point where you can say some of the things you strongly believe are things you're prepared to say that other people needn't believe and you could still be in fellowship with them it's those are those are the kind of issues and an analogy that I use I'll just say briefly I like to use this is the Paul and Barnabas rift in Acts 15 because you know Paul and Barnabas it wasn't over doctrine but it was over you know it was over taken take and mark you know on this missionary journey but they couldn't agree and so what do you do when two apostles you know don't agree on something well ultimately good came out of it you get two missionary journeys you know

both are proclaiming the proclaiming Christ to proclaim the gospel in the different places they went we follow Paul we don't know exactly where Barnabas and Mark went maybe they went to Alexandria but they both went to proclaim the gospel to proclaim what we would say the essentials and but that it was a necessary rift right I mean because they couldn't agree it may be a necessary rift go ahead the way the way they did it I think was was scandalous I mean Luke describes it as a paroxysmos you know that was it was a furious row which must have shaken the church at Antioch to its foundations so that's where I parallel you know whoever's Barnabas or ever's Paul but you know Catholics and Protestants you could you could kind of say that we're on our journey doing you know preaching the gospel we have this rift where we can't agree but we could also look back at each other like Paul and Barnabas couldn't say hey you're still my brother we were preaching Christ we can't agree on everything but but Paul came back and said that that ultimately Barnabas was right in the present in the present dangerous secular or even post secular world when so much is going on I as an Anglican have far more in common with my Roman Catholic neighbors than with all sorts of other people out there particularly the mass of secular humanity you know we are we are absolutely at one on the things that really matter. Hi there before we go any further I want you to know about a very special ebook we're releasing this month called critical race theory and Christianity this ebook draws from two unbelievable podcasts with Neil Shenvie, Razzleberry, Owen Strand and Jermaine Marshall addressing questions like has so-called woke ideology taken over parts of the church or is white privilege a problem in the church and is critical race theory compatible with the gospel. I'd love for you to have a copy of this powerful ebook as my special thanks to you for your gift to Premier Insight today the ministry that brings you this podcast each week you see all of the conversations, insight, resources and encouragement that you get from premier insight programs like this one are only possible because of the support of wonderful friends like you without your generosity none of this would be possible so please go to premierinsight.org/give and make a donation today that's premierinsight.org/give and don't forget to download our newest ebook critical race theory and Christianity as my special thank you.

Well why didn't go to question two and this comes from someone else Liam in England who was also a convert funnily enough from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism but having second thoughts so he says I started listening in part because I've experienced a crisis of Catholicism converted from the church of England about 10 years ago but I've spiritually matured I've begun to question some of the structure and rigidity that I found so appealing in my 20s I've reconnected with old Anglican friends he've even wondered if I might be discerning a call to ministry. Anyway the question really for Liam relates to his daughter he says she's six and I've worked hard to raise her as a Catholic she attends Catholic school she's developed a beautiful little faith of her own she's a particular devotion to Mary she loves her rosary and sings songs she's learned about the seven sacraments. I believe professor writers generally opposed to people leaving their

churches and their denominations and I'm keen to hear his view on my situation is their merit in staying put to avoid disrupting my little girl's spiritual development or is it my responsibility to lead us both into a different tradition if I do have concerns about some of the technicalities of our Christian faith so any thoughts on this particular story? It's a very difficult one and it's a pastoral question first and foremost and as we've often said on these programs I cannot be a pastor at long distance or by zoom or whatever this is something that the person concerned has to go to somebody that they trust and love and who trusts and loves them and to pray about it and maybe weep about it and agonize about it and I think one of the things to say is there may be no perfect solution here and the idea that there is a perfect solution and if only you could find it then all would be well may itself be a snare and a delusion which leads some people to go from church to church to church just like in other bits of life lead people to go from one marriage partner or near equivalent to another to another thinking oh I messed up I'm now going to find the perfect person and of course again that it doesn't work like that.

I would normally encourage people to explore from within their own tradition if they can however over the years I have watched many people move out of this and that and the other tradition I remember one couple who when I first knew them they were in the Salvation Army they were Salvation Army officers they then became Anglicans and then maybe 10 or 12 years later they became Greek Orthodox which is what they now are that's quite a journey from the Salvation Army to Greek Orthodoxy and I want to say good luck to you you know god bless you in the strange economy of god all sorts of things like that and they will happen I have watched people come from Roman Catholicism into Anglicanism and vice versa including some people quite close to me and I don't have a grand scheme which says if only all of you would do A or B or C then the whole world would be wonderful I think it's a matter for individual prayer individual wrestling with conscience and certainly when children are involved because it can be incredibly confusing for children equally I would worry about some of the things which might be taught to children in a Roman Catholic Sunday school but which might then cause them difficulties later on when they start to ask other sorts of questions so I wouldn't want to build in too much too early so you hear what I'm saying maybe a typical Anglican response that there are there are there are many pathways which god willing converge I don't know that they do but knowing many people in many traditions they seem to equally I know many people in my own tradition who seem to find Anglicanism a place which is so undemanding that you wonder whether they're actually being genuine disciples or not they can just slide in and out of their particular type of Anglicanism so I'm not saying that Anglicanism is the perfect thing in the middle far from it we are all messed up but let's be wise and prayerful about how we relate to one another and how we contemplate the possibility of switching from A to B because that's always fraught with all sorts of questions. I mean you're a father to young children Justin any any suggestions for this father? Yeah I mean I sympathize with what Tom said you know what they're going to teach the kids you know at the in a Catholic church as you know to me

are important you know even though in a sense on the big on the big scale of things I think some things are not essential but I would always encourage people if they can and if and if the opportunity works out for them to move into a more something within the Protestant tradition whether Anglican or Reformed or you know some some sort of you know more in the Protestant tradition where they're not going to be using the rosary or things like that not only you know praying to the father of the son or the Holy Spirit for example but you know I would encourage people wherever they're going to love Jesus the most you know wherever they're going to be conformed the most to Christ you know that that's where so I actually have some some some strong Catholic friends and I see them on fire for Christ and and you know trying to change things within their parishes which are led by very kind of liberal priests and things like that and so in my sense like if I had to choose even if I could change their hearts and make them come over to a Baptist church I don't think I would I think I think they're better where they are I think I think they're thriving the most in Christ where they are but but when it comes to kids I mean yeah my I mean my advice pastoral advice would always be to to be somewhere where the most truth of the scriptures being taught and and that generally is going to be in a more Protestant tradition but to some extent that's not underestimate how much the parents themselves have a huge influence and and regardless of what particular education their children might be receiving the way that that then sort of gets interpreted and fed back to them by a parent who perhaps acknowledges that there are you know there are question marks and that sort of thing might might be very helpful in in bringing that child to a more mature rounded faith in the end I suppose Tom yeah yes absolutely and the conversations over meal tables I mean I think back to conversations over Sunday lunch after we'd all been to church and her to sermon and but dad what would he mean by such and such and how could he say that's great the more questions the better and the more the parents show that it's okay to question and we can grow through that and learn and and that it's okay not to have all the answers all the time and I think part of our difficulty today is particularly faced with again the the massive secular agendas which come at us through the media and in all sorts of ways some people retreat into a brittle framework where everything must be tied down and if it's not tied down then we're all in trouble and we're all going to burn in hell or whatever and to be able to say rather as with essential and non-essential things no there are big questions we don't all have all the answers nobody probably has all the answers if God is God for goodness sake we wouldn't expect shouldn't expect to be able to understand God totally and utterly and if you say God is revealed fully in Jesus which the New Testament does say yeah okay now look at Jesus do you understand Jesus from top to bottom probably not actually so let's be humble and rather than have this arrogance which leads to this brittleness of saying this way is absolutely right in everything that it does so just come inside here and then you'll be safe there is no safe safe space as people used to say faith is a fault let a word spelled R-I-S-K sorry that's an old cliché but it's still true that's a good one it's a good one and probably a good one to end with actually we'll leave it there for now it's been it's been great to be able to have both of you on the show for the last few

weeks and I hope that these answers have been helpful to those who are you know reconsidering their Catholic faith or asking questions about it obviously we know that many Catholics Eastern Orthodox and others listen to the show we love you all and we hope that we'll continue the the good friendly and important dialogue that goes on between Christians of different traditions but for now Tom and Justin thank you so much for being my guests thank you for inviting me thank you very much very good to be with you both and Justin very good to make your acquaintance I hope it was in an honor sir well thank you for being with us today on the show more from Tom as usual next week and if you want to ask questions in a live show well that's getting very close if you're last chance ready to register for our upcoming Tim Keller live show on Tuesday the 13th of December you can join from anywhere in the world it's free to attend do check it out at unbelievable dot live and join us for what will be a great evening for now thanks for being with us god bless and see you next time [Silence]