

Catholic Homeschool Podcast

History Through a Catholic Lens – With Christopher Zehnder

Hello and welcome to the Catholic Homeschool podcast. I'm your host, Paola Ciskanik and today's podcast is all about seeing history through the Catholic lens. I am thrilled to invite Christopher Zehnder with me today. He's the general manager, the editor, writer. Well, we'll get to know him in just a minute. Hello, Christopher. Thank you for joining.

Hello. Thank you for having me.

So good. I was just telling Christopher before we hit that button here, that I've known him for many years, and this is the first time we get to talk in person. So, we're going to make this time here a time to get to know Christopher and to know the work that he is doing to help us families in teaching history, again, through a Catholic perspective.

So, without further ado, let me just get this part over with Christopher, which is, you know, reading the bio.

Christopher Zehnder is the general editor of the Catholic textbook project. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Thomas Aquinas college in Santa Paula, California, and his masters from Holy Apostles college and seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut. He has taught history, theology, Latin English, grammar, composition, English literature, and universal literature, at Catholic secondary schools in both Connecticut and California. He has developed curriculum in history and language arts. And in addition to his work in education, Mr. Zander has authored a trilogy sets in the German reformation. And that first volume, which we'll talk about in a minute again, too, is recently published by Arouca Press. He has edited two monthlys and written for various publications on historical, political, and theological subjects. He and his wife, Catherine, with their children live in central Ohio.

Well, thank you. We got that out of the way. Good little background, but what it doesn't really say in there was something I found very interesting, which is you had sent me your interview with Marcus Grodi from journey home, you know, Christopher, we have like this growing community of homeschool teens in our community. We even have a teens Catholic author group. So, I really wanted to dive into your background, your journey as a convert to the Faith.

So, let's begin when you were a teenager and fast forward to how in the heck did you get to where you are today?

That's always a hard question to answer because there's so much, there's so much that goes into a conversion and much, much what goes into conversion. You often don't even know what they are. They're different influences. I, I was kind of an odd teenager. I liked reading and looking at maps. I read all sorts of different things.

So, I guess I was, I tended to be an intellectual almost from my early teenage years, if not before. I come from a historical faith; my family has been Lutheran since Martin Luther. They were one of the founding families of the Lutheran church, Missouri Synod. And so, I always grew up with a sense of that history and the sense of a tradition. Even though there was a time in my life, I rejected all of that. I was influenced by the Jesus movement through my brother, but I did come. It always sort of drew me back.

So that, that sense of the beauty of that tradition and we had, it was, you know, the liturgical tradition of the Lutheran church is very similar in many ways, to the Catholic liturgical tradition. And in the music, music plays such an enormous part in Lutheran worship, particularly of the works of Bach. So that's one of the things I've always missed being a Catholic is I don't get to hear Bach preludes and postludes.

I do have a friend who's, who's a convert. He was a Lutheran minister and the same thing they missed, you know, they, they actually, he's now a priest of the, you know, the ordinariate and partly I think because of the music and the whole congregation, you know, or would sing and they would harmonize with each other, you know, so that must've been a beautiful experience growing up with that.

Yeah. So I was, I was drawn by that. There were lots of other things that went into too, but yeah, the sense of the historical, I was early on drawn to when I was a teenager too, I was compelled to find the historical faith. That was a big part of it. And even though I rejected all of that at a certain point, it was always something that drew me at the same time and through an influence, but very important man in my life, my Latin teacher in high school, man named Kevin Long. And he, I was drawn towards the Catholic faith, even though he never told me he was a Catholic, he always told me he was a mere Christian. He taught in a Lutheran school, but I, I gradually understood where he was coming... I knew that he was Catholic, and it was through his influence that I ended up going to TAC as well.

But yeah, so those are the various different influences that came upon me. There was a Lutheran minister who was sort of a mentor to me. And he also was a, he was a theologian. He, he, he played musical instruments. He had a profound sense of beauty, all that drew me towards the Catholic faith. I'm sure he doesn't like the idea that it drew me towards the Catholic Faith.

Right. But all those things were, were, were deep influences and there were intellectual problems, intellectual questions that I, I struggled with as well. Like the whole question of authority. What is the authority for divine revelation? Where do we find the true interpretation of scripture? Those things deeply troubled me.

So ultimately all those questions, the only answer that seemed to make any sense to me, was the Catholic faith. In fact, at a certain point in my life, I thought if the Catholic faith proves to be false, I'm not even going to be a Christian anymore. I figured it didn't make any, you know, it wouldn't make any sense.

It wouldn't make any sense. Absolutely. Like again, right.

That's a little bit, a very small capsulation of my life.

Yes. Well, people I'll put the link for the journey home one because people should listen to it. It is because the reason why I bring this up is essentially because we tend to underplay what teenagers are going through. And the fact that you were questioning and seeking knowledge brings us then full circle to the importance of what books and materials we are feeding that, that thirst for knowledge. So, yeah.

Right. Before I talk about books though, I just want to make a point of the importance of teachers and mentors and how seriously we have to take teenagers. I taught teenagers for many years. I have raised them. I think sometimes we, we don't pay them sufficient respect, and we don't expect enough out of them. They can actually do perform a lot more than we give them credit for, and we have to give them that confidence and sense that they can actually understand in education, difficult material, that they actually have a high calling. They have to follow.

They're somewhere between children and adults, but there are more adults than they are children. I think that's something we always pay them that kind of respect and never speak down to them. Never condescend to them. That's why when I was a teacher I tried never to do... I didn't want to condescend to the students.

I would speak to them like I was speaking to adults. I think that's a very important thing. What we give them to read is also extremely important and on various different levels. On one level, what we give them, the reach be good literature. Well-written, I mean, the classics of course, students should, should have access to in our, in our reading material too.

Like in our classes, we would want to have it. I think books, which are written well, which are intelligent, which are, are, are inspired by the love of learning and wisdom and which being we're all Catholic, they should be Catholic in orientation. We've talked about what that means in terms of history. I mean, it, it, it becomes difficult. Like when you're doing mathematics, what's Catholic mathematics? You know? It's not counting rosary beads. There's no Catholic really specifically Catholic mathematics as I'll talk about in it. There's no, in a certain sense, there is no Catholic history either.

Yeah. And I, in many ways, that's why it's like, I do like to preface that by the Catholic lens, you know, again, it's that understanding or faith and perceiving that through that, that... you know, perspective. So, I mean, one of the things getting back to the teenagers, I can't, you know, again, thank you for saying that, because very often, I think, especially with homeschooling parents, they tend to say, okay, I'm done and they don't pay attention. They, oh, it's the teenage years. We won't understand each other, but it's like that much more essential to actually get to know this fully formed person who has a calling for noble things and being able to, to respect the dignity of, of that age and of that individual. That's kind of on loan for such a short time.

You're quite right about that.

Yeah. Yeah. It does go fast. I can say, as a grandparent, now I can say, well, good. Well, one of the things that always drew me, and again, I grew up in New York city kid. So, we learned current events. There was no sense of history. So when I, I am a revert to the faith when I began to homeschool was not only a journey of my faith, but it was also journey of history. And our family just loves, loves, loves history. And the one thing I really wanted to dive into is why I highly recommend these textbooks as that spine. You know, I, I do homeschooling history, you know, using history, family style for multi-ages is one of the frameworks. I teach people to do that. But I use that book as the framework, because of the things we're talking about, let's talk about how that project started and what its mission is. Why is it different than what's out there?

Okay, well, we began in the year 2000, so we had a meeting in Phoenix. I was living in California at the time. I'm a native California. We were meeting in Phoenix and Michael Van Hecke, who was the president of our company, our first general editor, Dr. Raul Lasker, a mutual friend of ours, Douglas Alexander, we all met. And we had an opportunity of getting some money to produce Catholic history books.

Now, we were all had been in schools. I, I was teaching high school. Michael van Hecke was a headmaster.

In Ventura, right?

This was when he was originally in Phoenix. Then he ended up in Ventura. That's why we were in Phoenix. Why else would you go to Phoenix? But we, we all had the experience of trying to teach history in schools with substandard books.

The problem was is that there had been no Catholic texts published since the late sixties. And many of those books were not really adequate, had to do with lots of different things. One of them is writing style. They were often times written a very dry pedantic fashion. They weren't beautiful. Look at it. Sometimes there's a kind of triumphalism or even a kind of extreme Americanism, which you find in these books. And we just didn't think that there were the sorts of books that actually evoke wonder.

When I taught, we used one particular book, an old book at the school I was at, and I would just assign the readings, but my history classes, where I would do the research myself and take notes and present them and the students, I don't know if all of them liked it, but there were those who did. So, I took down the, I would take notes in lecture that way. So, we wanted to, we thought we need to have books, which are as colorful and attractive as a lot of the major publisher's books, but that's, that's the only, that's a very minor thing.

What we wanted was of course, Catholic books. And we can talk a little bit what that means in terms of, but we also would have books that both wonder and the desire for knowledge in students. And so, what we landed upon was the idea of writing these books in a narrative fashion, you know, basically almost like many of the good popular histories you think of American history are written in that narrative, almost like.

Yeah, Nathaniel Philbrick's book on, you know, travels with George Washington. And he was a literature person who writes history and again, making it accessible, very telling us that narrative, the story, which is a really fascinating way for kids to be totally engaged in the story. Yeah.

Yeah. So that was, that was the goal we had.

And the biggest problem of course was money. And we thought we had enough money. They'd gotten a woman who willed us some money to do this. And so, but we had nowhere near the amount of money to do an extremely expensive proposition. What we set out to do, especially in those days, when you actually had to buy all the pictures, we want to have a lot of pictures that were works of art, you know, true works of art, not cartoon drawings.

Yes exactly! And if anybody ever, and again, they can go to the website and see those pictures, but that's like really literally what makes the difference in many ways. It, it really captures the beauty again, the beauty. So yeah. You had a license those in the old days, right?

Yes. It was, yeah, it was very expensive. And, you know, I think, I think the first booklet pictures alone were \$30,000, And that was a lot more than, than it is like, you know, and those days we were, we actually published with Ignatius Press originally, right. Don't ask me the date when we stopped, but we decided we would go form our own publishing company, which has been an adventure we've had years. We've struggled quite a bit, but now, I mean, we're actually doing very well. It's, it's, they're catching on schools all over the United States are buying them and we're getting increased continually.

Yeah, and you have new ones as well. And my son, you know, when you did the lands of hope and promise, which, you know, again, there's nothing out there like that, that gives the perspective of Spanish history and the importance. You know, we... constantly all the history books are always talking about the English coming, but they never talk about coming from the Spanish perspective. And, and they're closer, you know, to us being Catholic.

Well, I'm glad you brought that up because when I wrote that book, I was living in California. And so, I had, you know, you live in a close proximity to Spanish culture, and it seemed to me there were two reasons why it was important to understand the United States, you really have to understand her neighbors.

And the most important neighbors are Latin America. You couldn't write a history. All the Latin American countries, so we included concurrent history of Mexico. So, we start, it starts with the Spanish, and it moves into the revolutions and the Mexican history.

And I think that's important both to understand, you know, a growing population in the United States, but probably more importantly to understand ourselves because often times with American history, the problem is, is it's told in a vacuum and it's; it's not told in the proper context of a larger civilization.

And so, we think certain things are just absolutely obvious and clear, which are not obvious and clear questions of, of, of foundations of government, the nature of government authority, whether a state or nation, a culture should be, you know, basically agnostic, in its reproach to religion. We take all that as obvious. But when you see a, a country like Mexico, you begin to see it. There are other ideas that are at work in planned society. And those ideas come, and they clash with ideas that come from the United States.

So actually, you have to think on a broader level, it's even better. Of course, if you're doing European history and to see in the United States and contexts with that now I don't think the point is to see the United States primarily. I think that the point is to know this history. I mean Mexico and Europe are not just foils for the United States.

The book I talked to you about earlier that I used in school, one of my criticisms of it was, was that it made it seem like all of the development of Europe coalesced and found perfection in the United States, like it was all there, just for the sake of the United States. And so, you kind of have all kind of Europe, European thing, but all of a sudden, you're just talking about England.

So fascinating. My family and I went to Jamestown, you know, we went to the real site of Jamestown and, and you have the, you know, you have the park Rangers who are giving the tour and they're talking about how horrendous the conditions work, but he gave us the broader perspective.

They just said, you know, England was not, did not have the Naval power was not, as you know, there is Spain in Florida, you know, and it's it had the conditions been better for starting or, you know, I mean, basically it was like people that were punished in England, it was like, either you are hung or sent a Jamestown, people would prefer to be hung because they knew it was terrible.

So, Spain never even tried at that point. And I thought that was so eye-opening for my children, for my whole family to really get this broader perspective that it isn't like, as you said, this, let's just look at America as the center of the world, put it in a historical perspective.

Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, yeah, so we wanted to help. We want to have books, which would inspire wonder and the desire for knowledge, because we're convinced that, well now, as Aristotle and St Thomas said, man is a rational animal. That's, that's the definition of man. We have all the animal passions and the like, and bodies and the whole business. But what really distinguishes us is the fact that we can know and we can will too, I mean, will is obviously important, but before you can, will something, you have to know it.

And so, we want it to help to inspire that love of knowledge, which is, I think just being killed constantly in our society, through technology, through the culture, all different ways, all different things. It's being killed almost in a special way by the educational system.

Yes, exactly. And of course, I represent a lot of homeschoolers who are trying to actually reclaim that for their families.

Right. And I think that love of knowledge, the understanding that knowledge is good. Not because it gives you a good job, not because it, it gives you position in standing. So might do all those things, but if it doesn't do any of those things, it's still good. It's good in and of itself. Knowledge is the perfection of the human mind and wisdom ultimately is that perfection.

And you can only find out through seeking to know, to live in your life in such a way that you're always trying to learn whatever your position is, no matter what you're doing in life, based on one's own gifts and one's opportunities, one always seeks to know. So that's why it's the liberal education, right. The principal of liberal education, not the democratic party education, but liberal in the sense of that, which frees. Right? That which frees us to be fully human. So that was another aspect. I think that being Catholic, what we've been attempting to do and been trying to do is recover the real tradition of Catholic education, which has been fairly killed with so much the United States and throughout the world, since, since the 20th century where you have Catholic schools, aping the standards and measures to undertaken by public schools, right?

So, they, they set the standard. We try to measure up, whereas really, we have the superior education because it's actually rooted in what it means to be human. So it goes, it's even pre-Catholic. It's, you know, it goes back to Greece and Rome. So that's one of the big inspirations of what we've, what we've been setting out to do.

And, And I would say it was very inspiring. You know, I love to tell the stories of the fruits of your work. My son, as I said, did take that class lands of hope and promise. He, I think you were teaching it at the time at, on homeschool connections. And you had just published a book. In fact, we were just like, I don't think it was in hardback. It was like digital that first time. And we went through it together. It was amazing. And then fast forward, you know, he, he's my youngest who went to the local college he's business major of all things, but still has a strong love of history.

And he had to take a history class and there he is immersed in secular history. And he there, he was researching and bringing to class the broader perspective that he had learned foundationally from doing things like working through your book with you.

Good. I'm glad to hear that that's always encouraging.

Yeah. As a teacher. It is. But to know that the fruits of that gives that legacy is giving the foundation for the next generation,

Right. Yeah. I going to, if I may, I'm just add what we mean by Catholic history. Cause we do tell these books from the, from the perspective of the Catholic faith, and I understand why when people first hear that they say, well, then it's just biased. You're just, you're just making stuff up. Right? What is Catholic history is like what's Catholic mathematics doesn't exist. And in a sense, it's true.

Catholic history doesn't exist. You know, the term history Historia in Latin means an inquiry can also mean a narration, a narrative its well, history is an inquiry into human actions and events of the past, trying to get to know, to come to know what happened and as best you can, why it happened. So, in both of those, oftentimes when you study history and find it's, oftentimes you don't even know what happened. It's not clear what happened. I've been, I'm working on one of our next books for freshmen level high school. And I would go through the medieval period and the ninth and 10th centuries.

And sometimes you just don't know, there's not enough. The records aren't there. So, when we talk about history, we are talking about the inquiry, which since the 19th century has become very scientific. We're also talking about the events themselves. So, in a sense, the inquiry, there's nothing specifically Catholic or anti-Catholic or non-Catholic about the inquiries. It's kind of neutral in terms of being Catholic. However, nobody writes history without a perspective. If you're, if you're the modern historians who pretend like they're objective, they're not, they come from a certain perspective, it could be a Protestant perspective. That could be a secular perspective, could be a Catholic perspective, but we all come from that perspective. And that's something we have to take into account when we're telling the story of history, that perspective for Catholics, obviously Catholic. Well, no.

Does that mean, I, I simply blindly believe anything that Saint said or, or even with say to take the life of Christ. If I look at the gospels, do I just say, okay, the gospel said it that's it. Or do I submit even the gospels to a certain kind of historic scrutiny. It's the latter. That's when we tried to... you try to see the gospels as historical documents. And I don't think there's anything impious about that. It's just, that's what they are. They're historical documents. And they can be examined based upon that. I think work...

So being Catholic means you respect the actual demands of the discipline that you're following. If you're a mathematician, you respect mathematics. If you're a philosopher, you respect philosophy and the actual inquiry of those in those disciplines to be when you're doing history, you step, you respect the demands of historical discipline, the scientific apparatus that goes into it.

I think one of the big differences is though, is this, is that we Catholics, and this... I guess could go for anybody who believes in God, but we're, we have a broader view of our vision of the world than say a secular materialist does for the secular materialist. There is nothing else, but the material causes all causes of history are to be economic, or they're going to be environmental. They can't secular historian is because of his assumptions can't accept miracles, for instance. So, he's limited. He has to find some non-miraculous explanation for the certain events, which seem very well-documented and as such the thing. Yeah, yeah, exactly. Oh, there's a number of different things. You can point out like this. As a Catholic. I don't really...

Well take Fatima as an example. As a Catholic historian, I don't come at Fatima and saying, oh, the church has said, it's believable. Therefore, it happened. Or, you know, pious people say it happened. Therefore, it happened. I have to look at the event of that. That's Fatima in, in a, in a manner, which is at the core of the struggle I have to see what's the evidence. Right. I can't just be pious. So, I have to be, it has to be evidence-based, but I can actually, I can actually entertain the idea that something miraculous did happen.

Right. That's beyond our, you know, our physical ability to, to recognize something. Yeah, exactly. Broaden that inquiry, as you say, that search for knowledge.

Right. So, I can entertain a lot more. I think also being Catholic, we have a sense through our faith of the trajectory of history. Now, again, we can't just take this or assume trajectory our ideas of Providence and just sort of explain everything by them.

Nor do we say God's sort of, you know, or be a deist perspective where he's just set everything in motion and boom, we're on our own.

Right. So, we have to, we have to do the work at the same time, but we can entertain and seek to understand history in light of what's revealed without shortchanging history, without being simplistically pious. We can actually... we can actually say, I, there seems to be a movement. This, this happened, these providential, these seemingly providential events. I'm thinking like a historian, like Christopher Dawson, where he talks about, like, who asked the questions that he talks about the role of religion. And you can tell his understanding of the role of religion. It's history, comes from being Catholic, but you would never say that this man is being, he's a duped Catholic where he's trying to dupe us with slight historical slights of hand.

He argues from his actual evidence of history, but he argues it as a Catholic. He can entertain that providential aspect of history. So, I think, you know, and I think to being Catholic, if you really are being Catholic, you don't treat your history as a propaganda piece. Like so much of history is being done now.

Yes, it is. Oh my goodness. And that is one of the hardest things, you know, Christopher, especially when we talk about homeschool materials, we have different viewpoints, secular even our beautiful, you know, brothers and sisters in Christ who have certain perspectives that you're right. It's all about pushing down that evangelical propaganda as part of, even within science or math, you know, just, here's another opportunity to get somebody into my, in the door of my faith. So, yeah, that's again, why I love the breath of fresh air in terms of the perspective that your textbooks in the project.

And a part of our perspective too, is we wanted to make sure to do is be honest. You know, the tendency always is to protect your own, right? And there's often been, has been this idea amongst certain Catholics that you only play up the good parts of those days. You kind of hide all the bad stuff. And our perspective has been, we're going to tell this story warts and all, we're going to tell what about the bad popes. We're going to talk about the abuses that occurred in the church, how Catholics had fallen short time and again, and I think that's it.

If you don't do that with students, they're going to find it out from somebody and maybe not even in a particular accurate fashion, but they'll find it out from somebody. And they're going to turn around and say to you, why didn't you tell me this? Right. We can at least tell it. We can tell those stories with the perspective of the faith. We can explain it in relation to the faith in a way that nobody else can.

Christopher, that it's also from a standpoint of like, we're not, when you're seeking truth, you're not afraid that the things you're going to find out are just because the truth never contradicts itself. It's central. It's just leading you to a closer relationship to, to his story.

Right. Yeah. Yeah. And I, you know, that's so I guess the way you put it, the Catholic history is just history told by Catholics.

Yes, yes, exactly. It's not a tool to, you know, again, propaganda, it's not to prove a point. It is the unraveling of, of truth of what's happened. And being able to open your mind to that perspective and what you're gonna find it's not always beautiful. Is it Christopher, because it's humanity working in this world is sinful world.

And you'll find you, you're gonna find there are admirable people who aren't Catholic. Sometimes there are people who are more admirable, then some, some non-Catholics and other Catholics too.

I mean, even, even with, if you take somebody like Martin Luther, for instance, it's very wrong to go and just treat Luther like he was a devil and not try to understand the man. You know, being raised with, I always, I guess I have a certain, I always have a certain residual piety towards Martin Luther. People might think that weird, but it's hard being raised in a faith where you're told that Luther is the second St. Paul, right. For so many years and not to feel like he's this, he's a certain paternal figure.

It's almost rather like finding out your, your father's a rat. Right? I mean, not to say that Luther was entirely a rat. But there were admirable things about Luther. There are things we have to understand about Luther, and it just makes history boring. If Luther is just a black cat, he's just a bad guy. It's easy to dismiss bad guys.

It's easy to scapegoat as well.

Right. Or Napoleon is another character I find it fascinating. And I think the complexity of a man like Napoleon is fascinating. And so that will lead to wonder, students will say, well, there's these people who did things, which we think are wrong, but yet they're not entirely bad. And there are people who are doing good things who are not entirely good. It gets them to thinking, right. If we can guide them directly, we can get them to understand, for instance, like the church is not her members. I mean, we're all members of the body of Christ, but the church ultimately transcends that earthly reality of it.

Well, like you said about the, you know, talking about the bad popes again too, I had a beautiful dear priest. He said, you know, when you look at the church, we have to look at it in 500 year chunks. Not like what's going on this year versus last year. And, and, and this overarching, the holy spirit protecting the church, guiding it, keeping it true to, to Christ's church.

Right. Right. So, I guess, I think I've said about everything about the history.

But it's so important for people for our parents to hear this Christopher. It really is important, very, very important. And, and just the guiding light as to what we pick, how we work, how we inspire our teenagers, what we give them. And, and so what is coming next? Let's talk about those historical fiction books before we wrap things up. What else can we expect from, from Catholic textbook project?

Well, the historical fiction books are not Catholic textbook project.

No, they're yours, right?

Right. But so, I have to make that disclaimer, it's important. From Catholic textbook project. We are, we, we published an eighth grade. We just going to be going to print hopefully very soon and eighth grade American history texts. Cause there was a lot of requests from that particularly from Catholic schools.

We were hoping our hope was that, that we could just have people do modern history, modern European history in eighth grade, but didn't work. I mean, people are, people use the book, lights, nations too, but this has been a great alternative for eighth grade. And it's, there's a tremendous amount of interest in orders are, are really flying through the roof. I'm currently working on a book of one of the first books. I actually talked to Ron Laster, good portion... a lot of it.

And it's, it's a history that goes from basically from pre-history to the Renaissance, so it is big chunk, but I'm in the middle ages right now. So that's something I hopefully, but I have done next year, but with everything else we do, we have, we have a very small staff.

So, so we'll pray for you and getting those books out. Yeah. So, but tell us about your own. And again, one of the things I encourage families when I'm teaching them about history, family style and the importance of yes. That framework texts, but then immersing yourself in that time period, because we very often have you history from our modern mindset. What about historical fiction? And being able to recreate and immerse ourselves in that... That's one of the inspiration for those the trilogy. Tell us about that.

Well, the trilogy... I mean, first of all, it's not a teen trilogy, so I know there's a lot of teens you probably, I would say you'd have to be older to really understand it. And actually, my daughter, who's 20 something. She read it for the first time, and she said, she was glad she didn't read it when she was younger. Cause she didn't think she'd understand all the themes. So, I would say it's more for adults than it is for children. Not that there's anything really nasty in it. It's just a...

Yeah. Well, like as you said, it's like reading Christian Laban's daughter and about, you know, Norway, you know, I, I think being a married woman, reading it versus a teenager, you get a totally different perspective of that.

The beautiful story, Life Experience makes a difference in what we read.

Yeah. So, the trilogy, it takes, it goes from roughly 1506 to 1550. And it deals with a young man who actually gets drawn into the reformation. And it's about him. The central story is him and a woman, at first, the young girl that he meets, but their, their relationship in the context of all of that. So, the first one that's been published by Arouca it's called, it's called a Song for Else E L S E. And the first volume is called The Vow. And it's a Arouca Press. It's A R O U C A

Yeah, and we'll put the links below this video. So, I have those links.

And I'm so behind technology I don't know these things.

So many of our homeschool parents are, again, they're getting educated and they want this good, you know, literature and materials and a sense of history. So I'm so glad you're writing this.

Yeah. So and so the first volume actually goes right up to the Burj, the beginning right before the reformation begins. So, it doesn't actually have those events in it, but it has you get a context, a sense of the time. The second volume, it goes through what I call the heroic years of the reformation from 1517 to 1526, pretty much culminate in a rather brutal bloody peasantry going on in Germany in 1525 in the last volume goes up to...

The last one, this has been the hardest to write. Second Vine was easy in a sense, because there's so much good material you can draw from 1526 to 1550 year kind of there's a lot of Imperial diets and meetings. And so, you have to try to find things to actually, you know, make the story more. It was just more difficult to write, but those are, that's basically time period, but there are some historical characters appear in it.

Martin Luther is one of them, Philipp Melanchthon. There's some others. I probably have in my portrayal of Luther would probably maybe tick off both Catholics and Protestants because he's, I, I think I presented as the complex character he was and how, at the beginning he was a different man than he was at the end.

But that's basically it. Yeah. So, it's the first volume has been published. We're going through the proofing of the second volume.

It's that's just about finished, but just had to put the, in all the, all the changes. And then it goes, you know, the typical process where it gets laid out and you have to read it through again and find any mistakes. And then it's done, hopefully, hopefully this summer, the second volume will be out.

So, a word about writing. Cause I said, we have this great new group. They are so energized these young Catholic teen authors. And again, the mission of that whole program is to be authentically yourself as a Catholic and just write stories instead of using it as you know, shoving in Catholic things. But would you say you were always a writer, Christopher? Cause I mean, you're just prolific and, and you, and is it a job? Is there's like one thing I'd love for you to just inspire these teen, young authors who feel inspired to write?

I always wanted to be a writer. I wrote when I was in high school, I wrote for a while even wrote poetry. I don't know if there's any good, but what really propelled me. I went to college I went to TAC, did whatever writing I had to do there. But then when I got out of college, I wanted to write, but I, I hit sometimes what happens when you're, when you don't have to write for a living, is that you worry so much about your style. You keep thinking, my gosh, is this perfect? Is this just right? And, and you go over and over and then it gets then after a while it gets, it does get bad because you're, you're over your thinking of the thing. What helped me and unfortunately, avenues for this are not as common as they once were, was I had to go, I, I got a job as a journalist. I edited at first, I wrote for two monthly's in California. I became the editor of one of the first one and then the other, and I had to write to make a living.

So, I had, I had to push out a thousand-word, 1500 word article every month, at least one. And I didn't have time to worry about my style at that point. I just had to write. And that helped. That helped tremendously. I stopped thinking about that sort of thing. I mean, not that I don't go try to improve things, but at a certain point I say, that's it.

Yeah, exactly. I mean, what we're doing with them is we give them a challenge each month and, and we have a young man, Dominic D'Souza who is managing, and we're bringing in Catholic authors, but that's exactly it it's you're right. That is so important. They have to have those deadlines.

It's just that ability to say, you've got one month, here's the prompt it's on fairytales this month. It's on myths, you know, and just get it done, get it, get it in there and we will publish it. So that understanding that's so good. So helpful that you said that it made a difference for you. Yeah. Great, great. Before we wrap things up, I do anything, any last parting words you'd like to say. I mean, I, I just, we can spend another hour talking about history so close to my heart and obviously yours.

Yeah. I don't know. I would just say anybody, parents who are engaged in homeschooling, be very careful that you cultivate a sense of love of learning, the sense of wonder. And one of the best ways you can do that is by cultivating a love of learning and a sense of wondering yourselves. I know when you're raising children, it's hard to have a sense of wonder record. You may wonder what you're doing wrong sometimes. Right?

Different kind of wonder, what am I doing this crazy thing. And then I'm crazy. I'm homeschooling on top of it all.

Yeah, so if you can try to cultivate that. I mean, there's lots of different things. You had an actual interest, even if it's, if it's gardening or something, study gardening in any way you can. But one of the, I mean, a good book is important, but it's never as important as a good teacher. We need the good teachers out there and being that you're homeschooling. You're that... You're that teacher.

Yeah. Saint John Paul the Second says by just the virtue in his letter to families, of being a parent, you are a teacher.

And you don't have to be, I just don't think worry as much about the technique. It's just, I think it's the, it's the ethos. It's the, it's the culture of learning that you try to cultivate culture of good music, culture of good arts, take them on walks in the country, especially now that spring is coming. And, and this observed the beauty of nature, all beauty and truth and goodness go together and your children are going to be good to the degree that you're also inculcated with wisdom and with beauty and you can't just, morality is not something over here and, you know, wisdom over here, they go together.

What morality, what virtue is virtue the Latin word virtus, which is manly, manly strength. And what virtue is, is the perfection of ourselves as human beings, right? That's, that's what it is. It's its strength. And what is that virtue?

Saint Thomas would refer to virtue as not only moral virtue, we always think of, right, but it's also intellectual. It's, it's the, it's the virtue of the mind. And not everybody reaches that, those virtues, the intellectual virtue to the same degree, but we can all participate in some degree and that's, it's agree. Even parents can do that as important. And you know, if you have a hard time doing it, I mean, see what help you can get.

Yeah. You, you have certainly made things accessible. And, and I say, even just as I encourage parents, read aloud, if you finding, you know, you're not getting it, don't just hand the book to the child, let's read it aloud as a family.

Oh yeah. I think, I think that's really important. And in fact, the current books are younger, but they have little prints, tenacious guides for names, but like, like tenacious to, and the teacher's manual, it actually has an appendix where you can learn the pronunciation of names. Cause I know some of these, it could be jaw crackers.

Yes. Thanks so much helping the teacher's manuals and my goodness. It's beautiful. Including some musical pieces, timelines, historical novels that compliment it. So yeah. Beautiful. There is help out there and I'll put in a shameless plug for the Catholic Homeschool Community, which is the place to get support and help. And we're there, you know, growing together. Thank you for bringing up that point about parents. You know, the, the call are, we all have a call to holiness and to model that for our children comes first from our own seeking wonder and knowledge.

So, thank you so much, Christopher, for joining me today. Again, what a pleasure I will mention once again, if you're looking for the links for Christopher's general editor, the managing editor for the CatholicTextbookProject.com and then please do join me in the Catholic Homeschool Community.

Thank you again and make God Bless You abundantly. Bye now.