

The *Coming Home Network* *International*

NOVEMBER 2007 NEWSLETTER

JOURNEYS HOME

Picture Needed

A HERITAGE OF FAITH

BY PATRICK VOSSEN

FORMER NON-DENOMINATIONAL MINISTER

I remember how, as young boy, I enjoyed going to church. It was a place of peace. There was an awe and respect in the church that you didn't find anywhere else. In my early years I had held a special respect for the priesthood and the work of the sisters. Both were so special in my eyes, that I felt I was called to be a priest at the age of five. My father recognized that calling, and has been sensitive to it throughout my life. He would actually assist me later on in my teen years as I tried to discern this calling. For my father loved the Church, and always held the same regard for the Roman Catholic Church as I had in my youth.

In fact, both of my parents honoured my devotion toward the faith. But their support was not for me to be simply Catholic, as much as it was for me to have a living faith in God through Jesus Christ. Neither wanted me to be merely a church attender, for they recognized, as the scriptures declare, "The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him. This is the way we may know that we are in union with him: whoever claims to abide in him ought to live (just) as he lived." (1 John 2:3-6)

For me, life in Him was more than just an acquiescence of abstract knowledge. It was being filled with Him. It was being filled with the Spirit and abiding in God's Love. That was the heritage of faith my parents wanted to pass along.

Like others, I had my struggles as a young man in the church, but I always attended mass, and even desired to be an altar boy. But something happened when I was in fifth grade that toppled everything: The death of my dear pastor and friend Father Gordon. He was my shining example of the faith. He would take me into his rectory and talk to me

about Jesus. He explained to me what all the sacraments meant. He granted me my first confession, and even when he was deathly ill, he allowed me to visit his room and prayed for me when I was at the same hospital to have surgery. He was Jesus to me!

His death left a void from which I couldn't quite escape. Others at St. Patrick's, including priests, helped to a degree. But in my opinion, no one was able to replace Father Gordon. My father took us across town to St. Francis soon after that, and Father Barnett, as wonderful as he was, still could not replace him. I realize now that I had made a tragic, but common, mistake. I put too much of my faith in the man, instead of the One to which he was pointing me.

Shortly after this time, I found myself visiting both a Pentecostal church and a baptist church. Both churches

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impressed me with their “Bible Knowledge” and personal devotion. I had seldom seen such a defense of the faith, or such profound personal testimony, since my time with Father Gordon. Their lives truly impressed me. In my last year of junior high I took the plunge and left the Roman Catholic Church for the Pentecostal church in the hope that I would finally find that peace of Jesus I needed. It was such an awesome experience, that I believed the same Spirit baptism I was introduced to at the Pentecostal service was the one that had entered me at my confirmation.

Nevertheless, the Pentecostals had convinced me that Jesus couldn't honour the church of Babylon. That is, the Catholic Church. Its membership had been seduced by years of sacred traditions which had deluded and corrupted the purer faith. How could I believe such a teaching about the Catholic Church? Because of my new church's devotion, that's how. These people had a passion for God, they knew a lot more Bible than any Catholic I knew, so they had to be right. At least I thought so at the time.

During high school I was a witness for the Gospel, trying to lead anyone I could to place their trust in Jesus and seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet I believed that if they were believers, but hadn't been baptized, they needed to do so. This was contrary to many Pentecostals who believed baptism by water, while advised, was not necessary. I believed the bible was emphatic about the necessity of baptism for salvation: “Jesus answered, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.’” (John 3:5)

The idea that baptism could have something to do with salvation is not always a popular view in modern Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, a strong biblical foundation had indeed been passed on from my Roman Catholic beginnings. I believed that Mark 16:16, Matt. 28:19, Acts 10:48, as well as many other passages, made the prerequisite of baptism a biblical standard, not an option. That teaching stayed with me, and become a stumbling block in my efforts to “stay put” with the Pentecostals rather than return to Rome.

I eventually moved to Great Bend, Kansas and began to minister in a small charismatic/Pentecostal church where an old time preacher helped me learn about Christian ministry. He was wise, and old Pastor Ellis certainly could teach! I spent hours with him studying the scriptures. He was a treasure of scriptural knowledge and practical ministry experience. He soon had me singing and preaching. Believing that practicing the faith was essential to growth

and development, Pastor Ellis felt that if you had a call to preach, you preached. Seminary or no seminary, you were going to take time to learn and practice the tools of expository homiletics.

Two years later I was off to Texas Bible College. It was a wonderful time in the Lord. Daily devotions and services, Evangelistic Crusades, singing throughout the South — it was a wonderful time. I saw God do wonderful things. Soon I began to debate and expand my knowledge in the scriptures. I also began to have a somewhat overzealous attitude. I would say to almost anyone I encountered, “Let me at those Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. I'll straighten them out!” I always was ready for a debate, even though I never won a soul to God debating with anyone. In hindsight, I realize it actually profited God's kingdom very little. It was petty and I needed a wake up call. God soon gave me the one I needed, for in all my zeal, I had forgotten a very important passage of scripture. I had forgotten Proverbs 3:13: “Happy the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding!”

How many preachers had I been warned about, who thought they knew it all, and left nothing but prideful thoughts behind? Yet they never bore fruit unto eternal life. Their tree was without the fruit of the spirit and had gotten calloused and cold with self adulation and personal pride. That graveyard has claimed so many anointed casualties who forgot that our spiritual warfare is not against flesh and blood, but spiritual powers of darkness cloaked in vain desires.

In a way, God saved my ministry during a revival I preached during that time in my life. I was beginning to think I was something! I always was being asked to preach, or be an associate pastor, or something involving ministry. Yet that one meeting way out in western Kansas changed my life. The fourth day into the revival services I was getting upset. I hadn't seen the results I wanted. Yes, people were coming out to services. Large attendances were being documented each night. Then, one night, the pastor had the audacity not to let me preach! Suddenly, the Spirit of God entered the sanctuary, and many folks responded and turned to God. I was humbled. That next evening I humbly asked for anyone who would like to be baptized in water to come forward. Entire families and friends came forward. I was embarrassed before God. The Holy Spirit showed me it is not I who leads them to Christ but He does. I have never been so prideful again. I appreciate God's grace, that He allowed me to repent of my arrogant heart.

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Marcus Article



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former Non-denominational minister

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former Evangelical Missionaries to Africa

November 19
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Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul
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Shortly after seminary training I took an associate pastorate at Calvary Church in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. During my seven years there, I was married and welcomed our three wonderful daughters. I learned a lot, but I felt so empty. I began to question the validity of grace as we taught it. It seemed convoluted, and with few exceptions, I felt it was not the overwhelming love and grace that Jesus portrayed through the Prodigal Son's Father in the Holy Scriptures.

After Calvary, I left to become the associate pastor at the Hartford Lighthouse. This was a small home missions ministry, but it was the first inner city work I had ever experienced. It was rugged work, but very beneficial. I learned firsthand about ministering to the poor and needy, and caring for folks who lived without the hope of Christ.

At the Lighthouse I learned the importance of social ministries; of being a Christian in word and action. I found the value of putting a face on the faith with compassion and mercy. I have carried that ministry with me to each church I've been at since. I finally recognizing the gospel's command in the story of the Good Samaritan. Reaching out to those who we might normally never touch, but who Christ compels us to reach out to with arms of love.

While at the Lighthouse, my spiritual journey continued to point back to my Roman Catholic roots. I found myself stopping in the middle of the day at Catholic churches on the way home, walking in, kneeling, and praying. Sometimes I'd stare at the altar, remembering communion and the ministry of the priesthood. I just couldn't stand our once a month communion services! My Pentecostal brethren had holy respect, but no acknowledgement of the presence of Christ, other than merely asking him to forgive us before we took the bread. It seemed so empty.

Especially troubling was Christ opening up the scriptures to me, particularly extracting the real presence in the Eucharist in John 6:53-56 "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." I was truly under conviction, but I didn't know what to do with it. I was an ordained preacher on the rise, I had to stay the course, I couldn't go back to Rome! Or so I thought.

After The Lighthouse, I pastored a charismatic interdenominational church in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. We had people from all backgrounds. It actually was quite refreshing, but very hard to pastor. There was a basic

biblical foundation, but an abundance of open areas with no foundation. I had liberty to teach though, and instituted a more formal communion service with influences from both Catholic and Episcopal liturgy. But the compromise still didn't satisfy my soul. During this time, the final conviction came to my door. How do you deal with the necessity of apostolic succession or sacred tradition in a situation like that in which I found myself?

My first reaction to these questions was to write in our monthly newsletter about *Sola Scriptura*. A few months later, I wrote an article on Peter, and his leadership of the church. Neither did any good except make me dig even deeper toward Rome. I soon became friends with Father Ray Introvigne, pastor of St. John's in Old Saybrook. I realized I could have the ministry of the Spirit. I could have the Word of God. I could have it all in the Roman Catholic Church. No compromises, no trying to find a quick biblical fix, and I finally could find peace in my soul.

Well, I didn't give in easy, in fact I held on for dear life. Yet, ten years into my ministry, I resigned from the church. By then I had already been taking RCIA classes at St. Mark's under Father Rick Albamonti's leadership with Father Ray as my Spiritual Father. Two week's after resigning my church, I was received back into the Roman Catholic Church. Father Rick and Father Ray had seen my hunger, and had been there for me in a turbulent time.

During the previous year I had been in contact with James Akin and Scott Hahn online, and I remember them kindly for answering my questions. And what can I say about that Assembly of God turncoat Tim Staples? He came from my roots and showed me through his writings tapes that this was the way.

I won't say it hasn't been difficult. My wife and her Pentecostal friends were very upset. She even left me for a period of time, which stood to be the test of the ages in my life. I almost fell apart and wanted to give up on many occasions. Yet God somehow broke through. Eventually, her heart was touched after reading Marcus Grodi's novel *How Firm a Foundation*. She still hasn't converted, but she now appreciates the values I have conveyed.

The Vossen family now lives in North Platte, Nebraska Patrick works as a secular job and assists the local church in various capacities, while contemplating the possibility of the diaconate, as his diocese is opening up new pathways for former protestant ministers.

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