

“LET’S BUILD”

Christian Restoration Association Bible Conference (symposium) Oct. 18-19, 2012

“FROM ROME TO JERUSALEM”

As the title indicates, “FROM ROME TO JERUSALEM,” my assignment is to track my journey from the throes of Roman Catholicism into the church that Jesus built, the Church of Christ. My friend George Faull said to me in my early days of Christianity, “Dick, sometimes you run out of Rome so fast you run past Jerusalem.” His meaning was to slow down a bit and soak in the scriptures more fervently. I took his advice and have immersed myself in the holy record for the past 39 years. It has been an amazing trip, I assure you. Allow me to share it with you.

There is no place to begin like the beginning. I was sprinkled a Roman Catholic, June 12, 1942, just eight days after my birth in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I was sprinkled for the remission of original sin which I did not possess. Several things to point out: First, the sin of Adam was not transmitted to anyone. *Eze 18:20* “*The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.*” (NAS77) Second, hypothetically, if Mom and Dad’s original sin was removed with the Sacrament of Baptism (sprinkling), “as far as the East is from the West,” how could they transfer that which they did not possess? Thirdly, my sprinkling was exactly eight days past my birth day, signifying the seal of the New Covenant I just entered into, replacing OT circumcision. But the word of God expressly says in *Eph 4:30* “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” (NAS77) Oh yes, the Holy Spirit, I was to receive Him 12 years later through the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Bishop from the Greensburg Diocese confirmed His arrival that day. The Spirit must have had a 12 year delayed flight.

Parochial education was to be my plight for 8 years as I attended the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic School in Connellsville, Pa. It was the Sacrament of Confession each Saturday night via the “Reverend/Pastor/Priest/Minister/Father.” We confessed venial, cardinal and mortal sins until I was a teenager and began lying to the Priest. Then there was “The Mass” every morning. Some were called “Low Masses” and other “High Masses” and still others “Requiem High Masses,” for the dead in order to free departed Catholics from Purgatory which is found in Second Dalmatians 3:16. I might add that Saturday Night Mass was available in addition to 4 or 5 Masses on Sunday morning which accommodated the 2000 worshipping parishioners. So you see we had mega-churches, the pastor system and a mystically converted Sunday into Saturday night long before the Restoration caught on. A disclaimer is needed here: We do have in the Restoration, Pastors or Elders but they are the Evangelists. We also need as many Christians worshipping with us on the Lord’s Day, Sunday, as possible.

At the Catholic School I didn’t do well, coming from a totally dysfunctional home and trying to just survive. My Father was a wife beater and beat me a lot which is why I never wanted to go home, ever. This is the main reason; I had detention almost ever night I could arrange. Talking in class incessantly was par for the day and a sure fired “stay after school Charles,” that is my first name. As a last resort, I would haul off and throw an eraser laden with white chalk dust into the “coal black habit,” or robe of my Benedictine Nun, Sister Gabriella, and the fiercest of them all. On one evening stay-over, she wanted to teach me concerning my incorrigible conduct. I usually collected a rather large pasteboard box of erasers from each of the school’s twelve classrooms and clapped them together until they were all clean, out in the

school yard which was located between the school and the convent. But, alas, I was given a brand new electric eraser cleaning machine equipped with a table and rotating cleaning mechanism in the center to use. I thought I died and went to heaven and was having the time of my life when, suddenly an eraser got loose from the machine just missing a large classroom window in the school house. Well, it splattered against the two story deep red brick structure and looked like a giant tie-died tee shirt. As I ran for the eraser, I suddenly realized my first invention, the cleanest eraser ever. I emptied the box of projectiles one at a time and tie-died the entire side of the red brick school house. White over red looks so cool as you know. When I finished I returned to the “Panther” as we unaffectionately called her. With a single gaze she could not control her emotions as she praised me and praised me for the cleanest erasers ever. “Did you learn anything through this discipline?” she asked. I assured her that I was taught by the best and accepted her chastisement with pleasure. She thanked me all the way down the long hall and out the side door toward the convent. It was getting dark, must have been winter, and her back was facing the School, but the next morning... I can’t remember ever getting paddled like that ever. Sitting was impossible all day long and that’s why I loved the corner the “Panther” picked out for me to stand and stare into.

Looking back, those Nuns were tops in their profession of teaching, that was their life, teaching and discipline. I did receive a fine education except for the daily Religion class. Eight years of Religion Classes each morning after Mass and never opened or saw a Bible in class. We fasted every night, then received the “Holy Eucharist” or the “Sacrament of Holy Communion” at the next morning’s Mass and never studied the Bible, just the Catechism and the Catholic Missal or worship book. I could read, speak, and sing Latin Gregorian Chants, understanding almost none of it. Trudging through to the eighth grade seemed to occupy a lifetime. Finally, graduation day came and the teacher asked “who might be transferring to the public school next year?” Since I had my own, one of a kind, private card table with matching metal chair, beside the Nun’s desk, in the seventh and eighth grade, the Sister, standing slightly in front of me, couldn’t see my hand raised as high as it could. The class burst into laughter, as she turned and looked at me and said, “Thank the Lord.” If I could live that moment over just once more, I should have said, “And all the people said, Amen!”

I did transfer to the public school system and did quite well, but still shackled to the Roman Catholic Church, I attended Mass on Sunday mornings out of fear, superstition, and tradition. Suzanne, my High School sweetheart and current sweetheart of 52 years, and I eloped twenty days out of High School in 1960 to Jamestown, NY and were married in a Lutheran Church, because she was Lutheran. A year and a half later we were parents to Dian Denise and then came the rub. I arranged an “audience” with my Pastor of the church to discuss my plight. He told me in no uncertain terms that we had a “bastard child,” his very words. He wanted me and Suzanne to sign papers that Dian would be raised Catholic after we were “properly” married and Suzanne took “instructions.” Rather than tap (blast) him right on the nose, I elected to fly out of his office. You see, according the Roman Catholic theology, if you do not participate in the “Sacrament of Matrimony,” pronounced by “The Man” in order to dispense the grace of God on the marriage of Baptized Catholics in good standing, everyone delivers illegitimate children, everyone. What a lie! I was excommunicated, in the eyes of the church.

Not knowing any better, we had Dian sprinkled at Trinity Lutheran in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the remission of original sin as Wahl Pfiefer, the located Pastor recited, “suffer not the little children to come to me.” So I traded the frying pan for the skillet, so to speak. Suzanne and I were not very active as Lutherans but did send the three kids to Sunday school each Sunday. I had the very same void in my soul as I did in the Catholic Church. I knew God and believed Jesus was virgin born and was our Savior some how, but I really had no connection whatsoever to the Father or His Son. Whether I was at the communion rail in the Lutheran Church or Catholic Church on Sundays, I always came away totally empty and sad. Literally receiving His body and/or blood there was a total farce to me. It always was. I

see this lie so clearly now after studying the Lord's Supper, in God's word, as completely as I have throughout the years. More than anything, it is a fellowship and memorial reminding us of the fact that we are in a blood covenant with the Holy One of Israel, even Jesus Christ. We can receive the remission of sins on Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock through confession and repentance as easily as we do at the table of the Lord on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, which is Sunday not Saturday.

After graduation from Penn State University, I became employed with West Penn Power Co., in my home town of all things. I accepted the American myth: "Get good grades in High School so as to be able to attend a good college and make better grades. This will assure you of advancement to top of any corporation in record time." My bubble burst in short order. I drifted farther and farther away from God and was completely empty of any spiritually. We installed a draught beer system in our basement; Suzanne loved wash days near the ol' keg. Through the last nine months I was lost and occupying the darkest pit of my life, my neighbors and friends and my entire family drank 750 gallons of draught beer from that system. I know this count because I saved the keg caps which represented seven gallons each. Do the math. All of this boozing made the void in my soul only seem emptier. I do believe in the providential guidance of God in my life in those days, however. He was looking for me as He did the prodigal son.

We designed two total Electric Automobiles in the experimental lab at work. I thrust all of my energy into the project plus had a remodeling business a night. One day in the shop, turning a part on a lathe, Charlie George, a Christian from the Vanderbilt Church of Christ, laid a little yellow tract on the rails of the lathe. I thought, "Charlie's trying to induct me into the Masonic Blue Lodge", prevalent at the company. When he left and I looked around to see if anyone else was in the lab, I opened up the tract. "Right on" I said to myself, it's Masonic if ever I knew anything. It was in code, Jn. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:21, etc. Yep it's Masonic for sure. "You're wasting my time, Charlie," I thought to myself, "I'll never join, ever!" Arriving home for supper that night, Suzanne was busy at the stove, as usual, when I sprung the coded message from Charlie on her. "What do you think of that rat fink (that's seventies slang) handing me a coded message trying to get me installed into that Blue Lodge over there," I said to her. Suzanne usually calls me Dick, but in some special rare instances she will call me dummy. She responded, "Dummy, that's not a code, that's scripture from the Bible." "Do we have a Bible around here?" I answered. We both scoured the kitchen and found Suzanne's Revised Standard Version hidden in the cupboard. You see, I never owned my own Bible and in addition I never had one in my hands before, much less read one. Simply opening the cover of the RSV and turning several pages, there was the code. Jn. 3:16 was indeed John 3:16 and 1 Pet. 3:21 was First Peter 3:21. I learned chapter and verse within minutes. How proud I was of myself. It only took me 31 years to discover the word of God. Of course the next step was to see if all of these scripture references were in the Bible, they were. And thus my journey began. I fell in love with the volume and its Author. Not knowing where to begin, I read Numbers, like any eager engineer would do to find short-cuts to Trigonometry and Calculus. For some odd reason, Psalms or Proverbs was next on my list. I was hooked.

On Saturdays for almost nine months, on and off, I spent valuable time at the "Carnegie Free Library," in my home town, researching through the "Roman Catholic Encyclopedia" volumes that were more than eight feet long on their shelf. It's all on-line now but not in 1973. Each Saturday morning, I would choose topics to study out. Some of them were: The Papacy, the Cardinals, Arch Bishops, Bishops and Clergy System in general. Others were The Seven Sacraments: Baptism, Penance, Confession, Holy Communion (Eucharist), Holy Orders (ordination), Holy Matrimony, and Extreme Unction (last rites). Mass, The Altar, Confessional Booth, Stations of the Cross, Vigil Lights (red, blue, yellow), Sanctuary, Tabernacle, Stained Glass, Incense, The Vatican, Diocese, Purgatory, Limbo, Lent, All Souls Day, All Saints Day, Transubstantiation (miraculously changing the loaf and cup into the body and blood of our Lord), Did the Catholic Church Give us the Bible? (No, Holy Spirit did), Were They Really the First

Church? (Absolutely not) and Apostolic Succession (transferable, supernatural powers from the Apostles), The Popes infallibility, Saint Peter's Basilica (kingdom) and so many other topics to numerous to mention. This was over a period of nine months. I found that the single coal black, wicked thread that ran through the entire set of encyclopedias was found in this statement, "Even though the Bible does express this certain doctrine, we believe that Catholic Tradition is as valid and often replaces Sacred Scriptures." And if one does not believe the "tradition," he is considered "anathema," and they say so. I wanted to burn the books but was not allowed to check them out. I was duped, brain washed and lied to deliberately, but never as certain that the Bible would be my only rule of faith and practice thereafter. I remember reading *1 Pet. 4:11a* "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;" (*KJV*) This would be my polar star from now on into eternity. This became my breaking point from the Roman Catholic Church. I must believe the "doctrine once for all delivered" over Catholic tradition.

When Suzanne went bowling on Wednesday nights, in those days, I secretly got a baby-sitter and walked to a Baptist church a couple of streets away through our back yard. I learned a lot of Bible in their studies until one night I was told by a work mate, John, who attended there to bring with me a change of clothes for they were to have a group immersion. As I recall, I didn't bring the change of clothing, instead I sat in the back of the auditorium and listened intently as their Pastor spoke, with our RSV opened in my hands. He preached forever and quoted every baptism scripture I had read and studied. He spoke on every scripture you can possibly think of on baptism. And I'm not kidding. His conclusion was: "baptism has absolutely nothing to do with ones salvation". I began to smell the odor of dead rats in the place. I had studied these scriptures long before attending that church called "The Church of the Open Door," and knew he wasn't giving it to us straight. When he was finished preaching they opened the floor up to expose the largest baptistery I have ever seen. It must have been ten feet square. There were 4 or 5 steps, ten feet wide at one end and 4 or 5 steps at the opposite end. 21 candidates took their place at the edge of the pool atop the steps on the left hand side. The Pastor made each person, before he was baptized, recite, "This baptism has nothing to do with my salvation" Next, after baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each one, was made to recite again at the opposite exit steps, "This baptism has nothing to do with my salvation." I was appalled and never went back after the Pastor said, "This baptism is an outward sign of an inward feeling." I went home searching for that verse, never having found it.

Since Suzanne thought I dropped off the edge of the world, I attended the Vanderbilt Church of Christ on Sundays alone. The very first Sunday I attended, Preacher John Barchey delivered the most wonderful expository sermon I had ever heard. To be honest, it was the only one I ever heard but I sincerely thought he was the smartest man alive. I sat right up front to the left, on the end, right in front of the pulpit and I was speechless and won over with the word of God, Wow! Sunday after Sunday I arrived to hear that precious word, which implanted is able to save the soul, being so convicted every time. But something nagged at me, my Father. I despised for the undeserving things he did to me and could not find it in my heart to forgive him. As time went on I remembered scriptures like *Mat 6:15* "*But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*" I was unwilling to do this until one day in the Pa. forest I fell on my face, in a pile of leaves, in prayer with bitter tears and said, "Father if you could forgive me of all my many, many sins that I have committed against you that you didn't deserve, then forgiving my Dad is a cinch." I wasn't bargaining nor was I saved there; I only confessed and repented of all my sins, especially unforgiveness. Shortly thereafter, on Dec. 31, 1973, on a bitter cold night my entire family accompanied me to the Vanderbilt congregation and John Barchey Baptized me into Christ for the remission of personal sins and I received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was a night I shall never forget. I stood there waist deep in the water and looked John in the eye and said, "I'm going to see the face of Jesus someday." John said, "I've heard that before but somehow I do believe you mean it."

I owe a great deal to many in this room for teaching me throughout these 39 years the unsearchable and unfathomable word of God that means more to me than life itself. So I say thank you from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

By God's Grace I am,

Saint Dick Chambers