



# Born Again!

by Bill Holko

I was raised in a solid and ethical Roman Catholic home. Mom and dad were devoted to their faith and diligently required my younger brother and I to follow the Catholic path...Mass every Sunday, catechism classes, First Communion, monthly visits to the confessional, praying the Rosary regularly, etc. I recall my parents telling me that if any "Protestants" took issue with Catholicism, I was to tell them that while, "Jesus started our religion, and Martin Luther started theirs."

I remained a Catholic throughout my college years (1966-70) at Miami University, attending St. Mary's Church in downtown Oxford. Obviously, this period of time was quite tumultuous and it definitely impacted me.

Due to the influence of professors and the general cultural trends of the time, I began to question all of my values, including my belief in God. While I can't say I ever became an atheist, I certainly no longer subscribed to the teachings and tenets of Catholicism. Upon graduation in June of 1970, I saw myself as an agnostic at worst and a "Universalist" at best.

Soon after graduation, I married my high school sweetheart, who at the time was a practicing Lutheran. Following our wedding and subsequent move to Akron, Ohio where we commenced teaching careers in the Akron Public Schools, I found myself on a journey to rediscover God; however, I was convinced that "Christianity" (as in Catholicism) was not the way I wanted to go. I was drawn to the Unitarian Universalist Church because it seemed so inclusive of a variety of religious beliefs and expressions. Additionally, it aligned so well with the liberal political perspective I had adopted in college. I really thought I was on to something! How my wife Diane tolerated my thinking at the time now escapes me. She patiently attended the Unitarian Church with me as I found my way through the religious maze I was attempting to navigate. In hindsight, I think she was an example of what we find in 1 Peter 3:1, 2. *"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear."*

After a period of weeks attending the Unitarian Church, I found myself questioning the basic logic of their theology. Having studied the "World Religions" in college, it was obvious to me that there were differences and contradictions which seemed to say, "They can't all be true"; however, I continued to attend. During this time period, Diane asked me to attend a Saturday night "party" at the home of one of her elementary teaching colleagues. As a point of information, Diane was teaching at Rankin Elementary School and I was teaching at Buchtel High School, just a few blocks away. So, on a January evening in 1971, we joined a fairly large number of people at this particular home.

Within a few minutes of our arrival, the pastor (Dr. David Burnham) of the church (The Chapel in Akron) which our host and hostess attended entered. I was introduced to him and almost immediately, he began to engage me in conversation. (I learned later that I was the "target" that evening and that all the other people in attendance were members at the Chapel.) I recall that we had a very engaging dialogue for well over an hour, but the subject of religion never really came up in any great detail. I guess I had said enough about my liberal perspective on things that pastor Burnham decided not to press the issue that night. We talked primarily about history...I was teaching world history at the time and he was an obvious student of history. Interestingly, I learned afterwards that as he

exited that evening, he remarked to the hostess, "I doubt that guy will ever come to Christ because he fashions himself as a former Catholic and liberal intellectual." Little did he know...

Following Pastor Burnham's departure that evening, the people who remained at the party moved to the basement to listen to a "Bible lesson" from one of the church elders. At first I was uneasy, thinking, "Oh boy, here we go." The man doing the teaching was an older gentleman named Paul Tell. His topic was the "Second Coming of Christ." As he spoke, I found myself intrigued and thinking, "Wow, I have never heard this stuff before." As I listened, God was getting my attention. As we left for home that night, we Diane and I were invited to the Chapel for the next morning's worship service. We accepted, but my head was swirling! We went to bed and while my wife fell asleep, I could not. Finally, I quietly got out of bed and fell to my knees. I remember what I prayed because the prayer was so brief..."God, I'm confused. I just want to know the truth. Please show me the truth."

The next morning, our hosts from the previous night picked us up to go to church. I can honestly say that I went with open mind and it became obvious that the Holy Spirit was working on me. Pastor Burnham's message that morning was incredible! What he said penetrated my heart. It was as if I was the only person in the sanctuary of what truly is a very large church. When the invitation to receive Christ was given, I turned to Diane and said, "I have to go forward." Her immediate response was, "Then go!" As I came forward, I could see a look of obvious surprise on Pastor Burnham's face. It was as we were on our way home following the service when our hostess from the previous night informed me of what Pastor Burnham had said to her as he left her home...I could only chuckle at that point.

As we rode home, I was on "cloud nine!" I was so at peace. I remember thinking how for so many years, I thought I knew what "Christianity" was all about, but in reality had never heard the true Gospel preached. I was now born again, a new creation in Christ Jesus! As I then began to read and study the Bible, The Holy Spirit taught me so much. Possibly because of my innate interest in both history and science, I was especially drawn to the areas of prophecy and creationism. I was, and still am, absolutely fascinated by all the Bible has to reveal about the God of the Universe! I praise Him for saving me, for redeeming me, for sustaining me, and for giving me the gift of eternal life! My "life verse" is John 14:6. "*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*" I believe this verse is so compelling to me because as an educator in the public arena, I am constantly confronted with the religious pluralism advanced by our culture...The message of "All roads lead to Rome"..."It doesn't matter what religion you are as long as you are sincere"...These are bold-faced lies. Jesus claimed to be THE Son of God and the only way to the Father. If true, we had better take Him at His word and receive His offer of forgiveness and eternal life. If false, why would we choose to follow Him?

We live in perilous times and I believe that the "Second Coming" of which I first heard back in January of 1971 is very near. Jesus is in fact coming again, and I thank Him with all my heart that I (and Diane) are members of His family and will be with Him for all eternity.

In His precious name,

Bill Holko