



Born Again!

By Bill Holko

I was raised in a solid Roman Catholic home. Mom and dad were devoted to their faith and diligently required my younger brother and I to follow the expected religious path...Mass every Sunday, catechism classes, First Communion, monthly visits to the confessional, praying the Rosary regularly, etc. I remained in the Catholic faith throughout my college years (1966-70) at Miami University, attending St. Mary's Church in downtown Oxford. Obviously, historically, this period was quite tumultuous and it definitely affected me. Due to the influence of liberal professors and the general cultural trends of the time, I began to question all of my values, including my belief in God. While I cannot 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, for a variety of reasons, Roman Catholicism was not on my radar at that time. 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! As a side note, 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. 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 and then teaching them as a high school history teacher, it was obvious to me there were differences and theological 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, Murelene Morris. 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. Therefore, on a January evening in 1971, we joined a gathering of people at the Morris' home. Within a few minutes of our arrival, Pastor David Burnham of The Chapel in Akron, which our hosts, Murelene and her husband Carroll

attended, entered. I was introduced to him and almost immediately, he began to engage me in conversation. I recall that we had a very interesting dialogue for well over an hour, but the subject of religion never really came up in any detail. I guess I had said enough about my liberal perspective on things that the Pastor decided not to press the issue that night. We talked primarily about history. As noted previously, I was teaching world history at the time and he was an obvious student of history.

Following Pastor Burnham's departure, the people who remained moved to the basement to listen to a "Bible lesson" from one of the Chapel's Elders named Paul Tell. Initially, I was uneasy, thinking, "Oh boy, here we go." Paul's topic was the "Second Coming of Christ." As he spoke, I found myself intrigued and thinking, "Wow, I have never heard this stuff in such biblical detail before." As I listened, God was getting my attention. As we left for home that night, Murelene and Carroll invited Diane and me to the next morning's worship service at The Chapel. 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, Murelene and Carroll picked us up to go to church. I can honestly say that I went with an 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. 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 we road home, I was a changed man. I was at peace. My questions were answered and doubts removed. I remember thinking how for so many years, I thought I knew what Christianity's gospel was all about, but until that morning, I realized I had never heard the Bible's full gospel of grace 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! The one verse that particularly struck me was John 14:6..."I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." I believe that verse was so compelling to me because as an educator in the public arena, I was constantly confronted with the religious pluralism advanced by our culture...The message of "All paths lead to the same God"..."It doesn't matter what religion

you are as long as you are sincere"...Those 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 an individual (from a human perspective) who made such outrageous claims?

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 Diane and I are members of His family and will be with Him for all eternity.

In His precious name,
Bill Holko