
From “Bible Only” Anarchy to the Adventure of Apostolic Authority

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“A man cannot expect any adventure in the land of anarchy. But a man can expect any number of adventures if he goes traveling in the land of authority.” G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

On the Road to Azusa Street

MY FAMILY IS FIFTH-GENERATION METHODIST, with roots in East Texas. I was born in 1939, the year of *Gone With the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Hitler’s invasion of Poland. The winds of World War II, socioeconomic changes, and a struggle within the church over “speaking in tongues” forced us to find another road. There is a yellow brick road of Pentecostalism that runs from Topeka, Kansas through my hometown of Houston and on to Los Angeles. In 1946, we moved to Los Angeles, birthplace of organized Pentecostalism at the Azusa Street Mission of 1906.

My uncle gave me my first Bible for my sixth birthday, and I soon began to read the Bible “on my own.” The Holy Spirit led me to these words of Peter: “*You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity*” (Acts 8:21-23). Little did I know that this call to conversion came from the first Pope, the Pastor of Pastors. The Holy Spirit used the “keys of Peter” to bring me to Christ as Savior. At ten, I received Jesus as Lord. I felt the Lord calling me to follow in the path of my uncle and become a pastor. I spent much of my time in study and prayer. In 1960, I graduated from L.I.F.E. Bible College. I was immediately ordained in the Pentecostal church.

In the 1950s, God had given to Pentecostals a great visitation of the Holy Spirit known as the “Latter Rain.” The Holy Spirit was calling the Pentecostals back to their Catholic roots of apostolic authority, prophetic gifts, and “singing” the liturgy in the Spirit. Organized Pentecostalism re-

jected the “Latter Rain” but, thanks to Dr. David Du Plessis, an Assemblies of God minister known in charismatic circles as “Mr. Pentecost,” who had a personal audience with Pope John XXIII, the “rain” began to fall in the Catholic Church. “Latter rain” was given a theological face-lift and a new name: the Charismatic Renewal.

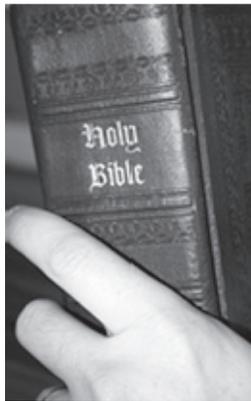
Unfortunately, I witnessed the sad spectacle of a divided Pentecostalism. I was deeply confused by Pentecostals who could not agree on the interpretation of a given text in the Bible and split into hundreds of groups. The Charis-

matics taught that speaking in tongues is one of the many gifts of the Spirit, but not the initial evidence of the Spirit-filled life as taught by Pentecostals. Without Holy Mother Church and the Pastor of pastors, we Pentecostals did not know where to take theological controversy, except to the

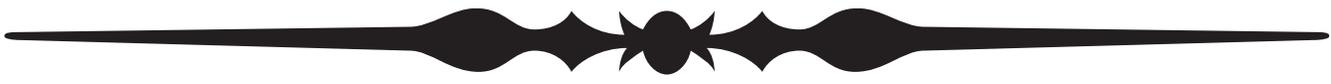
Bible verse which agreed with our experience, and this only made matters worse.

Tim Staples, an Assemblies of God pastor who converted to the Catholic Church, showed me how we Pentecostals hop, skip, and jump all over the Bible looking for our “proof texts.” For example, I have preached on the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Matthew 18:10-14 but stopped short of apostolic authority taught in Matthew 18:15-17: “*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church*” (Mt 18:15-17).

Knowing that Pentecostalism came out of Methodism, and longing for unity in the Body of Christ, I became a United Methodist pastor in 1975. I was serving the largest



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church of my denomination in the Southwest Texas Conference when my wife dropped the bomb: she wanted out of my life. The chill of death could not have been colder. After twenty years of marriage, three wonderful children, and ten years of being counseled by a “Bible-only” marriage counselor, we were divorced in 1982.

My life after divorce looked like the devastation of a Hiroshima. Divorce was a thief that stole my wife and a robber that left me a lame pastor. The “Eleventh Commandment” for Protestant pastors is “Thou shalt be married.” Yet as my world fell apart, my faith increased. Again the Holy Spirit led me to the Bible: *“Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome”* (Acts 23:11). What the devil calls the end, God calls “a bend in the road.”

On the Road to Rome

“I am out to build a church that will be a road back to Rome” (John Wesley, *Journal*).

I made my last pastoral call in San Antonio just as the sun was setting. I stood in that parking lot and watched the sun go down on my ministry. I had never felt so alone. I was entering a dark night of the soul.

Out of nowhere, a woman approached me and started to talk about that beautiful Texas sunset. Small talk soon became a serious conversation about the Lord. The woman said, “There is hope for you in the Catholic Church.” She left me with some prayer cards and the promise that she would call me at my new place to see how I was doing. No bishop and no fellow pastor called me — but she did. Unfortunately, I would not be ready for the Catholic Church without another crisis in my vocation.

*In 1985, God led me to start a radio ministry in Canton, Ohio, the first home of Mother Angelica, founder of EWTN, a Catholic radio-television network. It seemed that everywhere I turned, I met Catholics who encouraged me to study the faith. One of my listeners even gave me the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I bought a short-wave radio and began listening to all of the great teaching on this network.*

Ever since seminary, I would periodically attend Mass. On one particular Saturday evening, I entered a Catholic church where the celebrant was Fr. Doug Lorig of St. Anne’s, Gilbert, Arizona, a convert from the Episcopal Church. As Fr. Doug celebrated Mass, his radiant witness of hope gave me much-needed spiritual direction. He gave me a crucifix and two books, *Rome Sweet Home* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn and *Surprised by Truth*, edited by Patrick Madrid. A few days after reading these books, I sat next to a faithful Catholic on a plane

going to Canton who witnessed to me about the need for “on-going” apostolic authority in Bible study. My mind returned to Matthew 18:15-17.

I began to see a beautiful tapestry that only God can weave. Canton is ninety minutes from the Franciscan University in Steubenville, home of Dr. Scott Hahn. I had to meet the man whom his wife Kimberly called “Luther in reverse.”

I called Scott and told him of my desire to become Catholic. He told me that I was not alone and that many Protestant pastors were coming home to Rome. I soon was welcomed into an RCIA program to study the faith, under apostolic authority. I was a lame man who received the grace of

God at work in faithful Catholics who carried me to *“that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful... [Then] Peter said, I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”* (Acts 3:2, 6).

The well-prepared lessons and the inspiring testimonies of changed lives made the doctrine I was learning come alive. The “Latter Rain” began to fall upon my “dry bones.” I felt that I was at home. I experienced the faith of “apostolic authority,” the

hope of “prophetic gifts,” the joy of “singing in the Spirit,” and the love of faithful Catholics. At the Easter Vigil of 1998, the same Apostle Peter who had called me to convert when I was six years old in 1945, took me by the hand into the waters of Holy Baptism and raised me up on my feet: *“[I]mmediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God”* (Acts 3:7-8). I had been to literally thousands of miracle meetings and healing services in Pentecostal churches, but none like this one. The Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus became *“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”* (Gn 2:23). Someday the Church without divisions, as the new Israel, will be able to look upon Jesus, the Greater Son of David (see Mt 12:42), and shout with joy unspeakable: *“Behold, we are your bone and flesh”* (2 Sm 5:1).

Even five years later, I continue to walk to the Table of the Lord for my ongoing bone transplant. Some day, I hope to stand with the whole family of God before the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David (see Rv 5:5), and sing a new song, saying,

“Worthy art thou ... for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom [us] for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made [us] a kingdom and priests to our God” (Rv 5:9-10).

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