



MY SEARCH FOR THE TRUE CHURCH

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****NOTE* This testimony was written in 1998, several months before my family and I left the Pentecostal Church to become members in the ancient Eastern Orthodox Church.***

I have been a Pentecostal Christian for 21 years, and a Pastor for 10 years. In December of 1998, my family and I will be leaving the Pentecostal Church, and will be starting the process of joining the Orthodox Church. Several people have asked me why I would do such a thing. What brought it about? Why would a Pastor want to leave a "Spirit-filled" Pentecostal Church to join the "dead" Orthodox Church?

Several years ago I began a search to find the true historical Church. In 1990 I read an article in *Christianity Today* magazine about how many Pentecostals and Charismatics were converting to Anglicanism ("Why the Bishops Went to Valdosta," Sept. 24, 1990). Two years later *Ministries Today* magazine published an article along the same theme ("Ancient Altars, Pentecostal Fire," Nov/Dec., 1992). Being a Pentecostal minister, these articles caught my interest, so I began to study Anglicanism (with the help of an Anglican minister). A desire began to stir in me to get back to my Christian roots and heritage. As I studied the history of the Anglican Church, a question began to nag at me: "Can we look only as far as the Reformation for our heritage, or shouldn't we be going back further? As a Pentecostal Protestant, I noticed that we had strayed very far from the way the early Church used to "do Church." Even many of our beliefs were relatively new since the Reformation (ie: those regarding the Scriptures, the meaning and purpose of Water Baptism, the meaning of the Eucharist/Communion, Church Government, etc.).

In 1993 I had to do a research paper for my Bachelor's Thesis. I took this as an opportunity to explore a subject which I had many questions about: Water Baptism. I wanted to find out what the early Fathers of the Church had to say about that subject. My reason for checking with them is that they are the earliest link we have with the New Testament Church. In fact, some of them (ie: Ignatius and Polycarp) were even disciples of the Apostles themselves (John, in this case), or were taught by the Apostle's disciples. So we could be sure that the understanding that the Apostles were given by Jesus on these doctrines would have been taught to their disciples as well (men who became the Fathers of the Church). Here we are, 2000 years removed from the Early Church. I wanted to see what was taught by those who lived in, and immediately after, the Apostolic Church years (30-100 A.D.). In my mind, if anybody knew what the Apostles were teaching, they did.

Through that research, I discovered that the Early Church had a totally different concept of baptism than we had in our denomination. I began to wonder why that was. If Jesus established only one Church, and we Protestants were a part of the one Church, why were

there so many different interpretations of such an important doctrine -- one that had to do with salvation itself? Something was wrong somewhere -- someone had to be wrong.

This caused me to dig deeper on other doctrines as well (especially the Eucharist). In 1996 I devoted a great amount of time (often 5-8 hours per day) trying to understand what the teaching of the Early Church was, compared to the Church of today (especially Protestantism, of which the Pentecostal Church is a part). In pursuing this interest, I completed a course on Reformation Church History on the Master's level (Briercrest Biblical Seminary in Saskatchewan -- the taped lectures were by W. Robert Godfrey, instructor at Westminster Theological Seminary). This helped clarify the main teachings of the Reformation, and the Protestant Church as a whole. It also showed me what can happen when individuals begin to interpret the Bible on their own, without regard to the historical Church to guide them: we end up having Protestants killing each other because of their differing theological views (ie: Zwingli and others vs. Anabaptists); we end up with one church, the Anglican, trying to hold on to the best of both worlds (Roman Catholic and Protestant), and acquiring a reputation for itself as the "middle way;" we also end up having at least three different *Protestant* interpretations of the Eucharist -- Luther's, Calvin's, and Zwingli's. Here was this extremely important doctrine (which many consider having to do with salvation itself -- see John 6), and the main reformers can't even agree as to what it means!!! Are we in big trouble or what?? In fact, because of these differences of interpretation, Luther didn't even consider Zwingli a Christian!!

I did another research paper to complete my Reformation course, dealing with the document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." This caused me to study Roman Catholicism more in-depth. As a result of this, I began to further study what the early Fathers taught about the Eucharist, Baptism (again), the Church, authority, etc. It also caused me to re-examine my long-believed doctrines of the main teachings of the Reformation, especially that of Sola Scriptura. What I discovered actually caused me to tremble inside. I saw that the Patristic Church was saying and teaching things which in many cases were totally opposite to what I had been taught in Bible College. More specifically, I saw that they held to a different concept of "Church," with its hierarchy and councils, than most Protestants do today. Protestants of today can pick and choose what they believe, and still be considered in the "Church." That wasn't the way it worked in the Early Church.

For example, recently I did a study on a particular passage of Scripture from the Gospel of Matthew. As I read five of my commentaries, each one had a *different* interpretation of what Jesus was really saying in that text. Which one is right? Is there a right one? There was in Jesus' mind! So where is that one authority that we can appeal to, to help guide us in the right direction? The Bible says in I Timothy 3:15 that the *Church* is the "pillar and foundation of truth." And this is where truth was discovered by the Fathers -- in the authoritative teaching of the Church (through the Councils and Sacred Tradition, of which Scripture is a part). There was an ultimate authority one could appeal to. And if you didn't accept the teaching of the Church, you were in error. And depending on how serious the deviation was (ie: key doctrines) you could even be

considered *outside* the Church. Unfortunately, in the Protestant "Church," there isn't one "Church" we can appeal to. Which Church is the one Paul referred to in I Tim. 3:15, in which he says: "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth"? Which one did Jesus mean when He said to take our disputes to the "Church" (Mt. 18:17,18)? Today, if your local church disagrees with your doctrine, you can always go to another, more accommodating, "Church". Which one was Jesus referring to when He said, "I will build my Church"? He didn't say "Churches," yet in Protestantism, we have over 23,000 denominations, with five new ones starting every week (according the 1989 census of the United Nations). According to the May, 1998 issue of *Christian History* magazine, even the Pentecostal/Charismatic Church consists of 11,000 different denominations worldwide! And each one of these denominations is the direct result of the Reformation, and the teaching that anyone can understand and interpret the Bible for himself without the guidance and help of the Church. It's scary.

I was helped in this area by something that St. Vincent of Lerins wrote (in 434 A.D.):

"Here, it may be, someone will ask, 'Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and is in itself abundantly sufficient, what need is there to join to it the interpretation of the Church?' The answer is that because of the very depth of Scripture all men do not place one identical interpretation on it. The statements of the same writer are explained by different men in different ways, so much so that it seems almost possible to extract from it as many opinions as there are men....Therefore, because of the intricacies of error, which is so multiform, there is great need for the laying down of a rule for the exposition of Prophets and Apostles in accordance with the standard of the interpretation of the Church Catholic."

When I stand before Jesus, I want to be able to say that I'm a part of a Church that has existed since the earliest of times. I don't want to say that I'm part of a Church that has so many splits and factions that they can't even agree on the essentials of salvation -- with each one appealing to Sola Scriptura as their foundation -- with each one saying they are the most biblically *correct* Church. I want to be able to say that I "contend[ed] for the faith that was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). In the Protestant Church, there is no "one faith," there are no absolutes -- practically anything goes. Is that the Church that Jesus sought to build? Is that the Church that I want to be a part of?

Please understand, at this point in October of 1996, I was not studying the Orthodox Church. While I had looked into it a little quite awhile ago, for some reason it wasn't even in my thinking as I was studying the Early Church. Instead, my focus was more on the differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. For some reason, I'm really not sure why, I associated the Early Church with the Roman Catholic Church. But the more I studied, the more I saw the distinction between the ROMAN Catholic Church and the CATHOLIC Church (also often referred to in the first millenium as the Orthodox

Church). At first I had thought I might end up converting to Roman Catholicism. I felt that if the Early Church was indeed radically different than the Protestant Churches of today, then I must somehow become a part of that Church that still practices and believes what the Early Church practiced and believed.

I'm not sure exactly what triggered my interest in Orthodoxy specifically, but I began to seriously dig deeper into its history and theology. By early 1997 I was convinced that the Protestant Church was not the Church that Jesus established, and that they were far removed from what the Early Church was like. My only question now was, which Church today best reflects what the Early Church was, and has faithfully carried on its Traditions throughout the past 1900 years. This caused me to study the differences between the Eastern and Western Church, especially the claims of Roman Papal supremacy (and ultimately infallibility).

For the first thousand years of her history the Church was essentially one. For practical purposes, the Church was divided up into five major centers, or jurisdictions (Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople), each with its own head Bishop, or Patriarch. These five centers formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other. There were occasional heretical or schismatic groups going their own way, but the Church was unified until the 11th century. As I continued to research, I soon saw that such a teaching as Papal Infallibility was not a part of the historic Apostolic, Orthodox, and Catholic Church, but something which was introduced later.

Being a conciliar Church, the Church ultimately rejected Papal supremacy, choosing to have the five Patriarchs being heads of their own jurisdictions only. But Rome would hear none of it. They wanted the final authority for **all** the jurisdictions to rest with the Roman Patriarch (or Pope). But the other four Patriarchs would hear none of that. Today Rome says that the Eastern Church left the **true** Church, but Orthodoxy says, "No, it was the other way around. Rome was outvoted, 4-1, but still persisted in doing things their own way anyway, thus excluding themselves from the ranks of the true Church." Nearly a thousand years after that split, the other four Patriarchates still remain intact, in full communion with each other, maintaining that Orthodox apostolic faith of the inspired New Testament record.

So which one was right? The Eastern Church (Orthodoxy), or the Western Catholic Church (Roman Catholicism)? If the Church is the pillar and foundation of truth (I Tim. 3:15), then which one should I put my trust in? Which one remained faithful to what had been handed down to them? 2 Thess. 2:15 says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the *traditions* which ye have been taught, whether by word (oral tradition), or our epistle (written tradition -- Scriptures)." So which of the two did this? How does one decide where the **true** historical Church is?

Again, I appeal to St. Vincent for some good advice:

"I have therefore continually given the greatest pains and diligence to inquiring, from the greatest possible number of men outstanding in holiness and in doctrine, how I can secure a kind of fixed and, as it were, general and guiding principle for distinguishing the true Catholic Faith from the degraded falsehoods of heresy. And the answer that I receive is always to this effect: that if I wish, or indeed if anyone wishes, to detect the deceits of heretics that arise and to avoid their snares and to keep healthy and sound in a healthy faith, we ought, with the Lord's help, to fortify our faith in a twofold manner -- firstly by the authority of God's Law, then by the tradition of the Catholic Church. [Remember, not *Roman* Catholic, but the one Catholic, Apostolic, Orthodox Church -- Brian]. Now in the Catholic Church itself we take the greatest care to hold **THAT WHICH HAS BEEN BELIEVED EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS AND BY ALL** [capitals in original document].

That is truly and properly 'Catholic,' as is shown by the very force and meaning of the word, which comprehends everything almost universally. We shall hold to this rule if we follow universality (i.e. ecumenicity), antiquity, and consent. We shall follow universality if we acknowledge that one Faith to be true which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is clear that our ancestors and fathers proclaimed; consent, if in antiquity itself we keep following the definitions and opinions of all, or certainly nearly all, bishops and doctors alike.

What then will the Catholic Christian do, if a small part of the Church has cut itself off from the communion of the universal Faith? The answer is sure. He will prefer the healthiness of the whole body to the morbid and corrupt limb.

But what if some novel contagion try to infect the whole Church, and not merely a tiny part of it? Then he will take care to cleave to antiquity, which cannot now be led astray by any deceit of novelty.

What if in antiquity itself two or three men, or it may be a city, or even a whole province be detected in error? Then he will take the greatest care to prefer the decrees of the ancient General Councils, if there be such, to the irresponsible ignorance of a few men.

But what if some error arises regarding which nothing of this sort is to be found? Then he must do his best to compare the opinions of the Fathers and inquire their meaning, provided always that, though they belonged to diverse times and places, they yet continued in the faith and communion of the one Catholic Church; and let them be teachers approved and outstanding. And whatever he shall find to have been held, approved and

taught, not by one or two only but by all equally and with one consent, openly, frequently and persistently, let him take this as to be held by him without the slightest hesitation."

As I studied the earliest teachings of the Church, I saw that Papal supremacy by divine right was completely foreign to the Church as a whole (the Catholic Church), and rejected by the majority of the Church. Therefore, in keeping with the guidelines of St. Vincent, I must reject both the Protestant Church and the "Roman" Catholic Church, and "take the greatest care to prefer the decrees of the ancient General Councils, if there be such, to the irresponsible ignorance of a few men." This leaves me with the only Church that has remained completely faithful, on the whole, to the seven Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church -- the Orthodox Church.

I wasn't planning to end up at the Orthodox Church -- it wasn't even in my thinking for the longest time -- yet I feel compelled by the evidence to conclude that the Orthodox Church is the one, true, historical Church. In 1999, my family and I will become a part of this Church.

2010 UPDATE: Since 1999 my family and I have been a part of St. Herman's Orthodox Church in Edmonton, Alberta, where I currently serve as one of several Priests. Looking back on our journey to the historical Church, I wouldn't change a thing. God has brought us to where we are today, and I'm excited to see what other spiritual adventures He has in store for us, as we continue on our lifelong journey towards a greater relationship with Jesus Christ.