

## 55. Henry Nowakowski - A Catholic Priest Born From Above



Hello, my name is Henry Nowakowski. Let me tell you my life story. (I celebrated my 75th birthday on August 18, 2012). I was born two years before the outbreak of WW II. Mind you, like everyone else, I had no say whatsoever as to when I would be born, where I would be born, to whom I would be born. No, the Creator God decided those particulars for me. It was He who decided I would be born in mid August of 1937 to John and Nellie Nowakowski in Vermilion, Alberta, Canada and not in Australia, Africa, or Algeria. In fact, if my grandparents on either side of my family had not immigrated to Canada from Poland in the late 1800's, 1897 to be precise, I might have been born in Poland. However, it was the Creator God who chose John and Nellie Nowakowski, first generation Canadians of the Nowakowski clan, who were farmers by trade, to be my parents.

And so it was, my life commenced in rural Alberta with two older brothers, John and Peter, both now deceased; and then later, two younger sisters, Gloria and Agnes, both still living. That was my first birth; it would be many years later before I would experience my second birth, my birth from above—my spiritual birth. In fact, it was not until my 45th year before that would occur. Much would transpire before that fateful, glorious, and life-changing event. Let me fill in some of the major details.

I was born into a devout Roman Catholic family. My family was diligent in the practice of their Roman Catholic faith. My parents were very hard working but lacking in much formal education. My father, John Sr., received a fourth grade education whereas my mother advanced double that, completing the 8th grade. However, both my parents, to their credit, placed much emphasis on the education of their children.

As I recall, growing up, as far as the practice of our religion was concerned, the Bible was more or less nonexistent. We did have a family Bible in our home, but it was rarely read. However, baptisms were duly recorded therein. No, our devotions by and large were centered around the recitation of rote prayers, morning offerings, prayers before and after meals, the act of contrition, and of course the recitation of the family rosary in the evening. We lived by the slogan, “The Family that prays together, stays together.”

Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation were our weekly custom unless heavy winter snows or blizzards prevented us from attending. Again, the religious exercise was routine, monotonous, and foreign, as Latin was still in vogue. However, the gospel was read in English and the homily was delivered in the common vernacular.

The key to my religious upbringing and formation was to never ever question authority, especially church authority; hence, our parish priest was God's man. He represented the Bishop, who in turn represented the Pope, the “Holy Father,” the “Vicar of Christ”; and therefore, he was infallible and incapable of erring in faith or morals. When our priest spoke, it was like God Himself speaking. Later I was to learn in the study of God's infallible revelation—His Holy Word, that the true biblical Vicar of Christ was no mere man but God Himself, in the Person of the Holy Spirit—the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

So it was such a religious legacy I inherited from my ancestors who were the recipients of the same, never the chain to be broken by any Nowakowski. In this legacy, I was indoctrinated. Nothing wrong with indoctrination if it is in the truth, but it is deadly if in falsehood.

## Seminary Days

While growing up, I was what you would consider a “good” boy, almost always obedient, loving and kind, somewhat withdrawn, only average intelligence, never an intellectual. I did study hard; yet, received average grades. My two older brothers and I attended a Catholic boarding school from the ninth through the twelfth grade. It was when I was beginning the tenth grade that my oldest brother, John Jr., entered the diocesan seminary, St. Joseph’s in Edmonton. After being groomed by a parish priest, and the Sisters of St. Joseph teaching in our high school, another classmate, Phil Mueller, and I entered that same diocesan seminary. That was one year after completing high school. During that intervening year, I worked on the family farm helping my father.

My seminary experience was one of self-denial, routine, rote prayer, and practices, as I was being trained to become a functional cleric. In other words, I was being fashioned to be a dispenser of God’s grace through the rites of the institutional Roman Church; mainly the sacraments, with the sacrifice of the Mass and the Eucharist being the loftiest. I was to baptize, to witness marriage, and to officiate at funerals for those under my charge.

During the first two of six years at the seminary, the emphasis was on the study of philosophy, mainly the study of Aristotle and “the boys.” You might ask, “Why in a Catholic seminary would you be studying the philosophy of pagan Greek philosophers?” That would be a good question. You must remember that “the theologian” of the Roman Church was and still is Thomas Aquinas one of the most brilliant men who ever lived. However, being brilliant does not make you wise, biblically speaking. Living in the 1200’s, and confronted with Islam, he undertook to produce a philosophy/theology that was rational rather than the emotional one employed by the institutional Church of the day. Therefore, he drew upon the rationalism of Aristotle as his basis. After all, from where does the doctrine of transubstantiation come if not from Aristotle? In our seminary training, there was very little focus or study during those two years that was given to God’s Word. Nor did we study the original languages of the Scriptures: Greek and Hebrew.

The next four years were taken up with the study of Roman Catholic thought and theology, meaning church doctrine, dogma, canon law, ethics, the study of the encyclicals of popes—both past and present, and social justice. Again, the focus was not on Scripture; it took second and third place in the scheme of things. Oh, yes, we did also study church history, but, through the lens of Roman Church perspective. In other words, very biased, never transparent. However, I admit, some of our study was biblically based and sound, such as the study of the Trinity.

During my entire seminary career, if I were to ask any one of my professors the question of the Philippian jailor, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30) he would have parroted the Roman party line, rather than the answer given by the Apostle Paul, or as he reiterated in his letter to the Ephesians, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) Their answer would likely be, “You must do what ‘Mother Church’ requires. Basically, be baptized as an infant, as that removes all stain of original sin; receive the other appropriate sacraments of the church, do good, do no evil; and if you are in the state of grace, as we define it, when you die you will earn heaven as a reward.”

## Catholicism Versus Christianity

It was “do, do, do” as all other false religions prescribe and preach. Plain and simple, it is and was a works’ righteousness; whereas, true religion adds two letters to the word “do,” making it “done.” Jesus, the Messiah, the God-Man did it all. As Jesus was dying upon the cross of Calvary, He proclaimed, “It is finished” (John 19:30b), meaning it is accomplished—paid in full. Salvation was fully achieved. Jesus Christ is the Perfect Savior, and to deny that is heretical. To say that He needs help, or that a co-redeemer is necessary, is not only heretical, but it is idolatrous and blasphemous.

With the bad theology with which I was inculcated from my earliest childhood to my formative years in the seminary, I was to live the first forty or so years frustrated, striving—striving—striving without having full assurance of my salvation. To prove my point (as an aside), some two years ago, six others and I from the Evangelical Christian Church to which my wife and I belong, went on a mission trip to the Republic of Ireland. We spent two weeks in County Mayo with missionaries, Larry and Kathy Dunn. Larry, a former fisherman who lost his right hand in a fishing accident, is now a fisher of men in his native land. He, as a former Catholic, accepted the Biblical Gospel through the preaching of a street evangelist in Dublin. Now, going door to door in this predominantly Catholic country, one of our leading questions was, “Do you have full assurance of your eternal salvation?” No one, but no one, responded with, “I know my eternal destiny to be with God in His heavens, because I placed my trust in Christ and in Him ALONE: through His perfect life and His death upon the cross, He has atoned for my sins and credited me with His own righteousness.” No, most would answer, if at all, “I hope so.” No ringing endorsement to be sure.

### Ordained to the Priesthood

After six years, my seminary studies were completed. It was on June 1, 1962, that I, along with several of my classmates were ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Anthony Jordan, O.M.I. at St. James Parish Church in Edmonton. At the time, the cathedral church of St. Joseph’s was being renovated, giving reason for the change in venue. My first mass, I celebrated the following day at my home church, St. Columba in Clandonald, Alberta, Canada. As its name would indicate, my home community was originally settled by the Scots, followed closely by Irish immigrants. Although I am of Polish heritage, I grew up in this community, which by this time was more diverse in its ethnic makeup. I must say, these were joyous, though solemn, occasions for all involved, especially for family members.

My active ministry began in a rocky fashion. Not long after being posted to the town of Vegreville as a curate, I came down with hepatitis. In and out of the hospital over the next six months, I was finally diagnosed by a specialist in Edmonton as having a liver condition known as Gilbert’s Disease, a condition of the liver, not life-threatening I was happy to discover.

During this first year of ministry, when I was able, I had charge of a mission church in the town of Mundare, some ten miles from Vegreville. This community had a heavy presence of Ukrainians and, of course, they had their own Greek Catholic Church. A much smaller group of Mundare inhabitants were of Polish origin, so, with a last name such as mine, the Archbishop thought this to be a natural fit, despite, unfortunately, the fact I knew little of the language. It came as a revelation to me as to how devoted these Polish people were to their relics, to their rosary, to their statues, and especially to their “Mary.” In fact, within the parish boundaries, there was a grotto dedicated to Mary, with statues galore and the Stations of the Cross outlining the outdoor park-like field of green. Every year on August 15th, come rain or shine, during the Feast of the Assumption, hundreds from near and far thronged as pilgrims to honor Mary, to go to confession, receive communion, and participate in other activities. Sermons were preached in the Polish language throughout the day and into the evening hours. All this occurred outdoors, so rain was always a threat. Many of these same people you would only see in church at Christmas and Easter, but you could count on them being at the Skaro Grotto on the Feast of the Assumption. They were much like the Catholic who frequented the church on only three occasions during his lifetime: when he was hatched, when he was matched, and when he was dispatched. In many ways, this all had the character of a carnival with its booths ringing the infield, people selling their wares, whether they be statues, rosaries, trinkets or other novelties. Bottles of Lourdes holy water were also on hand to be purchased. However, I do not recall seeing any golden calves as Moses witnessed descending Mount Sinai. During that brief first year, I officiated at several funerals in that Polish parish. I vividly recall, even so many years later, the weeping and wailing that took place at the gravesite by these poor, misguided, unenlightened folk, mourning as those that have no hope. And so they were ... without hope. These sheep were surely blind, but just as blind was their novice shepherd.

Within one year of my ordination, I received a second posting, this time to a city parish; namely, St. Anthony, an affluent parish on the south side of Edmonton. My status, curate, remained the same. However, this time the parish priest was Monsignor Foran, known to some as a frustrated bishop. He ran a tight ship and made it clear to the two curates connected with the parish, to Father Larry Bonner who served as chaplain to the University Hospital, and to the housekeeper, that “whatever happened in the rectory, stayed in the rectory.” The Monsignor indulged in such cravings as overeating and watching television all hours of the day and night. His favorite pastime was playing the “ponies” with Mary the housekeeper being his accomplice, by her going down the street each morning and placing “Monsie’s” bet on the afternoon races with his bookie. The month of January he spent in the South with his priest-friend, Bert O’Brien, frequenting the racetracks where no one would recognize him. He was setting quite an example for us younger priests. There is no wonder his admonition was, “Whatever happens in this rectory, stays in this rectory.”

### Vatican II’s Affect on the Priesthood

Much was afoot during the time of the early 1960’s, the assassination of an American president, as well as the Council known as Vatican II. That Council did much to awaken the Catholic world. Change was upon us: vernacular in the liturgy, priests’ conferences, questioning of authority both inside and outside the church were operative and a trademark of the times. Celibacy became an issue within the church, at least in Western Canada. After all, the first so-called pope was married, so, why not allow a simple priest to do likewise? Many from my archdiocese took this matter into their own hands and, as a result, there was an exodus of clergy from our archdiocese.

John XXIII wanted to let some fresh air into the stale institutional church, so, he cracked open a window. He let in more than was bargained for, so, his successors in quick order slammed shut that window. Despite the changes and upheaval within “Mother Church,” the outcome was no different than rearranging the deck chairs aboard the Titanic. It was still sinking and perishing. The powers that be never did revisit the Council of Trent. That Council in the mid 1500’s that lasted some 20 years. (It opened on December 13, 1545 and issued its decree on Indulgences on December 4, 1563.) The same Council that sealed the fate of the institutional Roman Church. It was that same Council that drove a stake through the heart of the true biblical Gospel when it declared that faith in Jesus Christ alone was just not enough for salvation. The Council of Trent declared Christ was not the complete, perfect Savior; that by living a perfect life and dying an atoning death upon the cross of Calvary, He did not accomplish all that was necessary for salvation. They anathematized anyone holding those “heretical” beliefs. (The exact words of the Council are, “If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema [cursed].” Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, (B. Herder Book Co., 1957), #822, Canon 12). To be saved, they contended, one had to add one’s good works, which is completely contrary to Holy Scripture. Mother Teresa summed up their views when she uttered those famous words, “Jesus did 95% of the work; I must do the other 5%.” No, you are wrong, Mother Teresa, Jesus did 100% of the work. One cannot earn salvation; it is a gift. You do not buy a gift. Once again, I refer you to Ephesians 2:8-9. Because of man’s pride, he wants to do something to earn that which cannot be earned.

### Henry as a Catholic priest

So, despite all the fury, pomp, and circumstance, what did the Council known as Vatican II accomplish? For me personally, much was accomplished; I benefited greatly from it. It drove me to start questioning authority. I was not yet searching God’s Word to see how it matched up with church teaching and practice. That would unfold later, in fact, after I left the Institution. I do recall a point in the mid 1960’s when I stopped reciting the rosary. The council, to its credit, did put Mary in a more

balanced role, one where she was less exalted. However, this would last but for a mere decade before the first Polish pope came into office. He reinstated her, and even elevated her beyond her previous high and exalted position. I witnessed this firsthand when visiting the pilgrimage site of Knock, in Ireland, where Mary supposedly appeared in 1879. How did Moses react when witnessing the Israelites worshipping that golden calf? Would he have good reason to act differently to the idolatry practiced there at Knock, 1972 parading and bowing down to a bigger than life statue of Mary in that auditorium as the rosary was being piped in?

Personally, during the latter part of the 1960's and then into the 1970's, I was becoming more frustrated and disillusioned. For instance, how does one square this? The Vatican for ages proclaimed that eating meat on Fridays was a mortal sin that would damn one to hellfire for all eternity; but then, out of the blue, declare a counter declaration saying that this infraction was now no infraction at all. I ask, "How can this be?" Basically, there are only two sources of knowledge: God or man?

From where does the institutional Roman Church get its knowledge? God or man? If it came from God, it would square with His Word as contained in the Scriptures. Does it? It does not. Hence, it is arbitrary knowledge coming from man, from the world, and ultimately from the devil himself. Moses writes, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5) More and more, I was likening the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church to the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

### Preparing to Leave the Priesthood

It was in the early 1970's that I was ready to pull the plug and leave. However, leaving is not so simple considering the ties I had with family, friends, and especially associates within the clergy. What a scandal it would be! Even though I was not the first, I would be bringing shame upon my older brother, a faithful and devoted functional priest serving as a chaplain in a large hospital. I did not have the intestinal fortitude at the time, so I stalled and hung around. Neither did I have the truth of the Biblical Gospel. I was lost myself. I was blind. I could not sing fully John Newton's hymn, "I once was lost, but now I'm found; once was blind, but now I see."

During my seminary days, I served as a cadet in the Canadian Air Force, spending three summers assisting chaplains. During the summer of 1961, I was posted to Germany, with the 3rd Wing. This became my escape hatch. I applied and was accepted into the Canadian Forces chaplaincy corps in 1975. My archbishop grudgingly gave his permission. During the next three years, being paid a Captain's salary, I was able to accumulate a small stash of cash to tide me over as I got established in the real world. I certainly could not count on any financial support from the institutions I was soon to leave: the institutional Roman Church or the Canadian military. They did not disappoint; I expected nothing, I got nothing.

### The Breakaway

After being cloistered for years, it was with much trepidation that on July 1, 1978, Canada Day, I officially left the institution in which I had been an active player for some 22 years. Moreover, like Abraham, I journeyed to a foreign land. I came to Los Angeles, California to commence my new life.

I see the next season of my life as a time of awakening. At the time, my entire belief system was totally confused. What did I really believe? I was so disappointed and disillusioned by my past experiences. I now looked to Metaphysics, to Science of Mind, to Eastern Meditation, to make sense of all of it.

However, I had more than that to occupy my mind. I had to hustle to make my way, finding work wherever I could find it. I found myself with Farmer John's packing sausages; there was Forest Lawn, selling pre-need cemetery property. Eventually, I settled into telemarketing, selling over the phone everything from investment grade diamonds to oil and gas leases. I made friends along the way. One,

in particular, Leo Villela, became a close friend and confidant. He and I collaborated on a number of ventures and it was he who introduced me to Dr. Walter Martin, the Bible Answer Man on radio. Dr. Martin was instrumental in bringing me eventually to acknowledge my sinfulness and my need for a Savior.

I came to see that all my good works were as filthy rags in the sight of God. Isaiah puts it this way, “And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” (Isaiah 64:6) That is the Old Testament. What about the New Testament? Is it as harsh? I found this truth expressed even more forcefully in the New, namely the Apostle Paul’s inspired letter to the Romans. By the way, this book of the Bible became my favorite. It begins the explanatory session of the New Testament Scriptures. Paul explains what the coming of the Messiah means. Yes, He lived; He died. Yes, He rose again. But what does it all mean? In the Book of Romans, the Apostle, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains it all; namely, the condition of natural man: dead in sin, destined for hell—the bad news. Let us look at that. “As it is written, there is NONE righteous, NO, NOT ONE: ... there is NONE that seeketh after God... They are ALL gone out of the way... NONE that doeth good, NO, NOT ONE...” (Romans 3:10) I would say Isaiah is mild compared to this. Paul continues, “For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) Here I saw myself utterly condemned. Paul, however, does not leave us there. He now gives us the Good News: the Gospel. Romans 5:1 begins the good news. After all, without bad news, there can be no good news. Paul states, “Therefore, having been justified (aorist tense in the Greek, meaning one time, completed act), by FAITH (not by baptism: not by any other rites of any church or by any works, no, by faith, by believing. Faith is an empty virtue; hence, it is not a work.) we have peace with God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ.”(Romans 5:1) Our faith is in Jesus Christ, our Savior, and in Him alone.

Paul reiterates this same truth when he writes, “But, God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Again, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) I had read these words many times before but now I was reading them for the first time with spiritual eyes, opened by God’s Holy Spirit.

### Going to the Cross

Once I had acknowledged my sinful condition; i.e., the bad news, I was able to go to the foot of the cross and accept as a free gift the Good News, the Biblical Gospel of the perfect Savior, Jesus Christ. And so it was, by the grace of God, that in April of 1982, I knelt down by my bed in the little house I was renting in Downey, California, and received Christ the Messiah, as my personal Lord and Savior. It was on that occasion that I was BORN FROM ABOVE. Jesus talks to Nicodemus of this second birth in John 3. I must say, that day was the most glorious of my life. What a burden was lifted from my shoulders, a burden carried for years, dating back to childhood. After all those years of seminary training, of ministry, of striving, of penance, I was awakened to the simplicity of the Gospel. It was God’s doing, from beginning to end. Unless the Lord opened my eyes, I would be forever in darkness.

For years, I had been deceived, misled, lied to, intentionally or not, makes little difference. “What a treasure I have found,” was my thought. My natural desire was to say, “I must share this, especially with my family, all those old friends, all those “good” Catholics. Pardon me, “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Rom. 3:12) I would over time find out that salvation is of the Lord. He calls; He elects whom He will.

### Family Concerns

Who, in the Catholic Church, who is faithful, and of right mind, would believe a traitor to the cause, one who abandoned the “true faith,” the “one, true, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church?” After all, its lineage dated back to St. Peter, the first pope. Moreover, I was the “black sheep” destined for hell fire

if I did not repent and return to the “Mother Church.” My oldest brother reminded me of this on more than one occasion, but he was praying for me to return, of course. In fact, every year for Christmas, I received through the mail a card informing me, “You will be remembered in my Christmas Masses,” signed, Father John. Yes, my family, in particular, wanted me back, to have their “prodigal” returned. When I flew back for my father’s funeral in late January of 1984, this was clearly, although unspoken, the desire of all. “If you return, you will be welcomed back.” I remember well how generous my youngest sister was on that occasion. That, I will not forget. Very apropos to my situation were the words of the Lord, “Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own home-town and among his own relatives and in his own household.’” (Mark 6:4)

How does one throw away a treasure, the treasure of eternal life? One wants to share it, not cast it away. What? Go back to error and falsehood? No way! Once in the light of the Biblical Gospel, my desire was to share it and not retreat into the darkness. However, over time, I had to resign myself to the truth that God is sovereign, He is in control over ALL things and the ALL includes salvation itself. It is He who elects. Romans 9 came to mind. The Apostle Paul there writes, “...And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, ‘The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.’” (Romans 9:10-13) Paul continues, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” (Rom. 9:14-16) Paul further makes the point, “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Rom. 9:19-21)

Romans chapter 9 is the most forceful text of Scripture to drive home this point, but, it is evident throughout God’s Word. In John chapter 3, the Lord Jesus explains to Nicodemus that one cannot enter heaven unless he is born again; in other words, a spiritual birth—a birth from above. He proclaims, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit..” (John 3:7-8)

When selecting His Apostles, was it not Jesus who said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 5:16)? He selects whom He will to be His chosen, His elect. Whatever God decrees comes to pass as He has decreed it.

A corollary to God’s sovereignty would be man’s responsibility. Yes, the Bible teaches God’s sovereignty, but it also teaches man’s responsibility. Both are clearly taught in the Scriptures when we read, “...Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts 2:23) Even though Christ’s death was sovereignly decreed and predetermined by God, He still holds those responsible for Jesus’ death culpable and responsible. They are paying and will pay for their actions.

So, how can this be? Personally, I do not know. These two truths are a dilemma no man can fully fathom. The best answer I have found comes from the Prophet Isaiah. Through the prophet, God declares, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.” (Isaiah 55:8) Always remember, God is God and man is not. Our minds are like a thimble of water compared to the immeasurable mind of God, the difference between the finite and the infinite, actually no comprehensible comparison. The 1980’s were precious to me. Not only did God open my eyes and bring me to a true Biblical faith but He also opened up work and business opportunities so that I became more financially stable. However, next to salvation that He freely provided, He gave me the next most precious gift of all, for it was in September of 1984 that I met my future wife, Edith. We were married in December of that same year. Over the years, she has been a faithful, loving mate,

companion and friend, exuberant, joyful and exciting, a true inspiration to me in countless ways. Even more endearing is her love for God and His Word. Together, we have grown in that love. God was surely blessing me in so many ways. My heart is filled with gratitude towards Him in how He has blessed me. And, over these many years, my theology was sharpened and refined by reading, studying, and especially sitting under the preaching and teaching of such men as Chuck Swindoll, Michael Horton, Kim Riddlebarger, Bob Morey, and my present pastor, Philip De Courcy, with his practical, expository preaching at Kindred Community Church. That, along with Bible studies and Shepherding Groups, has brought me to this point as I write this in January 2013.

### Reminiscing

As I reminisce, my thoughts and memories travel back over the years. I ask myself, what truths have impacted me most? First of all, as I read and meditate on God's Word, I admit the most basic truth forced upon me by the honest study of the Scriptures is the sovereignty of God. God's Word is infallible. I used to believe at one point in my life, when I was very gullible, that the Pope was infallible, but no longer. Only God is infallible as is His inspired Word; i.e., His Revelation, from Genesis to Revelation.

As I further reminisce, the next thought I have is the contribution made by the Reformers of the 16th century, particularly Martin Luther and John Calvin. They rescued the Gospel from the darkness of Roman thought and theology. Opposition to them was fierce. Many paid with their lives, martyrs every bit as much as those of the church of Apostolic times. If I had lived during the 1600's and did what I have done in my time, there is no doubt I would have been a candidate for beheading, burning at the stake, or a torture victim for the Inquisitors.

### The Five Solas

The five "solas" of the Reformers are a benchmark for me. They expressed their beliefs so succinctly. Salvation for them was by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. How very Biblical, a reflection of Paul's words, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is also a reflection of the Book of Romans, which is Paul's treatise on salvation.

The Roman Church of the day could abide these five "solas" if the word, "alone" were to be eliminated. That one word was anathema to them and they declared it so at the Council of Trent. Yes, they said, salvation is by grace and faith—but not alone. You need works; you need the Roman Church's sacraments. Yes, it is by Christ—but not alone. He needs our help to save. He needs Mary and the saints. In other words, He is not a complete, perfect Savior. He did not pay the price in full. Yes, we believe in the Bible—but not alone. You also need our traditions. Yes, God should get the glory—but not all of it. We deserve some. Just like the angel of light, Lucifer himself, pride is systemic and shows its ugly head.

### His Marvelous Light

Finally, the study of Scripture has brought me to a place where I admit to being a doctrines of grace person i.e. a Reformed Evangelical Christian, born from above. Truly I am new creation in Christ and one who believes God gets all the glory for who I am; and how He has led me, protected me, brought me out of darkness and into His marvelous light, the light of the Biblical Gospel. I can surely pray with David the words of the 23rd Psalm:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his

name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

To God be the Glory forever and ever. Amen.