

Anibal Pereira Dos Reis

*If I Had Stayed in Roman Catholicism  
I Would Not Have Found Jesus.*

I was born in São Joaquim da Barra, Sao Paulo State in Brazil on the 9th of March, 1924, into a family deeply rooted in Catholicism. My father was Portuguese, and in order not to be an exception to the common rule aligned himself with the admirers of the Lady of Fatima, fate, and good wine. My mother was of Italian origin and boasted about the pope's golden throne in the Italian peninsula.

From the youngest age, my mother's father, who was very devoted to religious practices, used to take me to the Catholic solemn rites in the Mother Church. Even before I was 7 years of age, I regularly attended parish instruction on the catechism. On one occasion an obese priest spoke to us, full of energy and vivacity, about hell. He introduced us to the danger, but he did not give us even a single clue as how to be saved from this danger.

### **First Communion Day**

My first communion was on the 1st of May 1932. I was moved with the purest feelings. One incident, though, has obscured the solemn atmosphere of that hour. "Toad," one of our companions, as soon as the priest placed the wafer on his tongue, began to shout, "The wafer is stuck, Father." The priest very quickly approached the nervous boy and advised him to keep quiet and not to take the wafer out of the "heaven of mouth" with his fingers. Touching the wafer with his finger was sacrilege. After leaving the church, the boys and girls turned to the intervening boy with loud recriminations, saying he had shown a lack of due respect to the sacred Lord.

In 1936, my family went to live in Orlandia, a neighboring locality, so that my brothers and I could take the secondary school course. My father wanted to give his son the opportunity to study, something that he had never had.

A serious problem remained with me from childhood; it was the eternal salvation of my soul. I used to think constantly about it. Shivering with fear, I remembered the priest's words when we prepared for my first communion. He informed us of all the pious acts recommended by a very strict Spanish priest. There awoke in me, even as a child, a great desire to serve God. Not knowing any other way, I became a priest.

### **The Seminary and Ordination**

I managed to enter into a seminary at age seventeen. It was not a good environment. Never have I come across a place with so much slander. I gave myself intensely to studying all subjects. My dissatisfaction, however, continued.

I was ordained a priest on the 8th of December 1949, in the city of Montes Claros, in the north of Minas Gerais. I was given the responsibility, by the diocesan bishop, to set up and lead the workers' circle. In fact, this duty met my aspirations. I found the practice of social assistance a relief for my spiritual anxieties. I was intensely active, gaining sympathy from working people from every region and a lot of praise from ecclesiastical authority.

### **A Priest in Social Work**

In the beginning of 1952, the Bishop of Montes Claros was transferred by the pope to Recife, as a Catholic Archbishop. I was included in this change and was to live in Recife.

In this capital, I was given the task of restoring the Charity Company, a network of orphanages and Catholic education centers that in that area had suffered financial crisis. I worked hard, aiming to rebuild the public reputation of this institution. Furthermore, I was weighed down by the heavy responsibility. After little more than two years of work, the institution's financial problems were remedied. The orphanages and homes received a greater number of children and old people. The educators took a new point of view. The press used my name several times, which served to protect me.

### **No Peace before God**

But in spite of these human victories, and the applause of admirers, I never felt any peace in my soul. Neither in the complete dedication to my duties in the charity, nor the applause of the ecclesiastic authorities, was an answer provided for my spiritual torments. I strongly desired to be sure of my eternal salvation, and nobody could give me that assurance.

In 1960, I was transferred to Guaratingueta in the interior of the State of Sao Paulo, a neighboring locality of Aparecida de Norte. I rejoiced in this change mainly because I would be with the "patron saint of Brazil." Even more so, it was the first time that I would be involved in a task relevant to social management. Until then I was very preoccupied by social work. I was supposed to find in my duties, as a priest, an answer for my spiritual anxiety. But, I did not.

### **Parish Work**

I developed a new parish in the district of Pedregulho in Guaratingueta. I worked very hard. The construction of a parish home, a parish hall, and three churches within only three years was proof of my dedication. Even up to this peak in my life, with a long list of services rendered to Catholicism, I was still not certain of my salvation.

In October of 1956, my father died of lung cancer. I spent a whole year praying daily masses for the soul of my father. Even my family at that time prayed masses for him. Not even the Roman Catholic Mass, with its claim to infinite value, gave us the assurance of my father's salvation.

I used to cry out for this assurance for myself as well. But not even the developing social work, nor the construction of churches, nor the ceremonies that I led, nor the blind subjection to the ecclesiastical authorities, nor Roman Catholicism, were giving me any answers.

### **My Hatred of Evangelicals**

With my spirit in rigorous subjection to Catholic doctrines, I was feeling real hatred of the Evangelicals, whom I referred to in my preaching as “goats,” and the Catholics as the “lambs of Christ.”

One event demonstrates my anti-Protestantism. On the occasion of All Souls Day, in the cemetery of the district of Pedregulho, the Bible believers carried out their evangelistic work by distributing tracts and Bible extracts. In order to give “Glory to God” (that is the Jesuit motto) and to defend the “Holy Mother of the Catholic Church,” I resolved to damage their work. I got the children together from my church and divided them into groups to pray hour after hour inside the cemetery. The idea was to receive the literature and destroy it on the burning candles behind the mortuary.

However, during an evening when I had finished this merciless destruction of Evangelical material, I went into my library in order to find a book, which would amuse me. By God’s marvelous grace, I came across the Bible (translated by Matos Soares).

I opened this inspired volume. I read Chapter 11 of St. John’s Gospel. I felt relief come to my grief. I felt energy transforming my spiritual depression. I continued to read with more and more interest. I was constantly thinking about this chapter.

### **A Beginning in Bible Study**

Gradually, I began to sense new horizons in my soul. I decided to study the Bible, free of my preconceptions. Without anybody’s interference, and only through Divine grace, I discovered through this study the real plan that God has for our salvation. Amazed, I discovered that we could also have absolute and constant certainty of going to heaven if we accept His plan. I resisted, however. My soul had conformed to a standard of Roman Catholic practice.

### **A Talk with My Bishop**

One thing was certain; when I was to speak to the Bishop, I wanted to be sincere. He became confused with my questions. He told me finally that I was in Aparecida to take care of the construction of the new Basilica. My preoccupation became the purchase of concrete, bricks, and tools. I prayed to Our Lady of Aparecida.

### **God’s Turning Point in My Life**

The Evangelical believers were at this time distributing leaflets in Guaratingueta. One of them was about Catholic idolatry, worship of images, etc. To answer its many claims, I decided to go

to the pulpit to give an explanation about those doctrines, to tell them that God did not forbid the worship of images. I took my Bible; I began to explain by reading Chapter 20 of Exodus. I skipped over verses 4 and 5 in order not to give any “ammunition to my enemies.” When I came down from the pulpit, I was totally ashamed of myself. I decided to make a sincere comparison of Catholic doctrines and the Bible. Then I checked the infinite abyss that separated the two.

### **I Began Using Bible Standards**

In January 1963, I received an invitation to be a priest in the city of Orlandia where I had spent my adolescence. I was so pleased to go back where I had so many friends.

The contentment, however, was still not sufficient to drown my spiritual anxiety. I devoted myself entirely to the work in the Catholic parish, full of all the deficiencies an old parish with its rusty traditions has. In spite of the opposition of a group of discontented but pious women, I managed to develop a splendid work where everything fitted in, where possible, with the standards of the Bible. I cleaned up the church, withdrawing all the idols. My preaching was biblical. My daily programs on the radio consisted simply of a commentary on the Word of God. Many religious hymns sung in the services were Christian songs.

### **My Hatred of Evangelicals Turns to Fear**

An interesting thing occurred to me. My former hatred of Evangelicals had turned to fear. I wanted to talk with a pastor but did not have the courage. When I was in Guaratingueta, I decided to go to Sao Paulo with the single intention of resolving this situation. On descending from the bus at the highway station, I went to the post office in order to send a telegram. On Post Office Square, at that moment, an Evangelical was preaching. On seeing my cassock, he challenged me with a pointed finger, exposing me with his harsh words. He did not know what was going through my soul and could not imagine the purpose of my visit to Pauliceia. I remained, as a result of this incident, even more convinced that an Evangelical pastor could free me of all my problems. I then went immediately back home.

### **A Servant of God Assists Me**

In 1964, I came close to the end. I could not hold back from this situation any more. In November, I went to Santos. I had already worked out my plan. Wearing civilian clothes, I attended the Sunday service at the First Baptist Church and, incredibly, the Bible text used as the basis for the sermon was none other than Chapter 11 from St. John’s Gospel.

On the following day, I managed to catch sight of Pastor Elisue Ximenes. This servant of God responded to me in a manner that was so gentle that I was soon captivated and was free of all my earlier impressions. We began to plan my departure from Roman Catholicism. It was hardly a formal departure, because it was made over a long period of time.

### **Faith in the All-Sufficient Savior**

On the 12th of May 1965, with God's special protection, I managed to disentangle myself totally from the Roman Church. On the 13th of June, in the First Baptist Church of Santos, testifying publicly to the fulfillment of my faith in my only and all-sufficient Savior, Jesus Christ, I was baptized.

Besides having brought me into His kingdom, God placed into my heart the task of preaching His Holy Scripture, and I entirely dedicated my life to this ministry. He has recently helped the work of this humble servant through giving me the joy of seeing hundreds of souls come to Jesus Christ. In my sermons, I stress God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. Every time I preach, I can sense a more intimate "communion" with Him.

I have never felt such spiritual happiness as I do now. I have total peace in my heart, because I am certain of my eternal salvation. My soul has been purified by the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, to Whom be all the glory for all eternity.