

Francisco Lacueva

My 'Damascus Road'

I was born of Roman Catholic parents on the 28th of September 1911, in San Celoni, province of Barcelona, Spain.

My father died in 1918 at an early age during the influenza epidemic that visited so many homes in my country. I was only six, and my mother had to work hard from then on, as we were left very poor.

Two years later, a friend obtained a post for my mother as a servant in a Convent of Conceptionist-Franciscan Nuns in Tarazona of Aragon, a small city in the province of Zaragoza. The nuns accepted her on condition that I study to be a priest, as they did not want boys in the Porter's Lodge of the Convent, unless they were destined for later entry into the Seminary.

Thus, at the age of eight years, I found myself already committed to a future about which I knew less than nothing. The overbearing influence of the nuns was such that during my career in the Seminary, though I told my mother several times that I did not feel the vocation for a life of celibacy, she threatened to send me to the Civil Guard orphanage, which she proceeded to describe in very dark colors.

As a Young Priest

When I was ten, I entered the Seminary of Tarazona to study for the priesthood. I did not study very hard until the senior courses, but even so, I was able to pass all the exams with the highest marks. I felt this was some slight compensation to my pride to counterbalance the attractions of an ordinary job in which I could have realized my desires of making a home.

I was ordained a priest on the 10th of June 1934, in Tarazona by Dr. Goma, Archbishop of Toledo. Then passed the fifteen years of my ministry to the Church, classes in the Seminary and in private, as well as burials, baptisms, marriages, and other religious ceremonies.

Doubts Suppressed

In September 1948, I was promoted by my bishop to the chair of Special Dogmatic Theology in the Diocesan Seminary of Tarazona of Aragon. One year later, I was also appointed as Magister Canon, that is, the official preacher in the Cathedral. Up to that time, I had managed to suppress all doubts and difficulties that I had experienced with regard to many of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, which the faithful are taught and obliged to believe. This had been achieved partly because of the immediate and unconditional submission, which under pain of excommunication, all true Romanists render to the pope.

Then one day, I read in a Roman Catholic magazine, “Cultura Biblica” (“Biblical Culture”), the name of Spanish Evangelical Pastor, Don Samuel Vila. He was attacked for some remarks he made in his book, *The Fountain of Christianity*, with reference to the brothers of Jesus. After so many years, I still happened to remember the name of this Pastor, so I looked up his address in the telephone directory and wrote him a letter describing with utter sincerity my spiritual problems.

A True Conversion to God

Pastor Vila replied with a letter full of understanding and unction of the Holy Spirit, in which he explained many of the fundamental truths of the Word of God, which nevertheless amazed me, as they were against everything that I had believed. Mr. Vila did not ask me to become a Protestant, but told me quite candidly that the solution to my spiritual problem did not lie in changing from one religious confession to another, but in a true conversion to God. This was my first surprise, and it was not to be my last. He added that my salvation depended on my simple acceptance, by faith, of Jesus as my personal Savior and (another great surprise) that I should consider Christian living as a fond spiritual relationship with God. This was to me extraordinary. So, these were the maligned Protestants.

I continued my correspondence with him; and, after the first letters I received, he sent me a great deal of Evangelical literature. I shall always remember the impression I received from reading the book, *The Fountain of Christianity*, by Samuel Vila. There I found a reasoned exposition of the solutions to my personal research, undertaken against the dogmas of Romanism. Why had I not seen these things? Simply, I did not possess the extensive knowledge of the Bible and history, which in his writing Rev. Vila proved to have. It was thus that I devoted myself to the detailed and assiduous study of, and meditation on, the Word of God, accompanied by much prayer in which I sought abundant grace of the Holy Spirit to discover the real sense of the Word, to treasure it in my memory and heart, to live it out in my life, and to communicate it to others. In a little over a year, I had read the whole Bible through twice and the New Testament many times. I also studied the best Romanist and Protestant commentaries.

The Word of Truth

I was soon enjoying the fruits of this very pleasant task. My students were often amazed at the pertinent and varied biblical references with which I supported my theological explanations. But, above all, I saw with clarity and for the first time the falsity of many of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, which are the articles of faith. Why had not I noticed this before? For the simple reason that I had never attempted such a detailed and impartial study of the Word of God. That is why the immense majority of Romanist clergy continue in their false doctrines, without opening their eyes to the purity of Gospel truth.

Though the light had commenced to filter into my soul in January 1961, I was still not saved, even though I was convinced of the falseness of Romanism. Nevertheless, I made up my mind to join the Evangelical Church. I was most encouraged, at this stage in my conversion, by the first personal visit I made to Don Samuel Vila in Tarrasa (Barcelona) in May of that year. The fervor and devotion with which he spoke to me and particularly when he prayed to the Lord with me, and his brother-in-law, Don Jose M. Martinez, impressed and moved me greatly.

The Power of the Grace of God

Following the advice of Brother Vila, I put God to the test in moments of great difficulty for me, and with wonderful results. At last, on a glorious 16th of October, 1961, and in the midst of a trial which hemmed me in like a veritable bull of Bashan, I raised my eyes and heart to heaven, not resting on my own strength, but sure of the power of the grace of God, which harvests its greatest triumphs in the face of human weakness and impotence, *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”* (II Corinthians 12:9). *“Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”* (Romans 4:7-8).

Since that time, I have seen quite clearly that I have been born into a new life, abandoning my life of sin, and surrendering unconditionally to Christ, ready to take up His Cross and follow faithfully in His footsteps. Every day, I have prayed that the Holy Spirit might keep me ever on the alert, to obey His slightest desire, and that I might be an instrument under His almighty guidance. From October 1961 to June 1962, my friends, my pupils, and my closest companions were able to see the change that had been wrought in me. My sermons had a fire of conviction that they never had before. My heart was filled with an enthusiasm, an interior joy, a wonderful happiness, and my greatest delight was in prayer and in the continuous reading and study of the Holy Scriptures. I began to read methodically; and many were the Bibles and New Testaments that were given away to my friends on their birthdays and holidays.

Romanism: Another Gospel

I realized, after some time, that it was impossible under my new circumstances to continue in the Roman Catholic Church. On the 21st June 1962, I wrote letters dated the 16th of the same month in Barcelona to my Bishop and to the President of the Canonical Council of the Cathedral of Tarazona to which I was attached for thirteen years as Canon Magister. In them I renounced all my honors and position and told them of my coming out of the Roman Catholic Church. I told the Bishop that I did not wish to fall under the anathemas of Galatians 1:8-9, *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”*

Not My Own Righteousness but His

That same 21st of June, I crossed the Spanish-French frontier at Port-Bou, and in the afternoon of the following day, I disembarked at the port of Newhaven, on the south coast of England, where I was awaited with open arms by that servant of God and friend, Mr. Luis de Wirtz.

I do not wish to leave out that on Sunday, 17th June, for the first time, I attended a Gospel meeting at a church in Barcelona and spoke at an afternoon service at another chapel in Tarasa. Then I enjoyed the hospitality and courtesies of my spiritual mentor, Don Samuel Vila.

I would not end without offering a vibrant testimony of my conversion to Jesus Christ. With great joy I have renounced the high positions that were mine in the Roman Catholic Church and the handsome living, which accompanied them. I follow confidently under the providential guidance of my Heavenly Father to the sure goal of my salvation. Since leaving the Roman Catholic Church, I have seen quite clearly that in order to possess all things it is necessary first to give up all things.

“By Grace Are Ye Saved through Faith”

To you, my ex-companions in the priesthood, I say with all my heart, “I am very happy in the new life which I have embraced in Christ and in His Gospel. I would that all of you were touched by this same grace. I shall not forget you in my prayers, and I trust I have a place in those of all who seek the truth sincerely and with an upright heart. Be assured that salvation is a personal matter between God and each one of you. Salvation does not lie in membership in a church, nor in pious practices, services, rosaries, messages of Fatima, etcetera. It is obviously wrong to believe that observing the “First Fridays” or the “First Sabbaths” can save a person. Only our personal acceptance by faith of the unique fact of the Redemption of Jesus Christ can save our souls. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God”* (Romans 3:23-25).

This is biblical doctrine; it is the doctrine of Paul in Romans. Study the Scriptures, and they will guide you to the truth. Beware of following a mistaken road. Think on this today; tomorrow...may be too late.