

Jose A. Fernandez

I Was Blind, Now I See

I was born blind, not only physically but also spiritually in 1899, in one of the most mountainous and inaccessible regions of Asturias, rightly called the “Spanish Switzerland.” My parents were devout Roman Catholics who had the faith of the “coal man” mentioned by St. Teresa of Avila, that is, they believed implicitly everything that the Roman Catholic Church believed and taught. They had, indeed, a blind faith, which they transmitted to their 17 children.

I was born in a home where Roman Catholicism permeated the heart, the mind, and even the body of the individual; where the baby was nursed and nourished with the mother’s milk and love, and taught devotion to Mary and the Saints; where later on the child was impressed with the value of medals, scapulars, beads, holy pictures, etcetera; where the priest’s word was law and had to be obeyed.

As early as I can remember, I had a strong inclination toward everything connected with the Church and the priest, whom I had been taught to regard as a super-human being devoid of the ordinary human needs and weaknesses. My greatest delight was to serve as an altar boy, considering it a great privilege and honor to rise early in the morning and walk two miles in the snow through mountainous terrain in order to assist the priest at the Mass. At the age of seven, I was able to recite the prayers of the Mass in Latin.

Blind Faith in the Church

The family devotions, consisting of the recitation of the Rosary and a long litany of prayers to all the patron Saints, were held every night without exception. The whole family, including the small children, gathered in the kitchen, which also served as living room. We formed quite a congregation! When my father took the beads from his pocket, it was the signal for all of us to go down on our knees on the bare stone floor, ready for the coming ordeal, which usually lasted 40 minutes.

The recitation of the beads, consisting of the “Apostles’ Creed,” fifty-three “Hail Mary’s,” six “Glory Be’s,” five “Our Fathers,” one “Hail, Holy Queen,” and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, was trying enough. Far more so was what followed, a seemingly endless series of prayers to the different “Virgins,” Angels, and Saints noted for their special advocacy and protection in all circumstances and vicissitudes of life.

The Worship of Images

My early religious life was centered on one main event during the year: the Festival of the Virgin of Dawn, commemorating the festival of the Assumption of Mary into heaven on August 15.

The Virgin of Dawn was the patroness of the region. According to a legend, the virgin appeared to a certain shepherd on a nearby mountain called "Alba" or "Dawn." A sanctuary was erected on that spot to honor the apparition. Every year a religious pageant is enacted, and the shrine is visited by thousands of pilgrims from far and near. The statue of the Virgin, attired in splendid regalia, is carried in procession through the mountainside, to the acclaim and veneration of the devotees who come either to pray for a miracle or to thank her for the miracles already performed. Each region in Spain claims at least one such miraculous Virgin. Fatima is reproduced hundreds of times!

Although Roman Catholic theology distinguishes between the statue and the person it represents, in practice that distinction is one for the books only. In spite of the theoretical teaching of the Catechism, there was no doubt in my mind that both those simple mountain people and I really worshiped the image. In our belief, a supernatural power was attached to the physical part of the figure, for it was not even a statue in the proper sense of the word. It consisted of a few sticks arranged so as to provide the skeleton on which a face was placed. The figure was then dressed in silk and gold. I was shocked beyond words, when one day I saw the altar ladies undress the statue and noticed that the virgin of my dreams was only a dummy. That mental picture has remained with me ever since. Having observed my religious inclinations, the parish priest approached me with the idea of studying for the priesthood. Guided by the exalted opinion I had for that profession, I yielded readily to his persuasion, much to the joy and satisfaction of my deeply religious father and the consternation of my equally religious mother, who opposed the idea on the grounds of her maternal instinct and love.

Friar and Priest

At the age of twelve I left my home, father, mother, brothers, and sisters, never to see them again. The glory of the priestly life, the enchantments of the monastery, and the salvation of my soul envisaged on the horizon of my mind overcame the natural sadness that came over me as I took leave of my family and the scenes of my childhood.

I was sent to a high school located in the province of Valladolid. The high school was conducted by priests of the Dominican Order for the purpose of training young boys already set aside by their parents for the priesthood.

During the four years of my stay there, I not only studied the high school subjects but became proficient in the large Roman Catholic Catechism. It was there that Romanism took hold of me body and soul; there it was that the seed of intolerance was sown in my soul, as the Catechism insisted that there was only one true Church of Jesus Christ outside of which there was no salvation. That Church was the "Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church." There it was that God was presented to my young mind as a stern judge ready to render to us according to our sins, an angry God that had to be appeased by good works, penances and mortifications.

One can well understand the hold that the Roman Catholic Church has over the soul of the Spanish people, particularly over the candidates for the priesthood, being brought up since early boyhood in such an atmosphere and with such ideas. That may explain the reason why in past centuries Protestants were burned at the stake and at present they are being persecuted in my native Spain.

During the first two years of my training, my life was exemplary in the observance of every rule and in the diligent attention and care to my studies. I was honored on several occasions with special awards.

From this "Apostolic" School, I was sent to the Dominican Novitiate in Avila, and in the famous monastery of Santo Tomas I was invested with the black and white habit of the Dominican Order at the age of 16.

A Time of Torture

One full year was devoted to the intensive study of the Rule and Constitution of the Order, the rigid observance of the same, the chanting of the Office of the Virgin, and constant vigilance on the part of the Novice Master.

It was a year of trial and probation, which only the strongest characters could survive. Fasting was prescribed from September 14 to Easter. The Master carefully censored the incoming and outgoing mail. All contact with the outside world was prohibited. No conversation or communication could be held between the priest and the professed members of the monastery. Auricular confession was obligatory every week, and this was generally held on Saturday and had to be made to the same Novice Master who was at the same time our superior and constant supervisor.

It is not difficult to imagine the anxiety and mental torture that such unmerciful practice, since changed by the Canon Law of the Church, inflicted on the young novices, who literally dreaded the approach of Saturday. But the dream and anticipation of one day becoming a full-fledged friar provided me with the courage needed to stand and complete successfully that year of probation and absolute self-renunciation.

The day of partial liberation came on September 8, 1917, the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, when I made my profession as a member of the Dominican Order. The next four years were spent in Santo Tomas College, adjoining the novitiate.

From the time I left home at twelve, until I finished college at twenty-one, I had not spoken to a woman. Womanhood was presented to our young minds as something evil, and on numerous occasions the religious instructors related to us stories of saints who never looked at their mothers' faces, citing this as an example of chastity to be imitated by us.

Ordered to America

After four years of college, seventeen of us young seminarians were ordered to the United States to study theology and learn English. Dressed in the clerical garb worn by American Roman Catholic priests, we walked the streets of Madrid for the first time in nine years, beholding the charming Spanish señoritas, our young faces blushing whenever our eyes met those of a young lady.

I was twenty-one years old, and I had never known, nor met, anyone who was not a Roman Catholic, for at that time everybody in Spain professed to be a Roman Catholic. I had read and heard about Protestants, but I could not believe that such people existed.

The first time that I had an opportunity to meet someone who was not a Roman Catholic was during our trip from Spain to America. There, on the ship, was an American gentleman who

had spent some years in Spain and who was returning to the United States with his charming seventeen-year-old daughter who spoke Spanish fluently.

Human nature being the same everywhere, one day three of us engaged her in conversation to discover, to our horror, that she was a Protestant. Led by a burning but imprudent zeal, immediately we began to work on her, putting into practice everything we had learned about how to make converts from Protestantism to Catholicism. The first subject that we approached was that of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We asked her, “Don’t you believe in the Blessed Virgin Mary?” She replied, “Yes, but not the way you do.” We were horrified with this fresh answer and added, “Don’t you know that one must pray to Mary in order to be saved?” “No, I didn’t know that,” was her quick and flippant answer. Finally, in desperation, we said to her, “Don’t you know that young ladies like you ought to pray to Mary to protect your virginity?” She began to cry; she ran upstairs and told her father, who two minutes later came down the stairway holding a revolver in his hand, ready to shoot us. And he would have, had not the captain of the ship intervened. That was my first evangelistic effort. I was afraid of Protestants!

A Pharisee of Pharisees

I spent three years in the Dominican Theological Seminary in Louisiana and more time at Notre Dame University. Soon, after my ordination to the priesthood in 1924, I was sent as assistant pastor to one of the largest Roman Catholic churches in New Orleans, Louisiana. I served in that capacity nine years; in 1932, I was appointed pastor of the same church at the age of thirty-two.

For six years I labored untiringly, zealously and, let it be said in all truth, with great success. The church grew in membership, attendance at religious services, reception of the sacraments, and even in material goods. When I became pastor, the parochial school had an enrollment of about 450 pupils; two years later, the enrollment went over the 1,000 mark. I had made it possible for hundreds of poor children to receive free religious education.

The Dominican Order had honored me with the office of Superior of the Dominican House connected with the church. My community was composed of five priests and two lay brothers. I was also the Father Confessor of several convents of nuns, facts that prove the high esteem in which the Archbishop, the congregation, and my religious superiors held me. I was indeed a “Pharisee of the Pharisees,” who needed a personal encounter with the living Christ on my spiritual road to Damascus!

A Penitent Soul

During the last years of my pastorate, I began to doubt the validity of some of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The first thing that I doubted, and rejected, was the power of the priest to forgive sins in confession. Neither could I make myself believe in the doctrine of the transubstantiation, or the real physical bodily presence of Christ in the host (wafer) and in the chalice (cup).

My faith in the Roman Catholic Church weakened. I felt that I could no longer remain a hypocrite. I was entertaining the idea of leaving the priesthood. God intervened and provided the occasion—by the instrument of human agents. This time it was the Master General of the

Dominican Order who issued orders from Rome, to the effect that Spanish Dominican priests of Louisiana should leave their churches and turn them over to the American Dominicans. Some were ordered to Spain, others to the Philippines.

I resigned myself to abandon the parish without any protest, feeling that the finger of God was present in this new turn of events. However, I refused to leave the country of my adoption, which I had learned to love. I left the priesthood and took the road that leads to the gutter of sin, but somewhere along that road God took pity on me and saved me from a disastrous end. For a year and a half a terrific struggle went on within my soul. I felt tempted to turn away from God and everything sacred. But then I would remember the words that came out from the depths of Peter's heart, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*"

The world, with all its pleasures and allurements, could not fill the vacuum in my soul. After vainly trying to find happiness in the things of the world and wishing to save my soul, I took the road that led to a monastery in Florida. It was my purpose to consecrate my life to God in the solitude of the monastic life, to bury myself within the four walls of that sacred precinct, to work for and earn my own salvation. In the seclusion of a monastery, I thought God would surely give me that assurance of salvation and the happiness of soul that I was seeking.

That was my purpose, but God had other designs for me. From now on, God's hand leading me was manifest. It was in the monastery that I became acquainted with Evangelical Christianity.

The Inspired Word of God

For a while, I worked in the library of the monastery. There was in that library a particular cabinet with the inscription, "Forbidden Books." Curiosity got the best of me. One day I took the key, opened the cabinet, and saw six or seven books. I read them all, one by one. They were religious books dealing with the evidences against Roman Catholicism as the true Church of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, I took to the reading of the Bible. Until then, the Bible did not mean much to me personally. It was indeed the inspired Word of God, but I was told that the ordinary human mind is not able to understand its true meaning. I believed a super mind, i.e., an infallible authority, was necessary to impart the meaning of what was in the mind of the Holy Spirit when He inspired the sacred writers. I preferred to read the Word of God as understood by this infallible authority and as found in the Roman Catholic missals and prayer books.

Gradually, the reading of the Bible became a source of comfort and inspiration in the solitude of the monastery, and I began to understand the real meaning of certain passages of the Bible to which I had not paid particular attention in the past.

I was particularly impressed with the following verses as I read them in the Bible: "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*" (I Timothy 2:5-6); "*Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen*" (Ephesians 6:24); "*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*" (Acts 16:31); "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For*

every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving" (I Timothy 4:1-3).

The seed of the Word of God was then planted in the garden of my soul. It is true that I tried to smother it, but in due time, that little seed was to grow and bear fruit. While teaching church history to the young monks, I became acquainted with the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, both in doctrine and in practice; and in my heart I felt a deep admiration for the courageous leaders of the Reformation. After two years in the monastery, I had not found the peace of mind or the happiness of soul that I was seeking. What should I do next?

An American Soldier

Not wishing to go on living in those surroundings, anxious to be useful in some way to humanity, and knowing that my adopted country was at war, I did the most honorable thing: I enlisted into the U.S. Army. In this move, Divine Providence again guided me. Whole books could be written about the experiences of my army life as a private in time of war. The Army is a wonderful institution, and I am glad for the rich experience of my three years of army life. The worst thing that I found in the Army were the "two by four" corporals and sergeants, usually found in the orderly room—corporals and sergeants who assumed so much authority that they considered themselves a reproduction of Hitler, Mussolini, and even Tojo, and who made the life of a private miserable.

After my basic training, I was sent to the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. The men selected to attend this Intelligence School were highly educated. We had to take orders from these corporals and sergeants, who for the most part in their civilian life did nothing, perhaps, but sweep streets or wash dishes, but who could use strong language, and the stronger the language, the more stripes. But I thank God for these men, for they fitted me for my future Christian ministry as they taught me humility, obedience, discipline, and spiritual democracy.

Furthermore, I was assigned for awhile to the Chaplain's office. The Chaplain happened to be a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, with a brilliant mind and a heart of gold. His name was Chaplain (Major) Herman J. Kregel, who, after serving for three years as Division Chaplain with the occupation forces in Japan, was appointed Post Chaplain at the Military Academy of West Point. I loved to listen to his sermons on Sunday morning, for he was a fluent and interesting speaker. Under his guidance, while my mind was reacting favorably to his full and lucid explanations in doctrinal matters, my heart became captivated by the example of his conduct, his charity, unselfishness, broad-mindedness and naturalness. For the first time I realized that a Protestant minister could be happy and sincere in his faith and work.

In the American Army, unlike other places, proselytizing of members of another faith by a chaplain is not done. The relations between the Protestant chaplain and myself were cordial in the usual chaplain-soldier relationship, but no more. He had no objections to my attending the Protestant services. After all, the right to worship when and where one pleases is one of the things for which we were fighting.

Salvation by Faith Only

One Sunday Chaplain Kregel preached on salvation by faith only, basing his arguments mainly on the teaching of St. Paul. Up to that time, I had discarded practically every doctrine and practice characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church, but I had clung tenaciously to the belief in salvation by works. After the service, I went to his office to let him know how I felt about his “heretical” statements. Armed with the text from James 2:24, “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*” I arrogantly and ignorantly said to him: “If what you said is right, then James is wrong; if James is right, you and Paul are wrong. Otherwise, you must admit there is a contradiction in the Bible.”

With a smile of pity on his face, the Chaplain bade me sit down and “take it easy.” In a calm, humble, dignified way, his voice ringing with affection for the spiritual welfare of this soldier who questioned his theology, he explained, “José, there can be no contradictions in the Bible, for the Holy Spirit is its only author, and the Spirit cannot contradict Himself.” With that, of course, I fully agreed.

“Now,” he continued, “when Paul says that salvation is by faith alone, he speaks from the point of view of God, who reads our minds and sees our hearts. So far as God is concerned, we are saved the moment that we believe. But this belief, please notice, is a faith of trust and not just a mental assent to a few doctrinal statements.” Never before had I heard faith being defined that way. “On the other hand,” the Chaplain went on, “when James states that salvation is by works also, he speaks from the point of view of men who, being unable to read our minds or see our hearts, must have something visible and tangible by which to judge whether or not we are saved. As far as men are concerned, we are saved when we produce good works, for ‘*Ye shall know them by their fruits*’ (Matthew 7:16). But good works are not the root, they are the result of salvation.”

The explanation was unique; I had never heard it before. I fully agreed with it. The last mental barrier had been removed. I became an “intellectual” believer and promised the Lord to give my life to the Protestant ministry after my separation from the Army. But I was not fit yet for that ministry. My mind had been converted, but my heart remained untouched. A true conversion must effect a change not only of mind, but above all, of the heart. I believed in every fundamental truth of the Bible, but I had not surrendered my heart to Christ.

During one of my absences on temporary duty away from the post, a representative of the apostolic delegate (the Vatican system of checking on its men) visited me. I was told that if I would return to a monastery for a period of time to do penance, I would again be given a parish. But the wheels of Rome had been moving too slowly. Too many doubts and questions, unanswerable by Rome, had been permitted to ferment from the time I was assigned to the Chaplain’s office.

A Sinner Saved by Grace

I prayed for light, studied for information, and on my days off I would visit the different churches in Maryland and Pennsylvania to find out which one appealed to me the most on biblical grounds.

During one of my journeys through the churches of Baltimore, I met one who was going to be my life partner, a deeply religious lady of the Baptist communion. She possessed a winning personality, a delightful sense of humor, and a fine Christian heart. Our short courtship ended in a most happy union brought about by a Baptist minister in a Baptist church. Ever since,

I have loved the Baptists. The good lady could not give me salvation, but the merciful Lord was going to grant it to me six months after our marriage. The Bible teaches believers not to marry unbelievers. I did not know this Bible command at the time I married.

In the fall of 1944, I was assigned as interpreter for South American officers studying the military science of mechanized cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas. While doing army reconnaissance, I also engaged in spiritual reconnoitering. It was the period during which I was searching for the truth.

One Saturday night, I attended the Salvation Army open-air service on a street corner of Junction City, Kansas. At first my attitude toward the meeting was one of indifference and even scorn. But as the meeting went on, I was being driven by a supernatural force to lend my earnest attention. My effort was rewarded.

A young lady wearing the Salvation Army uniform gave the message, a beautiful stirring message that she ended by appealing to those standing by to believe on the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, to respond to His grace. Then she quoted the words of Jesus as recorded in John 5:24: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”*

At that moment, I felt myself passing from death into life and under the influence of a supernatural force. I went down on my knees, confessed Christ as the Lord of my life, and received Him as my own personal Savior. What happened, how it happened, I cannot tell; all I can do is repeat with the blind man of the Gospel, *“Whereas I was blind, now I see”* (John 9:25). [Note: the Bible teaches that women should remain silent in the church. First Corinthians 14:34, *“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.”* The Bible also teaches that women are not to teach men. First Timothy 2:12, *“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”*]

In the face of the transformed life, there can be no denial of the power of the Holy Spirit. Something happened in my life; I am not the same man. I love the things that I used to hate and hate the things that I used to love. For the unregenerate man and woman, this may seem foolishness because *“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14). My life since then has been a public testimony to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. I have been saved by God’s grace.

Again, to Make Sure

From the time I became an intellectual believer, six months previous to this glorious experience of the new birth, I was frequently assailed by doubts and fears, and night dreams turned into nightmares. But as soon as I became a heart believer and surrendered myself fully to the extended arms of the crucified Savior, I experienced nothing but peace, tranquility, and the perfect assurance of those who trust in Jesus. Life for me began at 44!

Gospel Minister

Blue Ridge Summit is a summer resort located on the mountain range dividing Maryland from Pennsylvania, 15 miles west of Gettysburg and only half a mile from Camp Ritchie, my permanent Army post. Soon after our marriage, my wife and I took residence in that community, where the Presbyterian Church was the leading church. Its pastor was Rev. C. P. Muyskens, a college classmate of Chaplain Kregel and, like him, a former minister of the Dutch Reformed denomination. Worshiping regularly in his church, we became acquainted with his sterling qualities as preacher and pastor. Visiting him at his home, we were impressed with his Christian family life. He did not leave his religion in the pulpit but took it with him to the home. In him I found the inspiration, guidance, and encouragement that I needed during the transition period from soldier to gospel minister.

I had just begun taking instructions under him when I was sent on detached service to Fort Riley. Upon my return four months later, I was the happiest man in the world. I had with me two great possessions: Christ in my heart, and a citation from the Commandant of the Cavalry School in my pocket.

On April 24, 1945, while still in the Army, I was ordained a Presbyterian minister at the Hawley Memorial Presbyterian Church of Blue Ridge Summit. Two months later, I was given that piece of paper, which I was waiting for so avidly—an honorable discharge from the United States Army! That fall, I entered Princeton Theological Seminary, where I studied for, and obtained, the degree of Master of Theology. My year there was without doubt the happiest of my life. There I found spiritual uplift, Christian fellowship, intellectual growth, and deep religious experience. It was indeed, as in the case of the Apostle Paul, an “Arabia” for me.

Apart from the physical beauty of the school’s surroundings, I was particularly impressed with the soundness of doctrine of my professors and the radiant lives and the freedom in the Spirit of the young men and women whose lives had been dedicated to full-time Christian service. When I compared conditions there with those of my earlier Catholic seminary days, the difference was striking. Fear, regimentation, and constant supervision had given way to love, joy, and the freedom of the children of God.

His Witness

Having witnessed to the saving power of Jesus Christ, it is fitting that the concluding paragraphs should be devoted to the subject, “What the Gospel Means To Me,” my way of witnessing to the dynamic vitality of God’s grace. Christianity, to me, means a life lived in Christ through faith in Him Who alone can save.

God has given us His truth in the Bible, and through the Bible I became acquainted with the real and living Christ, Whom I have as my own personal Savior and the “*only Mediator between God and man.*” As a Spanish Roman Catholic, I knew Christ only as a babe in His mother’s arms and as a corpse lying on Mary’s knees. A living, resurrected Christ never really existed for me until the Bible brought me to Calvary, the empty tomb, and the risen Lord.

For forty-four years I was led to Sinai, where I heard the thundering of the law through the rituals of a church; but all the thundering could not convict me of my sins until the day I went to Calvary and saw my Savior hanging there for me. In the presence of the cross, for the first time in my life I realized the full significance of the atonement. I believed not only with my mind but with my heart, as well, and surrendered myself to the extended arms of the crucified

Savior. At that moment, I felt my burden lifted. I was born again; my soul now possessed eternal life.

As a result, I was given a taste of the resurrection glory. I became justified in God's sight, and all my sins were thrown behind God's back. Christ became to me a living reality. The Spirit Himself bore witness with my spirit that I was a son of God, "*partaker of the divine nature.*" The fear of death, so ingrained in Roman Catholics, completely disappeared from my heart, so that now with Paul I can say, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;*" and with Job I can repeat with joy and exaltation, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth;*" and with the songwriter I can sing joyously and triumphantly, "He lives! He talks with me and He walks with me and He tells me I am His own. You ask me how I know that He lives? He lives within my heart." I am fully convinced that the Gospel in its essence is dynamic, for it possesses the dynamic power of God. I echo Paul's own words: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16). This dynamic power seems to project itself from the realm of spirituality into the economic and physical spheres, according to God's direct promise to Joshua: "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*" (Joshua 1:8).

We need to make contact with the "*power of God unto salvation.*" That power is the Bible. It is the source of our strength and the foundation on which the Church is built. For we read, we "*...are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*" (Ephesians 2:20).

Give me the simple message of the Gospel, that message which sounds foolish to the wise of this world; it is good enough for me, "*for it is the power of God unto salvation*" (Romans 1:16). With that simple message, the early Christians were able to conquer the pagan world for Christ, and by it the Reformers succeeded in opposing all the power of the mighty "Goliath" of the Roman Church.

No true Bible Christian has ever left the Bible and the Gospel teachings for the catechism and commands of men. It is those nominal Christians, without the "*power of God unto salvation,*" that fall prey to the enticements offered by a materialistic, ritualistic, formalistic, and pompous religion. The primary motive impelling the Reformers to usher in the Reformation Movement was a love for the truth rediscovered by them in the Gospel. As a result, they raised their voices in protest against the Catholic Church for having obscured, or totally eclipsed, the light of the Gospel. It was their firm stand for the unadulterated Word of God against the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of that time that precipitated the development of true Christian faith, built upon the Rock, which is Christ, and on the pillars of His Word.

The Challenge of the Hour

What must we do to demonstrate our vitality?

Let us repent! We need to go down on our knees and confess with contrite hearts that we have deviated from the pathway of our forefathers, who heroically contended "*for the faith once delivered unto the saints;*" that we have turned from the Word of God to the commands of men; that we have gone back to the old system of formalism and legalism against which the Reformers

rebelled; that we have lost our “first love;” that the vision of our priceless heritage has been obscured.

In the book of Revelation we find the angel of God addressing the church of Sardis, which represents the church of the Reformation, in these clear-cut words: “*And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee*” (Revelation 3:1-3).

Let us go back to the Bible! Christ Himself is the Word. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*” (John 1:1,14). When we read the Word, Christ is with us. When we preach the Word, we impart Christ to the people, the same Christ who walked the earth, died on Calvary, and rose from the dead. It is through the power of the Word alone that we can expect to revitalize our Christianity, to make our faith dynamic, and to save the world from chaos and ruin.

Let us witness for Christ! If the Word became flesh, then every flesh should become word, proclaiming the “*unsearchable riches of Christ*” (Ephesians 3:8). If Christ means something to us, let us proclaim His Word. If we have experienced His saving power, let us dedicate our lives to His service. As the Psalmist says, “*Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy*” (Psalm 107:2).