

ders, or grades, of the Roman Catholic clergy. In the third year, I studied dogmatics, history, and the Trinity, and I received the first of the major orders, that of sub-deacon. The final year I studied moral law and pastoral duties and was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest.

The Living Word of God

But the Lord called me to a new way, and I would like to tell you something of what happened within me while I was preparing these many years. I read a speech by the Spanish writer Donoso Cortez in which he spoke of the greatness of the Bible and of its contribution to world literature. He concluded with a paragraph in which he spoke of the Bible as the book of God for men. I understood then the importance of the Bible as a book for salvation.

In our home we had a beautiful Bible in which we noted marriages, deaths and births; a Bible which was a silent witness to the activities of our home, and a witness which never spoke to us because we were never taught to read it. As I began to read some parts, many doubts were created within me, and I wanted to resolve them. I believed that I should get closer to those who lived what the Bible taught. Thus I went to a Protestant Christian friend from whom I bought a Bible and with whom I had many discussions. I took their correspondence course, but there were many questions still unresolved.

Once when attending a Protestant young people's meeting I was surprised at the knowledge these people had of the Bible. On my birthday my Protestant friend gave me a Scripture bookmark with John 3:16 on it, the text which became the key of my life: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

I had gone to the seminary thinking that in this way I could give myself to the Lord. I had chosen one of the most noble of the orders of the Church because of its theologians, preachers and service in the defense of the Roman Catholic faith (the order of Thomas Aquinas and also of the Inquisition). But I found no peace in the seminary.

Always the Lord kept before me this text of John 3:16. I began to wonder why I was in the monastery if indeed the Lord could *completely save me*. All the practices of the mon-

astery and the Church were extra and not needed if salvation was *by faith*—"whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I sought for the practices of the Church in the gospels to no avail, and one doubt grew into another.

The Way of Faith

From my second year of study I was accustomed to reading the New Testament in Greek. Certain verses in Romans showing the pre-eminence of faith seemed very strange to me—"Even the righteousness of God which is *by faith* of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that *believe*... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified *by faith* without the deeds of the law... But to him that worketh not, but *believeth* on him that justifieth the ungodly, his *faith* is counted for righteousness... Therefore being justified *by faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that *believeth*" (Rom 3:22,28; 4:5; 5:1; 10:4).

Also several verses in Galatians puzzled me—"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen *through faith*... That the promise *by faith* of Jesus Christ might be given to them that *believe*... That we might be justified *by faith*... For ye are all the children of God *by faith* in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:8,22,24,26). These verses from God's Word were stripping away the very foundation of my Roman Catholic theology that taught that salvation is not received by faith, but *earned through good works*. I had to choose between Catholic doctrine or God's Word!

The way of faith seemed to be presented as the Christian's security. But when I asked my professor of exegesis about my doubts, he answered me in the words of St. John Chrysostom: "The more I read of Paul, the less do I understand." My doubts became greater.

The Lord Brought Me Out

But it was through further study of the Scriptures that I was brought out of these doubts. The Lord made me an evangelical at heart. I did not believe in the ritual of the Church, although I was still in it. I began to believe that my whole life was a lie. I was living a life in which I did not now believe.

One afternoon I visited an evangelical pastor. It was during my first vacation at

home in seven years. We studied the Word of God together, especially the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the faith chapter. God used this study to bring me to see that salvation was not in my religious works or ceremonies, but rather it was in the person of Jesus Christ. I had only to receive him by faith—"But *as many as received him*, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe on his name*: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13). Through the grace of God I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and received him with all my heart.

I believed that Jesus died for me, "the Just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18), that "he loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20), that when he cried, "It is finished," the whole of my sins from first to last were put away; for "once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26). I believed that he actually bare my sin on Calvary's cross—"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

It was then that I met the Saviour. He became real to my soul for the first time in my entire life. He did for me in a moment what religion could not do in a lifetime. Old things passed away; all things became new. I was a "new creature" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17).

My Family's Reaction

After my conversion to Christ many problems arose, especially in my family. My father said, "In two hundred years the Santamaria family has never had a murderer, a thief, a prostitute, or a Protestant—you are the first!" I had to give up a precious family of six members for the gospel's sake, but I gained a family of thousands of true believers in Christ.

The Roman Catholic authorities tried to put me in jail, but many believers stood with me and the Lord delivered me miraculously. I now serve the Lord as a missionary to the Catholic people preaching to them none but Jesus—"He that *believeth on him* is not condemned... This is the work of God, that ye *believe on him* whom he hath sent... Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God *through our Lord Jesus Christ*... He that *hath the Son* hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (John 3:18; 6:29; Rom 5:1; 1 John 5:12). □

John Zanon

"I Found Christ the Only Mediator"

I was born in 1910 to poor but devout Roman Catholic parents in northern Italy. Following my ordination by Cardinal Rossi, 29 June 1935, I was sent to the United States.

A few years later I was given a table radio as a birthday gift. To my surprise and joy I was able to receive some Protestant programs. What impressed me most about them was their emphasis on the Bible. It seemed that these preachers were fulfilling Christ's mandate to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). In an attempt to prove how right I was in being in the Catholic Church and how wrong they were who were outside of it, I began to read the Bible earnestly and prayerfully. The more I read and the harder I prayed to God, the more clearly I understood how wrong the Church of Rome was.

Salvation Not in the Church

I was taught that salvation was in the Catholic Church, but the Bible clearly says: "But as many as *received him*, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). "He that *believeth on the Son* hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever believeth in him* shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). The Bible was clear on this all-important matter of where salvation is—"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is *in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 3:24).

Being a Priest Could Not Save Me

Even being a Roman Catholic priest did not assure the salvation of my soul. I came to realize that my zeal and good works as a priest could not save me. "*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" (Eph 2:8,9). "*Not by works of righteousness* which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5).

This shook my faith in Catholic teachings. Until now I had blindly accepted all of what Rome said. A Catholic has no choice: either he accepts Rome's doctrines without question, or he is excommunicated. Because I was beginning to doubt everything, I started searching the Scriptures more diligently than ever.

Only One Sacrifice for Sin

The Catholic church teaches that Christ's sacrifice is to be continuously offered in the Mass, but I found the Bible says that Christ's sacrifice is never to be repeated. It is complete, finished, and all-sufficient: "Who needeth not daily as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did *once*, when he offered up himself...Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in *once* into the holy place, having *obtained eternal redemption for us*... By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*...For by *one offering* he hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified" (*Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10,14*).

Only One Mediator

I began to realize that all these doctrines of the so-called "only true Church" were nothing but Roman inventions. Pursuing my studies further, I learned that devotions to Mary were not even mentioned in the Bible. Mary herself directed the attendants at the marriage of Cana to go to Jesus: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it" (*John 2:5*). I had been taught to believe that Mary is an *advocate* before the Father in heaven. Yet the Bible says: "If any man sin, we have an *advocate* with the Father, *Jesus Christ the righteous*" (*1 John 2:1*). The Bible never elevates Mary to the position of "mediatrix" as the Roman Church teaches, but it does declare that Jesus is the one and only mediator: "There is one God, and *one mediator* between God and men, the man *Christ Jesus*" (*1 Tim 2:5*).

The function of a mediator and an advocate is to *intercede* on behalf of others. Catholic tradition assigns this position to Mary, whereas God's Word exalts the Lord Jesus as the only intercessor: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, *who also maketh intercession for us*...Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing *he ever liveth to make intercession for them*...Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands...but into heaven itself, *now to appear in the presence of God for us*" (*Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24*). Mary is never mentioned as an intercessor in the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church has stripped Jesus Christ of these glorious titles—

Advocate, Mediator, and Intercessor—and dropped them into Mary's lap instead. If Mary is so exalted, why does the apostle Paul make such a statement as this: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*" (*1 Cor 2:2*)?

I found that "praying to saints" is never mentioned in the Bible; and also that the Catholic definition of a "saint" is unbiblical. I had been taught that a saint is one of a select few who, because of their good works while alive, were declared by the Church to be a "saint" after death. But the Bible teaches that *all of God's children* are saints. Paul wrote to *all* the Christians in Rome: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, *called to be saints*" (*Rom 1:7*). Many other verses express this same truth: "Unto me, who am less than the least of *all saints*, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; *for the perfecting of the saints*, for the work of the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (*Eph 3:8; 4:11,12*).

I learned that the thousand and one devotions to the saints were all inventions of Rome. Jesus Christ is our only intercessor, and he invites us to come to him: "*Come unto me*, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*Matt 11:28*). He declares that there is no other way to God but through him: "*I am the way*, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (*John 14:6*).

For the first time in my life it became crystal clear that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church were wrong. I no longer looked in that direction for my salvation; my eyes were turned to Christ, and Christ alone. I gave thanks to God for the light that he gave me in my darkness. He lightened my path through his Word—"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (*Psalms 119:105*).

Leaving All for Christ

I had no choice but to leave the Roman Catholic Church. I began formulating plans, but the decision frightened me. I knew my parents and brothers would be hurt and the Roman Catholics would feel I had disgraced them. It would also cost me many life-long friends, security, prestige, and a comfortable

life. I delayed and prayed.

Finally the voice of the Lord came clear and firm: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (*Math 10:34-39*).

My family, my friends, my associates, and my life meant nothing to me any more, when compared to Christ. He had become my "all and in all" (*Col 3:11*). The cry of my heart was that of the apostle Paul—"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (*Gal 6:14*).

Everything that had meant something to me at one time had lost its attraction. The glory of Christ eclipsed the glory of it all—"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (*Phil 3:7-10*).

Trusting Christ, and walking with him, I have come to know by experience the truth of his promise: "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (*Luke 18:29,30*). □

the story of 2 Catholic Priests

Dario A. Santamaria

*Yesterday, a Priest -
Today, a Missionary*

Born in Bello, Antioquia, Colombia, on 22 June 1942, I first went to school in the Institute Manuel José Caieido, taught by the Christian Brothers, an order whose work is teaching children. Here I studied for six years. After this, I studied in the school of the Salesian Fathers for five years. My last year of high school I studied in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, with the Dominican Fathers.

Climbing the Ecclesiastical Ladder

After leaving high school, I received the habit of the Dominican Order and began my novitiate year. I wore the white robe and black cape of the novitiate. My head was shaved leaving just a fringe of hair. That year I was studying the constitutional laws, customs, obligations and privileges of the religious life in the Roman Catholic Church.

It was a year of hard work. The restrictive regimen forbade communications with outsiders. We were never allowed to eat meat, except on certain holidays. Every Friday we had to fast. Daily we prayed and sang the psalms in Latin. Every day we began in silence and remained so except for prayer, until 12:30. On Sunday we had to confess our sins before our classmates and our superiors. Often offenders were made to lie in the doorway where brother priests would walk over their prostrate forms.

I made a promise to remain in the order for three years. Immediately I began my philosophical studies. During these three years I spent my time studying metaphysics, cosmology, psychology, methodology, the history of philosophy, Greek and Hebrew.

Afterwards I made my solemn vows, then I began my theological studies. In that year, 1961, I met the most progressive thinkers of the Catholic Church. At the end of the year I received my first order, another step up the ecclesiastical ladder. In my second year of the ecclesiastical studies, I received two more or-