

# I FOUND THE ANCIENT WAY

By

MANUEL PEREZ VILA

Copyright @ 1958

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer

*~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~*

## MY TESTIMONY

I WAS BORN into a Catholic family and was taught their beliefs. When I was seventeen years old I joined Catholic Action and in Madrid I belonged to the EI Carmen Parish Center. Before the Civil War I served in the Falangist party and I voluntarily enlisted for the Nationalist cause.

When the war was over, moved by some "spiritual exercises" carried on by the Madrid Diocesan Union of Catholic Action, in Holy Week, 1940, I came to feel that nothing is so important to man as the salvation of his soul. So, determined to serve the Lord, I went with a priest and other young fellows of Catholic Action to revive the Order of St. Jerome in the EI Parral Monastery of Segovia.

In compliance with the strictest principles of the Order, we gave ourselves up there to the practice of severe penitences with all the ardor of our youth, whipping ourselves until our backs were turned into one great sore. One of our satisfactions was to be able to show the visitors to the restored monastery the marks of our own blood on the cell walls. We also tortured ourselves with sackcloth that we wore around our waists and legs for whole days and nights. Still, no matter how much we sacrificed our bodies, we did not feel the peace that one could logically expect as a result of such penitences. I know that my experience was also that of several companions.

In that monastery I was ordained a priest and, thinking that the Lord was calling me to the ministry, with the desire of serving Him as wholeheartedly as possible, I came to the Diocese of Barbastro, in Aragon, to take charge of several parish churches.

My soul felt thirsty for something I was not finding in the Roman Church. One day, through what then seemed to me curiosity but which I now see was an impulse from the Lord, I went to Madrid intending to find out about the teachings of Evangelical Christianity.

Not having an introduction to any Protestant church, I went to an embassy and asked for the address of a pastor. They gave me that of a pastor of a foreign colony.

This gentleman, although he was kindly, spoke little Spanish and, as soon as he realized that what I needed was the help of a minister of a Spanish church, he sent me to a faithful servant of GOD who was at the time in Madrid. This second pastor talked to me in terms that I had not dreamed of, dealing with me about regeneration through faith in CHRIST. He did not refer at all to changing from one church to another, but to the necessity of having a sincere personal relationship with GOD and the assurance of salvation. Finally he lent me two books, *The Way to GOD*, by D. L. Moody, and the book of the testimony of Mr. Padrosa, a recent convert to the Evangelical faith.

Much more light came into my soul through reading these books, but still without my understanding the secret of salvation.

Taking advantage of a trip to attend the Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona, I got in touch with another Catalonian pastor, who provided me with more religious literature. He did not at all encourage me to abandon my calling but instead warned me how much it was going to cost me if some day I should decide to take such a step.

But the more I studied the Holy Scriptures and the Evangelical books I had, the better I began to understand my inner dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church, while the desire grew in my spirit to be free to follow the truth. So one day I wrote the Evangelical pastor with whom I was in touch and he advised me to go slowly and think it over well.

"I don't care if there isn't any suitable work for me. I am ready to take any kind of work - watchman, painter, clerk, or street sweeper. If there isn't anything else, I'll go and unload ships at the port. It would be hard for me to fit into such work, not because I am not strong enough, but because I am not used to it. But I would rather do anything than keep on performing rites and teaching things in which I don't believe. I'm afraid I would go out of my mind or do something worse if I had to continue this struggle with my own conscience for very long."

So I left the priesthood, where my life had run along very smoothly while I enjoyed the respect and consideration of everybody. For eighteen months I worked as a simple laborer in a factory. I ought to make clear that at that time I was not yet converted to GOD, though I was to Protestant Christianity. I was convinced of the truth of Evangelical teaching and its superiority to Roman Catholicism, but I was not a child of GOD. This distinction may seem a little strange to readers who are not Evangelicals, but I can assure you that there is a great deal of difference between seeing the truth and being born again through the Holy Spirit.

When I heard the Gospel preached I realized the need I had for pardon for all my sins, through a confession made directly to GOD with real repentance. I, who had so often given absolution to others, felt the uselessness of that act and the peace that the soul experiences when it goes directly to the only One who has power to forgive sins - JESUS.

My life as a priest was neither better nor worse than that of my fellow priests, but when GOD in mercy turned His eyes on me, He made me a **“new creature in Christ Jesus.”**

All of my feelings were so changed that I had the strength even to leave off the vice of smoking, which until then had controlled me.

I never had understood before what it meant to be born again. Like Nicodemus, I was "**a master of Israel**" and I did not know the most important secret of the Gospel, spiritual regeneration. But today by the grace of GOD I can bear witness to this miracle wrought by JESUS toward the end of 1953: I who had been spiritually dead was resurrected by the Holy Spirit of GOD and given a new life, to walk in the paths that GOD prepared from eternity for us to walk in.

I do not now feel any enmity toward the Catholic Church in which I served, nor do I think that it is our purpose as Christians to fight against it. So the reader should not expect to find in this book gruesome stories of my time as a monk in the Monastery of El Parral in Segovia, or of my experiences as a priest. I shall not say anything of a personal nature, since such things can't be considered arguments against a doctrine. Personally I have no complaint against anyone; I would be very sorry if the answer to this book were to be a slanderous campaign to my reputation instead of an attempt to refute its teachings, for this would oblige me to defend myself using methods of the Catholic Church. I have to dust off stories that I would rather leave in oblivion; stories - some not so old - that I learned in the spiritual guidance and confession of other priests.

Even after I left the priesthood, I must say in all honesty that both the civil and religious authorities have respected and treated me like any other citizen, so that in my case the first part of Article 6 of the Spanish Bill of Rights was carried out: "No one shall be molested because of his religious opinions."

It could well be that the publication of this book will cause me some trouble. But that doesn't matter, for if we want the Lord JESUS to confess us before His Father in Heaven, we must confess Him here on earth and proclaim the truth, even though people try to stop our mouths. Where would we be if the Caesars, by threat of jail and torture, had stopped the mouths of the early Christians? We would still be in ignorance of the redeeming work of CHRIST.

We who are also Christians should not fall short of those champions of the faith. So we must be ready to suffer persecution, if necessary, the more readily that we know our sufferings will be the seeds of new conversions and that the promise of JESUS is being fulfilled in us:

**"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"** (Matthew 5:11, 12).

We Evangelical Christians are disciples of CHRIST, and our aim is to reprove the world of sin and show it the only way of salvation.

If in doing this we have to reveal the lack of foundation of a creed or doctrine in which some people trust while they neglect the basic truth of the Gospel, it is not our fault but that of those who do not hold completely to the teachings of the New Testament.

Perhaps some reader will ask, "But what reasons led you to such an important decision as that of leaving the church of your forebears and your office as a priest?"

As I went on studying the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers, many things began to weigh on my conscience until they became a crushing and unbearable load. I want to refer to them briefly in this little work, hoping that other souls will see the truth as I saw it and will be able to make their religious life conform to the teachings of the Word of GOD.

~ end of My Testimony ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*