

331 *My journey from right to wrong*

I've been trying to understand how, as a relatively intelligent bloke, I could have gone so horribly wrong that I ended up in a tiny sect, and nearly lost Sue.^[0] And in parallel, how has the church gone so horribly wrong, in various inventive ways, over the centuries? I'll concentrate on my own experience here, but only to illustrate possible causes for the latter.

My parents didn't go to church but my friend up the road was the son of a church minister, an ex-China missionary, and my parents were happy for a bit of P&Q while I went to Sunday School. In sixth form an atheistic teacher influenced me, offset by experiencing the real Christian love of a community in Yorkshire, but it was as a student in Cambridge that my faith 'became personal'.

There I learned the facts about sin and salvation, which made sense to my engineering brain, and about how it was our job (a) to make sure we knew accurately what the Bible taught and (b) to propagate that truth. For (a) we had people like John Stott and Michael Green, and were fed on stories of how the CU movement was founded (in Oxford and Cambridge) to preserve the truth of the gospel – essential, because the Student Christian Movement had 'gone liberal'.

For (b) we had the stories of pioneering missionaries, such as The Cambridge Seven, and I went on church missions and Scripture Union camps.

We knew we were right and, as educated people, it was our responsibility carry that truth forward. To us, what 'proved' the Christian message was the resurrection, and we often quoted *Who moved the stone?* Apparently Frank Morison was a lawyer who tried to disprove the resurrection and ended up coming to faith.¹

We were taught that Catholics had *seriously* wrong ideas, women could be teachers and missionaries but not lead churches, and the gifts of the Spirit, such as tongues and prophecy, were only for the early church – all as the Bible makes clear.

Later the charismatic movement taught me that the gifts *were* for today's church; indeed, through 'power evangelism' people could come to faith – the reality of God was *proved* by miracles. Then when I attended the All-Africa Conference for Renewal, one-third of the delegates were Catholics – lovely people, alive and excited about God. A bit confusing!

Then I did 'internet evangelism' where, prompted by a 'God slot' that I wrote in my technical magazine (almost every month for 20 years) I discussed the faith by email; I persuaded some to come to faith.

Have you spotted the pattern? I've spent most of my Christian life persuading people that I am right (well we are!) so they need to believe us (well, believe the Bible) and 'give your life to Jesus'. And now? I know I'm wrong – in various ways – but, Bible-aided, I'm on The Way, seeking to draw closer to God and closer to other people.

Paul Bev. 15.6.24

¹ In fact, Frank Morison was the nom de plume of Albert Henry Rossan, an advertising agent, a member of the Institute of Incorporated Practitioners in Advertising – but I'm pretty sure I was told he was a lawyer.