

The Conversion of Nigel Johnstone

Foreword

This testimony was first published as “The Conversion of Nigel Johnstone”, in “Present Day Conversions of the New Testament Kind” - The John Metcalfe Publishing Trust, 1991. It was available, in that form, for over twenty years, until august 2012, when it was re-published by myself.

My understanding, now - in my sixty first year - of some events in my life, is such that I wanted to simplify some of the wording which I used forty years ago, when I was twenty one. Also, I have made some additions which were previously omitted. These alterations to the 1972 article are indicated by square brackets. Some minor grammatical alterations have also been made in a few places.

Nigel Johnstone

Malvern, august 2012

[The cover photograph is of an original water colour painted by myself a few years ago. It is called, “Into the light”.]

[This testimony is printed by myself and published by my own publishing company, Belmont Publications Ltd.]

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The Conversion of Nigel Johnstone

*The Conversion of
Nigel Johnstone*

***Written from Church Road, Tyler's Green,
on 30th december 1972 (aged twenty one).***

I am writing to give an account of my testimony and also of the word of God which effected this work. I did not write before because there was no sudden change, and, because of my unbelief and the hardening of my heart, the laying of my soul down in trust upon the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus was drawn out.

[I was first aware of my own existence at the age of about six. Just that; existing. At about that time, also, I was introduced to the Shorter Catechism and I distinctly remember the first question and answer of that system of religious education. It produced a sense of horror in my soul; of obligations which were vast, yet to which I was adverse.]

I carried on through a semi-religious childhood, my parent being a minister of the so-called Church of Scotland, encouraged to believe that I was, thus, good and even better than others. When I was about twelve, I began to feel the unreality of the world, as if it was all like a thin smear of paint on a canvas, which I might tear away, revealing a greater reality behind.

I also began to fear death, not for myself, at that time, but I wondered what it would be like if one or both my parents

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died. I felt it would be such a loss, unable to see them any more and I realised what an awful heart-rending thing it is for somebody to be no longer present in the body.

It was about this time, also, that, because we had moved from a village in the far North of Scotland to the city of Glasgow, I was without close friends and felt a keen sense of loneliness for a few years, my family circumstances aggravating this to give me a sense of being unwanted.

I used to listen to a transistor radio under the bedclothes at night and I heard Garner Ted Armstrong, the leader of an heretical cult, speaking in an impressive way, quoting the bible, particularly, The wages of sin is death. I sent for some of his literature and one of his remarks struck me, that Christians should not sin, as he quoted scriptures to indicate the holy life of Christians.

[I had previously thought that if I knew truths about Jesus Christ I would “go to heaven”, no matter how I lived, but although that had been sufficient for me to that time, having been brought up, at home and in the Church of Scotland, to expect nothing else, it was no longer good enough for my conscience, having read the scriptures that Garner Ted Armstrong quoted.]

[I began to feel a fear that was contrary to the religion and circumstances in which I had been brought up. Death and eternity pressed harder and harder on my reason, yet I was full of false ideas and notions about the simplest things concerning God and my relationship with him.]

[John Bunyan’s words, in his book, “Grace Abounding”, weighed heavily upon me - Will you have your sins and go to hell or will you leave your sins and go to heaven ? I know, now,

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that he should have said, Enter the kingdom of heaven, for that is immediate, not after death.]

I was at that time known as a “thief and liar”, had a vile and blasphemous mouth and, had God not arrested me, I have no doubt that, despite a respectable upbringing, I would have worsened in my outward behaviour as my personal behaviour was already deteriorating.

Through family connections I became more acquainted with groups of religious people on a social basis, but, although I behaved decently in their company, I was still very foul at school and carried on a sort of double life for a long time, through moral weakness, excusing myself for my behaviour but feeling smitten in conscience from time to time.

[I did, however, resolve within myself, at the age of fourteen, to stop using Divine names as swear words and I have always kept to this, even when not associating with Christians.]

[While on holiday at a boy's camp where religion was featured, I was sufficiently free from worldly influences to pray to God that he would “take my life” because I did not want it. I feel that this was, perhaps, partly an irresponsible attitude to growing up, yet it may have, also, been the beginnings of a spiritual desire for company other than that of nature. It seems to me that, both in my circumstances and in my soul, lover and friend had been put far from me. Psalm 88:18.]

[At this camp, I saw, for a few seconds - no more - a boy skirting around the tents as he went, unobtrusively, to the empty tent set aside, but very rarely used, for private devotion. He had his bible under his arm, a stern expression on his face, his lips pursed in thought and determination, his

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hands clasped tightly in front of him, and he looked at the ground as he went on his way to worship his God. That sight, brief though it was, changed my life.]

[Graham Young is his name and he lives in Tyler's Green.]

[Note: Mr Young still lives in Tyler's Green at the time of writing, 2012.]

Graham took me to hear an American Evangelist in the year 1966 when I was fifteen. Under an emotional impulse, a feeling of self righteousness, and a desire to please my companions, I "went forward" at his appeal although he had said nothing specific about the gospel. Afterwards he prayed with the whole group of young people who had gone forward, not having spoken personally to anyone, and allowed those who so desired to leave. I returned to my companions not realising the significance of what I had done.

Graham then introduced me to a Baptist Church and, since I believed it was the right thing to do, and since I saw how meaningless it had been for me to be "christened" at the age of five, I went forward, to be baptised. Becoming accepted within the church, I was paired off, without any effort on my own part, with a girlfriend, who was baptised along with me, and I took up an "Evangelical Profession".

I had had no change of heart and deep down I knew that I loved the world and my sins more than I loved Christ, but this state seemed quite acceptable in the Evangelical circles in which I moved and so my earlier fears were stifled by a change from worldly companions to religious companions.

Graham also introduced me, outside of the Baptist Church, to others who acquainted me with what is generally termed "Calvinism" and was told that man was totally evil by nature,

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that Christ had died for the sins of the elect only (and not everybody as I had, vaguely, been led to understand) that the elect had been chosen by God before they were born, and that their conversion and ultimate entrance to glory was certain despite themselves. I saw that these truths were more in line with what scripture said and were more logical than the self-contradictory theories of “General Ransom” and “Free Will” and so I embraced them intellectually, though still without a change of heart.

I grew more and more religious in an external way yet more worldly in an interior way, still in my double life, yet more vociferous about the bible, which I hardly read in private, having no love for the word of God. I went on a “campaign” to a seaside resort and there, prompted by others who seemed to think I was able to do it, I bawled about “sin” and the “blood” on a street corner, knowing almost nothing of either, but, through imitation, greatly impressing my religious contemporaries, much to my own satisfaction.

It was on this “campaign” that I met some “Pentecostals” and since their arguments seemed, at the time, to agree with what little I knew of the bible, I embraced their views and I was influenced by them for about a fortnight. I indulged in such antics as loud public prayer (though I had little relish for private prayer), listening to people speak in “tongues” (actually gibberish) - though I was not able to do this myself, having hands laid on my head, watching a supposedly demon afflicted man having a convulsion, and laying hands on a Ford Transit to “exorcise the evil spirit out”.

This progress in religion helped only to make me more self-absorbed, superstitious and hypocritically proud than I had been before. I was made “rather the worse”.

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A change, however, was mercifully to come.

I heard Mr John Metcalfe preach in Glasgow and then went to hear him speak in Largs, Scotland, in October 1967, where he spoke on I John 2:28 - 33 over a series of three addresses. I was overwhelmed with the power with which Mr Metcalfe spoke and was convicted by the standards which he seemed to expect of a true Christian, but managed to push it off by the supposition that other people there were more eligible for the searchings of the word that I heard.

Later, however, I began to realise that words and profession were not enough and that a real acquaintance with Christ, to know that he died for me, and to know his presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, were what I needed.

The sandy foundations, of an outward profession in front of other people, eroded away until my house collapsed and I first doubted, then was sure, that I had never been saved at all; that it was all unreal, and would only serve to make my judgment more severe.

A great distance from God, never realised in an external religious profession, a love of sinning, never confessed under comfortable preaching, and an inability to improve my state, never known amongst religious activities, brought on a rebellion in my heart against God that I should be alive in such misery.

I knew I deserved to be destroyed, for ever, in the flames of God's eternal wrath, but didn't know how to escape from such righteous, deserved fury. I began to discover a little of what my heart was truly like but I knew not how to change it - nor could I find help in books, though I searched into past ages of the Church - finding no help in the "modern" one - and was

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especially drawn to the Puritan era, through re-published books from that time.

I was either encouraged to “rest in Christ”, which I knew not how to do, or else was devastated with a sense of God’s just anger and holy indignation for such daring disobedience. I became tangled up with such theoretical questions as, “How do I believe?”, “What is it to come to Christ”, “Am I elect?”.

At times my heart sank within me as I feared that I had sinned against the Holy Ghost and had never hope of mercy in this life or the next. At other times I hardened and tended towards being entrenched in my state, becoming slothful about my eternal salvation, resentful of the collapse of my own, worthless, religion.

I attempted to induce conversion experience in an emotional way as I thought this was what was missing. I imagined that God would somehow overshadow me and I would instantly be different. Several times I hoped that something had happened to me, but it always came to nothing and I despaired in misery and self pity, then slumped into despair, rebellion and worldly distraction.

I hated my condition, was jealous of the genuinely converted, blamed God in my heart for my state yet feared when I realised what I was doing.

Needless to say, my relatives didn’t know what to make of me nor how, or whether, to assist me. Two friends were in the same kind of state and we could do little for each other but we met together regularly as we had become estranged from our former religious connections being a strange people to those who still held fast to those religious externals which we found to be a useless burden.

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At this time, in 1968, I was invited to stay for a week and visit a gathering in Belmont Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex where Mr Metcalfe preached. At the very first meeting - a Sunday morning - Mr Metcalfe had no liberty to preach and he said that all should search their hearts as to the reason. Since I felt it was because I was hardening my heart against being converted, and since by the next meeting I had experienced no kind of change, I walked in the street outside rather than affect other people and stop another meeting.

Later, when I saw John Metcalfe personally, he said two things to me which struck my soul. The first was, "You know he died for you, don't you?" and the second was in prayer when he prayed, "that Nigel would deny Thee no longer the heart that Thou longest for."

I did not understand, at the time, how these things could be, since, as to the first, I had shut myself out of the Saviour's death by theological barriers of my own confused making and, as to the second, it was a strange thing to me that the Lord Jesus Christ should *want* my heart and that he should want *my* heart.

I continued in a grey misery and an intellectual tangle until, despairing, broken, and utterly miserable I went on my knees and pleaded for mercy because of the Lord Jesus Christ. For what was the first time in my life I experienced a sense of peace and a sense that the Lord Jesus looked on me with compassion.

Through a belief that, after being converted, one was immediately made perfect in the flesh, and finding I was definitely not, I soon doubted but received encouragement from Psalm 103:8 "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to

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anger and plenteous in mercy". Then I went upon my knees again and found peace.

In 1969, about April, I heard Mr Metcalfe preach again at The Tent Hall in Glasgow, which was, unusually, filled with people drawn to his preaching. He preached on Isaiah 53:10 and 11. Then I saw the value of the offering that Christ made for the sins of his people in suffering for them and at that meeting I lifted my heart to God and made Christ's soul an offering, in a sensible appreciation that only this could appease God's righteous anger against my sins.

[Note:2012: John Metcalfe had driven me to one of this series of meetings and in the car on the way to the meeting he said he would - very unusually for him - make an appeal. He told me it would do my soul good to go forward. However I was too afraid and too unprepared, at that time, to publicly go forward and was afraid I would be expected to say things that I was not ready, yet, to say. I also felt, wrongly, that it would be hypocritical as I had not yet made a proper testimony at school.]

I have always regretted not responding to John Metcalfe's invitation at that time as it would have been a fitting end to my time in Glasgow and would have, properly and publicly, acknowledged John Metcalfe's part in my conversion before a congregation of several hundreds in that historic building.]

When I left school I moved to Tyler's Green where a number were gathered under John Metcalfe's ministry. I moved because I had heard nobody else who could preach the gospel of salvation experimentally in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nor could I find further instruction about the Lord Jesus Christ and his death in such clear doctrinal terms.

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Nor, either, could I find a group of people so in the power of salvation as these who were knit together in one under the sound of the gospel.

I was heartily received by minister and congregation and have been almost three years under the preaching of the gospel and in heart union with those who have found salvation and who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though I would have gone back and though I am so weak, yet, wonderfully, I have been kept and led in the truth. Under the preaching and teaching of the gospel I have found that God is Light and those things lit up - treacherous ways, man pleasing ways, off-centre ulterior motives in religion, the "secrets of men" - are not only lit up but dealt with, in spiritual exercise, in a way which was never so while I was in the dark.

While I realise that there is much I don't know, and more that I haven't experienced and so much of Canaan not yet trodden on, and so much of the world and its religion still in me, yet I am enabled, under the clear declaration of the truth, to lay my immortal soul more and more in trust upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today and for ever.

I am enabled to look more and more to him who has swallowed up all the sufferings due to my sins, and all God's wrath against my person and state, to the one who, in his immense Person, has brought me to God and the Father by his precious, worthy blood.

Nigel Johnstone.

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August 2012

This testimony was given by myself to John Metcalfe, personally, in 1972 and I heard nothing more about it until, in 1991, I realised that he had edited it and published it in a book published by the John Metcalfe Publishing Trust.

I respect John Metcalfe's editing and I have tried to change as little as possible, but felt some things required some adjustment.

This has remained my testimony for forty years.
I have stuck to it and still do - all of it.

This month I have been obliged to write, openly, of John Metcalfe's behaviour over the past few years and have sent that open letter to him and to five men who have sojourned with him for fifty or so years about certain matters which grieve me, but I have written of John Metcalfe as a brother, not as an enemy.

This month, also, I publish this testimony again, but now under my own company - Belmont Publications.

And this month Belmont Publications publishes three books I have written - "Nailed to the Cross", from Colossians; "The Beginning of the Gospel", from Mark; and "Redemption and Restoration".

As a separate issue, I also differ from Mr John Metcalfe's writings on the meaning of the words *tw staurw*, *agora*, *luo* and *allasso*. And I therefore diverge from him on *agorazo*, *exagorazo*, *apoluo* and *katallasso*. Thus I diverge even further on the words *apokatallasso*, *apokatastasis* and *apolutrosis*. My

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books Nailed to the Cross, also Redemption and Restoration show these matters.

But I yet treat John Metcalfe as a brother, not an enemy. Grieved as I am that he has, I believe, diverged from the New Testament, and grieved as I am that it is I, not his companions - my elders - who must admonish him, nevertheless I must do it, not for any personal reasons - for I have none - but for the sake of a rising generation which will, I am certain, see dreadful and unprecedented times.

My bible tells me of these times; my eyes and ears tell me of these times; my dreams tell me of these times.

These things are almost upon us and time is short. There is no time left.

For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy;
Now will I arise, saith the Lord.

Nigel Johnstone

Malvern, august 2012.