

Beginning A New Life

July was an eventful month. I've related my first real date with Margaret. In the next post, I'm going to ask Margaret to tell her own story of what brought her to L'Abri and to faith in Jesus Christ.

In July I also enjoyed an amazing day off. I was asked to be a groomsman for the wedding of Roy and Jane, students at L'Abri. Jane's dad had provided them with a rental car for the week leading up to the wedding. Roy, some other friends and I piled into the car and drove to St. Nicholas. From there, we took train to the village of Zermatt, where no motor vehicles are allowed. We rode a cable car up from Zermatt to the highest station at the foot of the Matterhorn. We guys all took our shirts off and played in the snow on a hot summer day! Returning to Zermatt, we found the townsfolk in beautiful traditional costumes assembling for a parade.

One of the friends with us from L'Abri was a talented photographer, Sylvester Jacobs. Sylvester, an African American who grew up in Oklahoma in the Jim Crow era. He wrote a book, *Born Black*, which is a candid account of his experiences. After a stint in the US Army, he emigrated to England, where he honed his photography skills. Syl had also become a committed Christian. Two years later, Syl would produce a book of photographs of the L'Abri community—*Portrait of a Shelter*. It was a delight to watch Syl dancing through the folk festival taking roll after roll of pictures. He later gave me a print of one of his photos as a memento of that time together. I have treasured it over the years. It is reproduced here with his permission.



This is my amateur photo showing that day in color:



Roy and Jane's wedding was a spectacular event. You can find photos of the wedding in *Portrait of a Shelter*. It was held in a beautiful candle-lit chapel (parts of which date to the 12th century) in St. Sulpice on the shores of Lake Geneva. Dr. Schaeffer conducted the ceremony. His wedding sermon presented the similarity of the marriage relationship to the relationship of Christ and the Church. Following the ceremony we all piled onto one of the marvelous lake steamboats and spent several hours eating, drinking, and talking while cruising on Lake Geneva.

By far the most significant event for me in July was entrusting myself to Jesus Christ. I did not record the exact date, but the events of the day are etched in my mind. I was becoming increasingly convinced of the Truth as proclaimed in the Bible. I had arrived at L'Abri three months earlier, certain that a synthesis between Christianity and Eastern religions was possible. My study of the Bible had convinced me that those who sought to reconcile the teachings of Jesus and Buddha (as I had) relied on a few seeming similarities based on a vast oversimplification of each system of belief.

I had come to realize that a fair reading of both the Christian and Buddhist texts revealed irreconcilable differences regarding absolutely foundational issues. Such as? Here is a short list: the nature of reality, the existence or non-existence of God, the core problem of human existence and the solution to that problem, the goal of human life (why are we here?), the reality and nature of an afterlife, and the understanding of the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Not trivial matters! In particular, the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ to be the only path to the Father (which first set me on the road to L'Abri) had become impossible for me to reinterpret or ignore.

I was seeing daily evidence of the power of the Gospel (literally the Good News about Jesus Christ) in individuals and in the life of the L'Abri community. I remember praying at the start of that day in July, "Lord, if you are real, please show me today." What did I expect to happen? A message in the clouds? A message in a bottle? I really didn't know. What actually happened to convince me of God's reality? Well, in a sense, *nothing* out of the ordinary! Through the course of the day, several people stopped to greet me and ask me how I was processing what I was learning. Their genuine interest and concern made a powerful impact on me!

Based on study, asking what may have seemed to patient workers like endless questions, deep conversations one-on-one and around dinner tables, it hit me: God really didn't owe me further proof than what I had found in His Word and the community of His people. My "back was up against the wall" and any excuses I could think of to continue hesitating giving my life to Christ seemed flimsy. By "coincidence," I had an appointment with Birdie later the same day. I knocked at the door of her chalet, and she invited me in. She looked at me and said, "You're ready, aren't you?" She reviewed my understanding of my sin and guilt before a holy God and the work that Jesus Christ had accomplished by His life, death, and resurrection. She then led me in a simple prayer of repentance and faith. It was then that Birdie did something that was so wise. She asked me if I had brought any items of religious significance with me from India and Nepal.

I did, in fact, have a fairly valuable hand-painted Tibetan thangka depicting the Buddhist wheel of life. When I bought it, I was told that it had hung in a Tibetan temple. It depicted the Buddhist view of the universe and path to enlightenment. It was the Buddhist equivalent to a evangelistic tract! Birdie asked me to go and get it. When I returned, she had a fire going in her fireplace. She said, "You know what to do." I gladly consigned the thangka to the flames and immediately had a deep sense of freedom and relief. Birdie's deep spiritual wisdom was revealed in her encouraging me to burn that thangka. The Book of Acts records how the new Christians in Ephesus burned their valuable books of magic (Acts 18:18,19) to proclaim they were finished with the old way and committed to the new.

Burning the thangka was a powerful act indicating that I was forever renouncing my quest to become my own god and instead submitting my life to the one true and living God. I had come

to the end of one quest and taken the first step on a much different and greater quest as a child of God. Rather than trying to save myself, I admitted on my knees that only the Living God could save me. I would no longer live trying desperately to earn His favor. Instead, this prodigal son ran into the Father's arms and, by His grace and mercy, pledged to live my new life in gratitude for His undeserved favor, love, and forgiveness.