

# *From Swinger to Saint*

**The Christian Broadcasting Network Was Not Even A Remote Dream The Day The Author, As A Nominal Christian Kept What Was To Be A Life Changing Luncheon Date.**

**PAT ROBERTSON with Jamie Buckingham**

"You are the Lord's guest," the handsome Dutchman said as we looked at the menu in the elegant Philadelphia restaurant. "God is generous, not stingy. He wants you to have the best. Order anything you want."

I was impressed. Even though I had a sneaking suspicion that my mother had asked this missionary-evangelist to invite me to dinner, I could not escape his obvious sincerity. I was used to the expensive bistros around New York, but that a faith missionary should say the Lord had led him to dine at this restaurant where the waiters wore white tie and tails was more than I could comprehend. I thought that God's people wore shabby clothes, baggy trousers, and suit coats that didn't match. I thought they ate hamburger and boiled turnips. But Cornelius Vanderbreggen certainly didn't fit that description.

Waiting to order, he began to talk easily about himself, allaying my suspicions with his charming but casual manner. He was a first-generation American with a ministry in Holland as well as in Philadelphia. He talked excitedly about

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the Reapers' Fellowship in Gelderland and about Miracle Manor in Philadelphia. I identified with some of his experiences as a Marine Corps officer in World War II and felt a sense of relief sweeping over me, for somehow I had entertained ideas that this "evangelist" would put me on the spot by standing up in the middle of the dining room to lead in prayer. Swingers, you know, don't ever show themselves to be religious.

The headwaiter approached the table. Stiff. Dressed impeccably. Pencil poised over his order pad. I glanced back at my menu, and when I looked up I saw Vanderbreggen pulling a small pamphlet from his coat pocket and handing it to the waiter.

"My name's Cornelius Vanderbreggen," he said warmly. "Here's a little book I've written, and I want you to have it."

I couldn't believe my eyes. The man was handing the waiter a Gospel tract. I was mortified beyond expression and quickly shifted my eyes back to the menu.

Glancing back at the waiter, I saw him standing there, his face set like granite. My image as a swinger was rapidly dissolving. It took all the self-control I could muster to keep from groaning as I placed my order.

Beads of perspiration were popping out on my forehead as the protection of the menu was removed and I was once again face to face with this strange man. What had I gotten into? Was my mother to blame for this? I had never had any real contact with "religious" people who did crazy things like handing out tracts in restaurants. What next?

I didn't have to wait long to find out. Vanderbreggen, with no apparent awareness of my embarrassment and mortification, reached into his expensive briefcase beside the table and pulled out the biggest, blackest Bible I had ever seen.

"You know, Pat, this afternoon I was reading the Word and ran across an extremely interesting passage. Let me share it with you."

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He pushed back the silver and the water glasses and, laying the huge Bible on the table, began to read out loud. I knew I had no choice but to sit there and act like I was listening. I could feel the moisture in the palms of my hands now, and little rivulets of perspiration running down my face. I tried to smile, but sensed my mouth had the shape of a crooked stick. I could feel a hundred pairs of eyes staring at us from all over the room while Vanderbreggen continued to read in a soft voice, accenting his thoughts with occasional gestures.

I tried to speak.

"Mr. Vanderbreggen, you know I'm a Southern Baptist, and . . ." I didn't get to finish. I saw the waiter coming. With quick strides he was advancing toward us, a dark scowl on his face. I knew we were about to be humiliated and asked to leave the restaurant. I kept wishing there were some way I could disappear under the table.

And then he was upon us. He cleared his throat.

"Ahem . . ."

Vanderbreggen hadn't seen him, or else had chosen to ignore him. He continued reading aloud from the Bible.

"Ahem." The waiter cleared his throat again. "Sir?"

Vanderbreggen looked up innocently.

"Sir, there is a lady over at the other table who is wondering what you are discussing."

I knew it. I dropped my head in my hands. Here it comes. The waiter continued in his starched voice.

"I gave her the little booklet you gave me. Can you give me another one?"

Had I heard correctly? I looked up as Vanderbreggen reached into his pocket and handed the waiter another tract.

"Certainly, brother." He smiled. "By the way, have you ever had a personal experience with Jesus Christ?"

This isn't really happening, I thought.

"No sir," the waiter said, his eyes seeking the face of my host. "But recently I've been praying that God would help my friend in the hospital. Would this experience help me get through to God?"

I was aghast. Right here in the middle of this plush restaurant these two men were carrying on a conversation about Jesus Christ!

"Of course it would. Jesus said, 'No man cometh to the Father but by me.'"

There it was again—the same verse my mother had quoted. Vanderbreggen gave the waiter his card and invited him to call him. The waiter thanked him and marched stiffly back to his post.

I don't know the outcome of that encounter, but I do know that while Vanderbreggen was speaking to the waiter, something was happening to me. Suddenly I found myself sharing some of the deep things in my heart.

"During the past year I've been reading the Bible. Actually I've been devouring it. At times I think God has talked to me from it."

I paused, waiting to see how my host would react to such a radical idea. He just smiled.

I continued. "I'm convinced God is the only hope for this world."

I paused again, waiting for a reaction. Cornelius just nodded his head in agreement.

"In fact," I blurted out, "I've decided to enter the ministry. My only problem is how to get out of business without losing everything I've got."

Vanderbreggen totally ignored my "problem" and asked, "What do you believe about God?"

I felt my nervousness return and reached for a roll.

"I believe He is the source of all power, the guiding intellect of the universe. Not only that, but I believe He has a destiny for each man's life, and that none of us will ever be happy or productive unless we are in the center of His will."

I had said it. I buttered my roll, expecting his word of approval.

"Pat, any Mohammedan could have told me what you have just said. Isn't there something more?"

Suddenly I was oblivious of the surroundings.

"Yes, there is something else. I believe Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world." I hesitated. I knew what he wanted, but I had never been willing to say it before. Now, to my amazement, I heard myself continue, "... and for my sins, too."

As soon as I said it, I looked up at my host. A slight smile was playing over his tanned face. A Bible verse I had learned flooded my consciousness: "If thou shalt

confess with *thy mouth* the Lord Jesus . . . thou shalt be saved."

I knew I had been resisting that moment. Several times I had wanted to say it out loud, but never had been able to. Now the words had come from my mouth as well as from my heart, and no one could have been more amazed than I. Yet, even as I said the words, God turned on a light within me.

All my experiences with God so far had been religious—not spiritual. They had consisted of *my* search for Him. Now I was beginning to understand His love for me, poured out through Jesus Christ. Every day for the last year I had prayed, "O Lord, in this life grant me the knowledge of thy truth and in the world to come life everlasting." Now suddenly, at

(Continued on next page)



The seven-branched Menorah, official symbol of the State of Israel.

"Pray for the peace (the Shalom) of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee!"

#### Dear Believers:

Many Christians have voiced their interest for first-hand material on Israel and the Jewish people. As a Hebrew Christian, I have compiled personal material on the subjects listed below. I have access to the addresses where you can obtain these in the interest that you may better understand the Jewish people. I will send them to any believer, just send me 25¢ for handling and a self addressed stamped envelope.

(The subjects of special interest—please mark below)

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Judaism - On Jewish worship, the synagogue and the Jewish family life.
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Evangelism - How to reach Jews for Christ today.
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Jewish News - A weekly Israel newspaper in English.
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<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Books - Most current writings on Jewish Evangelism.
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<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Maps: Jewish Migration & Middle East Crisis Maps
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Tracts: Current Jewish Tracts
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Other Material: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Great Powers and the Middle East</li> <li>b. The Arab-Israel conflict</li> <li>c. Israel's Quest for Peace</li> <li>d. Soviet Jews and Jews in Arab countries.</li> </ul>

Mail to: MICHAEL EVANS  
5321 Waldemar  
Fort Worth, Texas 76117



this moment, God was answering both prayers.

It was as if I had walked through a curtain which had separated me from God. Suddenly I knew Him, not just as God, but as Father. And I knew Him because He had come to me in Jesus Christ.

I don't think Cornelius actually realized all that was taking place inside me at that moment. We continued our dinner and talked about many things, none of which I can remember. My mind was too caught up in the excitement of the fact that Jesus was God's Son—my Master!

After dinner (he paid the twenty-six-dollar bill and left a generous tip), we walked outside the restaurant and stood on the sidewalk across from the train station. The trees in the nearby park were just waking to spring, and a warm breeze fanned my face.

Cornelius reached up and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Pat, let's pray before you catch your train." He said it as though it were the most natural thing in the world for two grown men to stand in the middle of a Philadelphia sidewalk and pray. But no longer was I embarrassed. No longer did I worry about the people who had to walk around us as we stood with our heads bowed. No longer did I remember I was the son of a Senator. Now I was the son of the King. My heart filled with joy at the thought of it.

Cornelius shook my hand and quoted from Proverbs (3:5,6) a Scripture that was to be the guiding principle for my life from that moment on: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

"God wants you," Cornelius said, "to walk by faith and not by sight. If you lean on your own understanding, or depend on man's ways, you will miss the greatest joy—walking hand in hand with God, doing together the thing He has in mind."

I awoke the next morning with a tremendous urge to blaspheme God. Even though my vocabulary had become spiced with vulgarity, I never had actually taken the Lord's name in vain. Now, spontaneously, the actual words of blasphemy

were coming to my lips.

I knew it was wrong. Turning over in bed I buried my face in my pillow and prayed, "God . . . I believe in You. Jesus, take this thing from me!"

Suddenly the desire was gone. Not only that, but as the day progressed I realized that something else was gone—my entire filthy vocabulary! I was a new person, in the words of Paul, "a new creation."

About three o'clock, sitting at my desk in my office, I leaned back in my chair and burst out laughing. I had been saved. I had passed from death into life. I was suddenly aware that I was living in an entirely new world. It was an indescribable sensation of joy and peace.

The hands of the clock moved to the familiar cocktail hour when all Manhattan stops working and starts drinking. Bill, my partner, appeared in the door of my office and said, "Let's go. Time to live."

"Bill, I am living—for the first time!" He gave me a strange look and went on out the door. I had no desire to go into those softly lit, upholstered sewers any longer. I had found a new kind of life. Real life. I could hardly contain my joy. I wanted to shout, and when I threw open the door of our living room, I did.

"Dede, I'm saved! Saved!" I grabbed her to me, lifting her off the floor.

Dede gave me a startled look and extricated herself.

"Pat, you're drunk! Both of us are going to have to start cutting down on our drinking."

I began laughing. "Dede, I'm not drunk. I've been saved. I've met Jesus!"

"You met *who*?" She edged around the corner of the room and back into the kitchen. "Um, I'll have dinner ready in just a few minutes."

I followed her into the kitchen and squeezed her waist from behind as she stood at the stove.

"I know I'm acting crazy. But honestly, something has happened to me. I've accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior."

Dede looked back over her shoulder, putting her face close to mine as she sniffed my breath.

"You *have* been drinking, haven't you?" She said it almost hopefully.

I grinned. "I told you I hadn't. It's just that I'm saved. I know Jesus."

Breaking away from my embrace and

wiping her hands on her apron, Dede set the casserole dish on the table and turned to look at me.

"Pat, I believe in Jesus, too, but I don't go around shouting like a fanatic. And while we're talking about it, did you take the Modigliani nude off the wall? I found it outside by the trash can."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you, Honey," I said. "I'm a new man. No more of that old stuff."

Dede picked up Tim and put him in the high chair beside the table. Wiping a loose strand of hair from her eyes, she sat down.

"Pat, I'm a Christian too."

"So was I—but now something's happened to me, and I want it to happen to you."

"I don't understand you," she said, frowning. "All my life I've believed in Jesus. He's always been there. In the Church, the Mass, the confessional. I don't need anything more to happen to me."

"But Dede, I know you, and you really do." I got up from the table and went into the living room, returning with my Bible. "Let me read you a couple of verses that explain what I'm talking about."

"Pat, you're being a fanatic!" Dede shouted. She pushed back from the table and ran into the other room. Tim, upset by the confusion, began to cry, and when I reached for him I turned over his milk.

"I don't care," I said to Timmy, or God, or whoever was listening. "Something tremendous has happened to me!"

By bedtime Dede had calmed down, and we were able to talk some more. Tim was asleep upstairs. Dede came back down and walked into the kitchen. I had finished putting up the dishes and was standing looking in the cupboard.

Dede stood in the door, watching. "Now what?" she asked, sarcastically.

I didn't say a word. I just reached up in the cabinet and began taking down the bottles of whiskey we had stored there. One by one I uncapped them and began pouring the whiskey down the sink. Glub . . . glub . . . glub . . .

"Have you completely lost your mind?" I heard Dede gasp. "That stuff costs money. What are you doing?"

"Sweetheart, I've got to do it," I said, watching the liquor swirl down the drain.



"I'm not going to drink anymore."

"Well, maybe *you* are not going to drink anymore, but I feel like I need a good stiff one right now, the way you're acting. Just because you've lost your mind and become a religious nut doesn't mean I have to go crazy too."

She darted across the room and tried to grab the last bottle from the counter. I beat her to it, twisted the top off, and began pouring.

"Pat, be reasonable," she pleaded. "We paid good money for that. Let me have it."

She grabbed, but I held her off, pushing her away until the bottle was empty. She just stood silently, staring at the drain.

"Why, Pat, why?" She was sobbing softly.

I wanted to comfort her but didn't know what to say.

"Please trust me," I pleaded.

"But there's nothing wrong with drinking."

"There is for me, Dede. It represents my whole life apart from God."

"But what about me?" Dede exploded. "Do you expect me to sit around this house all day and take care of the baby and then listen to you read the Bible when you come home from wherever you've been? I don't mind you going into the ministry, but all this 'saved' stuff is too much for me. If you think I'm going to put up with this the rest of my life, you've got another think coming. I'll go back to Ohio. I want my children to grow up in a normal home."

Was she threatening divorce? I partially understood her turmoil. She had never known Jesus except as a remote, mystical object of veneration. Now that He had become alive and real to me, it scared her.

That night I began something else that was to take several weeks, and was to make a profound impact on my spiritual life. While Dede turned her back on the sofa bed and went to sleep, I sat at the little desk and began making a list of everyone I had ever wronged. It was a long list, and I realized that there were probably many names I couldn't remember. But I knew I needed to make restitution, so I began writing letters, asking the people to forgive me.

The first name on the list was the United States Marine Corps. While in

service I was transferred from Quantico, Virginia, to Camp Pendleton, California. I had hitched a ride on a military transport plane, telling them I was on Marine Corps' business. Then I had turned in a voucher for travel expenses as well. I explained the best I could what had happened to me and enclosed a check to reimburse the Marines for the \$165 overpayment. Eventually they sent a curt acknowledgment. For all I know, my belated honesty may have upset the entire military budget.

I also began devouring my Bible, morning, noon, and night. I read it at meals. I read it aloud to Dede after we went to bed. Often she just turned over and went to sleep, but I read until I couldn't see anymore. As I read, one thing became clear to me: if I belonged to Jesus, so did my problems—even my business problems. So now I brought them to Him.

Three of us, all members of the same class at Yale Law School, had invested money in a business that was producing electronic components. We had borrowed \$6,000 (my share was \$2,000) to produce a collapsible electronic speaker. I didn't have the money to pay off my share, and to walk out wouldn't be fair to my partners, so I prayed, "Lord, You've got to help me. I've given myself to You, and now I'm counting on You."

It was a crude prayer, but I was doing all I knew to do—trusting in the promises of God.

I didn't know when I prayed that prayer, that on that very day God was forging the last link in a chain of events that would solve my problem. A businessman in Seattle, Washington, an ungodly, profane man, just happened to come home from work that same evening and pick up his wife's Bible. The Bible fell open to Psalm 150 and the word "organs" caught his eye.

This man represented a church organ company. When he read the verse, "Praise him with stringed instruments and organs," he read on. "Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals."

The man stopped reading, remembering. A few days before, he had received an ad from our firm advertising that our speakers were especially good on high notes. The company he represented needed some kind of small electronic

speaker that had good fidelity on high notes. The two things fitted together. He closed the Bible and called his travel agent.

The next day the man caught a plane in Seattle, picked up an associate in Cincinnati, and flew into New York. By the end of the day, we had sold him 25 percent of our business.

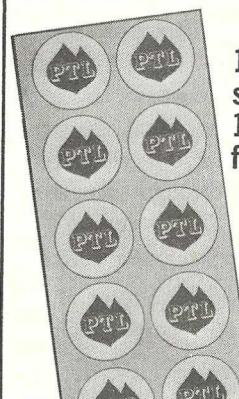
I was off the hook. I could leave clean. I didn't know where I was going, but I knew that in the fall I would be enrolled, someplace, in a seminary, preparing to become a minister for Jesus Christ. ☐ ☐

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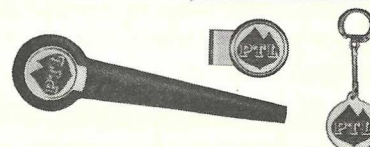


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