

John Lennon's Born-Again Phase

"Can He love me?" the former Beatle asked Oral Roberts. "I want out of hell."

1/6 – A teaser... two

I wrote this whole piece for today... then I decided to change and use it for the C&WC that is on my “to do” list for this weekend. So I had to search out another thought for this morning.

So I opened up one of my “save this for another day” files. These have sometimes sat for weeks, even years a few times, before being used, and often are NEVER used. But today, the top of the file had this little “brain teaser.” I am planning on using it in my math class as an “extra credit” problem. ... Okay. Here it is:

There are 10 kinds of people in the world. Those that understand binary numbers and those that don’t.

Can you figure it out?

The “10” is not “ten.”

“Ten” written “10” is representative of $1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1$ or is actually $1*10^1 + 0*10^0$.

But “two” when written in binary numbers – “bi” means “two” and only two symbols are used, 0 and 1 – is represented by $1*2^1 + 0*2^0$ which is “10” which is not “two” but “one zero.”

So now what does that have to do with anything spiritual?

Well, there are only two (or 10 in a binary number system) kind of people in the world, Biblically speaking. There are sinners that are headed for Hell, and there are sinners that have been forgiven and have placed their faith in the blood of Jesus to redeem them.

A lot of people want life to be like school. Some people get A’s and grades from 93 to 100%. Some even get above and beyond the max required and have 102% or 105%. I’ve had a couple students do that. They got it all AND did some “extra credit” stuff. They were “into” learning or whatever.

And there are those that are going to “play the system.” They know that when they graduate, the diploma doesn’t have their GPA printed in the corner. The star student with the 4.2 GPA gets the same diploma as the student with the 1.5 GPA. So they are going to do what they have to in order to barely get by. Just so they don’t fail. And they will party all

they can and do as little as possible. – Well, they don’t get the most out of the experience. And the effect of that will be evident later.

With God’s “school” the grading is different. His is a simple Pass-Fail grade. And it is based on Jesus having paid the price for you. Matthew 7:22-23 reads, *“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, ...²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* Just because you “say” you know Jesus... well, you have to know Him. You have to have built a relationship with Him.

After making the connection, then it starts to build... or not. Like a marriage. – Way back in 1969, Marie and I, after almost 4 years of dating and getting to know about each other, got married on a Saturday. That was just the very beginning. We are a lot more “married” now than then. But that’s because we have been paying attention to each other, building ties, bonding, all that. – There are other couples that start a marriage and then don’t work at building “us.” Sometimes they even go into a marriage with the idea already in their head that “if it doesn’t work out, we’ll just divorce.” They’ve already planned the escape route.

There is a new book out, a excerpt was written in Christianity Today on-line (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/januaryweb-only/001-22.0.html>) (I think I’ll post this at CrimsonWhite.org under “Articles of Interest”). John Lennon of the Beatles, had at one time said “The Beatles are more popular than Jesus.” After the Beatles broke up as a music group, in 1977, John Lennon professed that he had become a Christian and was trying to witness to those around him. Yoko Ono attacked his fledgling faith and managed to turn him back to the occult. He later said he was a “born again pagan.” He also said he felt like spirits would leave him and another spirit would then come and take over him. – Similar to what Jesus said in Luke 11 about getting rid of a spirit and not replacing it with the good.

The road is narrow and few find it. (see Matthew 7:13-14). *The Message* words v.14, “The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.” Don’t get distracted and be careful of those that would give you directions and things that lure you off the right road.

You are either ON the road... or you’re NOT. It’s a binary situation.

Have a blessed day.

Rich

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/january/web-only/001-22.0.html>

EXCERPT

John Lennon's Born-Again Phase

"Can He love me?" the former Beatle asked Oral Roberts. "I want out of hell." An excerpt from *The Gospel According to the Beatles* by Steve Turner | posted 1/03/2007 04:02PM

In March 1977 Yoko traveled with John Green to Catagena in Colombia to meet a witch who had been recommended to her as someone "who could do anything." Green had to accompany her to check out the witch's validity. Yoko paid the witch sixty thousand dollars to perform a series of rituals culminating in the sacrifice of a dove. When they returned to New York; Yoko insisted that they had to fly via Los Angeles and Alaska to avoid having to fly in a northeasterly direction because she believed this would bring her bad fortune.

Next came one of the most extraordinary turnabouts in John's life. A television addict for many years (it was his way of looking at the world since he could no longer walk around anonymously), he enjoyed watching some of America's best-known evangelists—Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, Jim Bakker, and Oral Roberts. In 1972 he had written a desperate letter to Roberts confessing his dependence on drugs and his fear of facing up to "the problems of life." He expressed regret that he had said that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus and enclosed a gift for the Oral Roberts University. After quoting the line "money can't buy me love" from "Can't Buy Me Love" he said, "It's true. The point is this, I want happiness. I don't want to keep on with drugs. Paul told me once, 'You made fun of me for taking drugs, but you will regret it in the end.' Explain to me what Christianity can do for me. Is it phoney? Can He love me? I want out of hell."

Roberts sent him a copy of his book *Miracle of Seed Faith* and several letters explaining basic Christian beliefs. In the second of his letters Roberts said:

John, we saw you and the Beatles on television when you first came to America. Your talent with music was almost awesome and your popularity touched millions. Your influence became so widespread and powerful that your statement—the Beatles are more popular than Jesus—might have had some

truth in it at that moment. But you know, our Lord said, I am alive for ever more. People, the Bible says, are like sheep and are often fickle, following this one day and something else the next. However, there are millions who have received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and have been filled with the Holy Spirit. They love him. To them He is the most wonderful and popular man who ever lived because he is the Son of God and His name endures.

I thank God that you see this, John, and finally regret thinking any man or group could be more popular than Jesus. Jesus is the only reality. It is Jesus who said "I am the way, the truth, and the life." So, you see, your statement that because of your hard background you've never wanted to face reality is actually really saying you've never wanted to face our loving Lord. What I want to say, as I tried to say in my other letter, is that Jesus, the true reality, is not hard to face. He said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." You said, John, that you take drugs because reality frightens you. Remember as you open your life to Jesus, He will take all the fear away and give you peace. Peace that passes all understanding.

This correspondence and his exposure to TV evangelism didn't appear to have any effect until he suddenly announced to close friends in the spring of 1977 that he'd become a born-again Christian. He had been particularly moved by the U.S. television premiere of Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, starring Robert Powell as Jesus, which NBC showed in two three-hour segments on Palm Sunday, April 3, 1977. A week later, on Easter day, he took Yoko and Sean to a local church service.

Over the following months he baffled those close to him by constantly praising "the Lord," writing Christian songs with titles like "Talking with Jesus" and "Amen" (the Lord's Prayer set to music), and trying to convert nonbelievers. He also called the prayer line of *The 700 Club*, Pat Robertson's program. The change in his life perturbed Yoko, who tried to talk him out of it. She reminded him of what he'd said about his vulnerability to strong religious leaders because of his emotionally deprived background. She knew that if the press found out about it they would have a field day with another John and Jesus story. John became antagonistic toward her, blaming her for practicing the dark arts and telling her that she couldn't see the truth because her eyes had been blinded by Satan.

Those close to the couple sensed that the real reason she was concerned was that it threatened her control over John's life. If he became a follower of Jesus he would no longer depend on her and the occultists. During long, passionate arguments she attacked the key points of his fledgling faith. They met with a couple of Norwegian missionaries whom Yoko questioned fiercely about the divinity of Christ, knowing that this was the teaching that John had always found the most difficult to accept. Their answers didn't satisfy her, and John began to waver in his commitment.

In an unpublished song, "You Saved My Soul," he spoke about "nearly falling" for a TV preacher while feeling "lonely and scared" in a Tokyo hotel. This must have referred to a trip to Japan at the end of May when he stayed at the Okura Hotel for over two months while Yoko visited relatives. Feeling isolated because of the language barrier, he locked himself away in his room for long stretches of time. At night he suffered terrifying nightmares. According to John Green, who makes no mention of the born-again period in his book, John told him, "I'd lie in bed all day [in Tokyo], not talk, not eat, and just withdraw. And a funny thing happened. I began to see all these different parts of me. I felt like a hollow temple filled with many spirits, each one passing through me, each inhabiting me for a little time and then leaving to be replaced by another."

The image was remarkably like one suggested by Jesus and recorded in Luke 11. It's hard to imagine that John was unfamiliar with the passage. Jesus was warning of the danger of merely ridding oneself of evil spirits without taking in the good. He says that an unclean or evil spirit, finding nowhere to rest, will return. "And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

Whatever happened in Tokyo, it marked the end of his personal interest in Jesus. "You Saved My Soul" said that he "nearly" fell for the TV preacher, but that Yoko "saved me from that suicide." So the salvation of the title refers to being saved from God, not by God. Yoko had again become the captain of his soul, the mistress of his destiny. Yet his life didn't improve. He sank into a depression, concerned that his creativity had deserted him and that he had no real purpose in life. The only real joy he experienced came from spending time with his son, Sean.

His life was out of his control. He worried about his health and his eyesight, about making the right investments with his money, about his personal safety. The only way out, as far as he could see, was to pay for the services of people who claimed to see into the future. But then, which ones could he trust? If the advice of the tarot card reader contradicted that of the astrologer, which should he follow? Instead of the freedom he wanted when he broke away from the Beatles, he was now completely enslaved. He couldn't travel anywhere without advice from a directionalist, do deals with anyone without knowing their star sign, or make plans for the future without consulting the *I Ching*.

In January 1979 he and Yoko traveled to Cairo, having heard that there was a major illicit archeological dig taking place. Both of them believed that ancient Egyptian artifacts contained magical powers, and Yoko had dedicated one of the rooms in their apartment to Egyptian artifacts. "I love Egyptian art," she said. "I make sure I get all the Egyptian things, not for their value but for their magic power. Each piece has a certain magic power." They stayed at the Nile Hilton and toured the pyramids, but when word got out about their intentions they were prevented from visiting the dig.

By the time Frederic Seaman became John's personal assistant in February 1979, John's main interest was reading books on religion, psychic phenomena, the occult, death, history, archeology, and anthropology. Specific books Seaman can remember him asking for included *Rebel in the Soul: An Ancient Egyptian Dialogue Between a Man and His Destiny*, by Bika Reed; *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, by Margot Adler; and *Practical Occultism*, by (Madame) H. P Blavatsky. He also listened to a thousand dollars' worth of taped lectures by Alan Watts.

Vacationing in Florida in the spring, he again watched *Jesus of Nazareth* on its by now regular Easter showing, but his reaction was completely different from the one he had had two years before. He kept joking that they should just get on with it and fast-forward to the crucifixion. Seaman, who was present with John's sons, Sean and Julian, recalled, "John began working himself up into a tirade against Christianity, saying that it had virtually destroyed what was left of pagan culture and spirituality in Europe-a great loss to civilization." He then announced that he was now a "born again pagan."

Later in the year Bob Dylan recorded *Slow Train Coming*, a gospel album born out of personal experience. Dylan told Robert Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times* that he'd recently accepted that "Jesus was real ... I had this feeling, this vision and feeling. I truly had a born-again experience, if you want to call it that. It's an over-used term. But it's something that people can relate to." Hilburn asked him what "born again" meant. "Born once," he answered, "is born from the spirit below, which is when you're born. It's the spirit you're born with. Born again is born with the Spirit from above, which is a little bit different."

Slow Train Coming was a direct and challenging album. Unlike most gospel recordings, it didn't simply praise Jesus but attacked opposition to him, whether that was religious syncretism, false saviors, or lack of commitment. It was addressed to people like John. In "Precious Angel," the first single, Dylan sang, "Ya either got faith or ya got unbelief and there ain't no neutral ground." In the title track he sang of "Fools glorifying themselves, trying to manipulate Satan."

Dylan's transformation took John completely by surprise. After all, Dylan had been the Beatles' only peer and remained someone whom he deeply respected. What made it particularly galling was that everything Dylan sang about on the album was delivered with a confidence that had always seemed to elude John. Dylan seemed certain that his sins were forgiven, his eternal security was assured, and that God was actively involved in his life.

When asked in 1980 about his response to Dylan's conversion, John was less than honest. He said he was surprised that "old Bobby boy did go that way," but "if he needs it, let him do it." His only objection, he said, was that Dylan was presenting Christ as the only way. He disliked this because "There isn't one answer to anything." This is why he favored Buddhism. It didn't proselytize. In what can now be seen as an allusion to his own born-again period, which hadn't yet been made public, he said, "But I understand it. I understand him completely, how he got in there, because I've been frightened enough myself to want to latch onto *something*." His private feelings about the conversion were expressed in his songwriting. He was particularly incensed by the track "Gotta Serve Somebody" because it opposed his view that there was no single truth. The song said, as bluntly as possible, that whatever your station in life, you were either serving God or the devil. This wasn't an avoidable choice. John wrote a riposte titled "Serve Yourself," arguing that no

one can save you. The only person you have to serve is yourself. "He was kind of upset [about Dylan's song] and it was a dialogue," said Yoko in 1998. "He showed his anger but also ... his sense of humour."

Excerpted from *The Gospel According to the Beatles* by Steve Turner, published by Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. Used with permission.

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The Gospel According to the Beatles

By: [Steve Turner](#)

Westminster / John Knox / 2006 / Hardcover

Renowned British music journalist and author Steve Turner surveys the religious and spiritual influence of the Beatles, the band that changed the history of music forever. With new interviews, never-before-published material, and fresh insights, Turner helps the reader understand the religious and spiritual ideas and ideals that influenced the music and lives of the Beatles and helps us see how the Fab Four influenced our own lives and culture.

Chapters include the religious upbringing of John, Paul, George, and Ringo; the backlash in the United States after John Lennon's "The Beatles are more popular than Jesus" comment; the dabbling in Eastern religion; the use of drugs to attempt to enter a higher level of consciousness; and the overall legacy that the Beatles and their music have left. While there is no religious system that permanently anchored the Beatles or their music, they did leave a gospel, Turner concludes: one of love,

peace, personal freedom, and the search for transcendence.

www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2003/aprilweb-only/4-21-22.0.html

The Dick Staub Interview: Alistair Begg on The Beatles

The author and pastor talks about the Fab Four's cry for Help and why no one answered it.
April 1, 2003

In the last several years, writers and academics have begun to seriously analyze what pop culture icons say through their worldviews. Books have explored the philosophy of The Matrix, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Seinfeld and the gospel according to Tony Soprano and The Simpsons.

Alistair Begg, pastor of Ohio's Parkside Church and the author of Made For His Pleasure (Moody), has been a longtime fan of The Beatles. He doesn't suggest the band had a solid theology or an admirable worldview. Instead, he feels the band is important to look at now because it asked a lot of pertinent question in its music—and too many of those questions went unanswered.

Why is it important to understand what The Beatles were saying during their era?

They were on the forefront of a generation's thinking. At the same time, they were able to articulate things and were given a voice. Without fully understanding it themselves, originally, they found themselves the mouthpiece of a generation. They were actually interpreting some of the angst, the hopes, and the fears of teenagers with mothers and fathers who didn't understand.

Did The Beatles simply reflect culture or did they shape it?

For good or for ill, they were shaping culture. That's true if you take the development of the music alone. Everything that they did pushed the frontiers out. This wasn't only true in terms of the way in which they were recording material or the way in which they were writing melody lines, but it was actually in the lyrical content as well. Think about what Elvis Presley was singing about, or about what Chuck Berry was doing. It was all about love and different things like that. The Beatles got into a whole new business the further they went.

The Beatles first said ...

www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2001/may21/35.89.html

"Editor's Bookshelf: Amazing Myths, How Strange the Sound"

"An interview with Steve Turner, the author of Amazing Grace: The Story of America's Most Beloved Song."

David Neff

March 1, 2003

Rock journalist and poet Steve Turner has made a long career of writing about the history of pop music. Book-length treatments have focused on Marvin Gaye, the Beatles, Cliff Richard, U2, and Van Morrison. Most recently he turned his attention to the history of "Amazing Grace."

As a rock journalist, what musician has been your favorite subject?

I enjoyed writing about the Beatles because I'd grown up with them. It was great to be able indulge myself and listen to all the songs. My book A Hard Day's Write told the story behind every Beatles song, and there were a lot of anecdotes about how they came to be written.

How did writing that book inform what you did in *Amazing Grace*?

I've been particularly interested in backgrounds of things. I've gone to places where particular songs or books were written, like going on the fairy tale route in Germany and looking for where the Grimm's fairy tales were collected, or going to Switzerland and finding where *Heidi* was written, and also going to David Bowie's Berlin and Dylan's Woodstock. And then I wrote *Hungry for Heaven*, which was about rock music and religion.

How does your book on "Amazing Grace" relate to *Hungry for Heaven*?

Well it helped when talking about the background to Judy Collins's recording of "Amazing Grace." The fact that religion was considered okay for rock music around that time—late '60s, early '70s—meant "Amazing Grace" seemed a natural song to record at the time. But it wouldn't have done five or six years before that.

My background in music also meant I'd start out at an advantage because I knew who the artists were and, if they were still living, I knew who to contact in order to talk to them.

You've got a wonderful discography at the back of the book. What is your ...

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The CT Review: Watered-Down Love

"Bob Dylan encountered Jesus in 1978, and that light has not entirely faded as he turns 60"
Steve Turner

May 21, 2001
Down The Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan
Howard Sounes
Grove/Atlantic, 432 pages, \$27.50

When Bob Dylan announced his born-again experience in 1978 and then recorded the album *Slow Train Coming*, I was an enthusiastic supporter of the change and was frequently called on to explain and justify it in the secular media. My argument was that Dylan had now found the answers to the questions he had so poignantly articulated to date and was a permanently altered man.

My opponents, and that included just about everyone else writing about rock music at the time, argued that it was just another Dylan phase, like polka-dot shirts or living in the country, and that he would grow out of it. Most of them hoped the phase would be brief, for while Christianity might have saved Dylan's soul, they believed it had damned his art.

From the perspective of May 2001, the month of Dylan's 60th birthday, these critics would probably consider their skepticism justified. After all, the finger-pointing gospel only lasted for three albums (*Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*, and *Shot of Love*), the apocalyptic stage raps have long since stopped and whenever Dylan is questioned about his faith by interviewers he is evasive. As early as 1983 he was reportedly close to an Orthodox Hasidic sect, the Lubavitchers.

I don't regret welcoming the news of Dylan's conversion, but I made a mistake in assuming that his life was as rock solid as the songs. Because he sang so uncompromisingly about his new life and the weak foundation of his old life, I had added a few of my own assumptions and fit Dylan into an apologetic. The best advice I got was from a former sideman of Dylan's who had converted about the same time. He said it would be safer to distinguish between the lyrics of ...