

FROM JEWISH TO CATHOLIC BY WAY OF ABORTION

By Chris Aubert

A Skeptic by Nature

I am a curious person by nature. The “what” is interesting to me, but I am often more fascinated with the “why.” Growing up in New York, for example, I was a loyal Yankees, Giants, and Knicks fan. Many people were just the opposite – they liked the Mets, Jets, and Nets. Why is that? Similarly, as a younger man, I tended to favor the Democratic political agenda, but as I grew older, I gravitated toward the Republican agenda. Others go in the opposite direction. Why is that?

The same is true for ideas on religious faith, theology, and salvation – some people go one way with their beliefs, while others go a different way. There is a “What” and a “Why” component to religious faith, as well. For me, the “What” is: I am a proud, happy Catholic convert on fire for the faith. But how about the “Why”? Why did I convert to the Catholic Church, instead of staying Jewish? Why didn’t I convert instead to some branch of Protestantism? Well, like the Grateful Dead once sang, “What a long, strange trip it’s been.”

The Trip Begins

I was born to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father. I was not baptized. My father, Henri Aubert, grew up in France and Poland before being taken as a young boy to Buchenwald Concentration Camp in Germany during World War II. He survived Buchenwald by entertaining the SS troops with violin music, and was actually forced to play his violin for troops during the death march that brought his parents and sister to the crematorium.

When the Russians advanced, 12,000 prisoners, including my father who was 14 at the time, were taken on a 16-day march to Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Warsaw, Poland. When the war was over and the prisoners were liberated by General Patton’s army, my father, like many Jewish holocaust survivors, sought a better life in America. He met my mother and married her, and I was born in New York City on May 19, 1957.

Interestingly, despite his Jewish faith, my father wanted to name me Christian – my parents eventually settled on Christopher – because, fearing another holocaust like the horrible one he had just survived, he wanted no one to know of my Jewish roots. Little did he know who an American Holocaust would so profoundly affect his son’s life.

When I was two years old, my parents divorced, and when I was 14, my father died of brain cancer. Meanwhile, when I was five, my mother, whose Catholic faith was not terribly important to her, married another Jewish man, and converted to Judaism for him. I was then raised Jewish and was Bar Mitzvahed on May 23, 1970.

Leading up to my Bar Mitzvah, we were, frankly, the Jewish version of “C&E” (Christmas and Easter) Christians – for the most part, the High Holy days were the only times we went to Temple. So, my Bar Mitzvah, regrettably, was the last time I recall

being in Temple. I don't really know why this was the case, other than to say that religion was just not a vitally important part of my upbringing.

Walking to New Orleans

I moved to New Orleans in 1975 to attend Tulane University, a very Jewish school. I developed no real religious foundation at Tulane and lived a largely secular life, typical of college students in the 1970s. Organized religion had no place in my world, since I was the center of my own universe.

I was also the king of rationalizations. I could justify anything merely by embracing situational ethics. If I took a wrong turn in life, I justified it by saying something like, "Hey, everyone does it and no one got hurt, so what is the big deal?" This excuse was used for frequent indiscriminate sex without love, guiltless "partying" of all kinds, and many other things for which today I am, frankly, embarrassed.

After graduation from Tulane in 1979, I went to work as a sportscaster and producer at the largest radio station in New Orleans. The station was owned by Loyola University and run by the Jesuits. When the regular programming ended at 8 p.m., we ran pre-recorded religious programming, mostly of the Protestant variety – Marvin Gorman, Jimmy Swaggart, and others. I spun those tapes for four hours at night, every night. I paid very little attention, other than thinking that those guys were kooks; you see, I was still the king of my own universe. NOTHING sunk in, not even by accident.

I eventually quit the radio business and entered Tulane Law School in 1981. I graduated from Tulane Law School in 1984 and ended up working at a big law firm in downtown New Orleans. My largely secular lifestyle continued without much objection from me, or from anyone else.

It's Just a Blob of Tissue, right?

In 1985, I got a girl pregnant. The girl was not a serious girlfriend and marriage was not in the cards, so she decided to have an abortion. I readily agreed to the abortion, using the same excuses that still proliferate today: "It's just a blob of unviable tissue mass," "Hey, it's her body and she can do with it whatever she pleases," and "This is America, and our Supreme Court says abortion is perfectly legal."

This abortion was such a non-event for me that I didn't even go to the clinic with her. I just wrote a check, dropped it off at her house when I knew she was not home, and that was the end of it. I am ashamed to admit that I never gave that day, or that girl, much more than a passing thought over the next few years.

In 1991, I got another girl pregnant. Unlike the first abortion, this girl was a steady girlfriend. Nevertheless, marriage was still not an option, mainly because I remained caught up in my own selfish lifestyle. We talked about what to do with this "little problem" we had created, and I happily agreed with her decision to have an abortion, for the same reason as six years earlier.

This time, though, I went to the clinic, paid the bill, and took her to lunch afterwards. At lunch, I don't think we talked much, if at all, about what we had just done. To this day, I remember the eerie silence. Although I freely and even anxiously agreed to this second abortion, something about it felt wrong, even though I couldn't put my finger on it. I also started to think more about the first abortion.

The American Holocaust

In the early 1990s, I heard someone call abortion "The American Holocaust." The magnitude of abortion had never before registered with me, and I began to get curious why abortion was such a big issue for so many people, to the extent that some even called it The American Holocaust.

I had always accepted, at face value and without much thought, society's big lie that abortion was strictly a woman's issue. I agreed to the two abortions because, as I saw it at the time, we were not killing a body, we were just exercising a woman's right to choose what to do with her body.

Why wouldn't I think this way? Everywhere I turned, it seemed that choosing abortion was the enlightened position. It never occurred to me to consider what God thought about abortion. Truth be told, it didn't matter to me what God thought because I was still the pope of my own church and I made all the rules in my life.

I may have been the pope of my own church, and I may have been a smart lawyer, and I may have been a successful businessman, but I was finally realizing that I most certainly was not a man.

Jesus, Who Is He Anyone?

By 1992, as I had matured further into adulthood, things slowly started to fall into place for me spiritually. I guess I always believed in God, but I had long been a relativist. You know, what's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me – we can both be right.

I felt this way because I had no real understanding of God or His truth. As for the bible, I couldn't even tell you the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament – I had never even read the book! I don't know if it was a history book, a fantasy, a work of fiction, or something else. Heck, I didn't think I even *owned* a Bible. When I was occasionally asked what religion I was, I said "Jewish," but that was more out of habit and history than any set of beliefs.

More amazingly, perhaps, is that I was a well-educated 35-year old lawyer and I *literally* did not know who Jesus Christ was. I did not know if He was a fictional character or a real person, what He had done (or not done), or why Christians thought He was so important. I remember being asked once by a Christian if I was "saved" and thinking, "What does that mean – saved from what?"

Having been in New Orleans for 17 years at the time, I had made many Christian friends, mainly because the south, in general, and New Orleans, in particular, are very Christian, and very Catholic, places. Through my friends, I started to develop, again for the first time in my life, a basic knowledge and understanding of Christian values.

Wanting to know why Christianity was so important to so many people, I made a deliberate effort to learn more about it. Christianity started to make sense to me, and I found it attractive. But, I couldn't be a Christian! After all, I was Jewish, and, besides, I "knew" that organized religion made no sense.

Furthermore, I didn't even know what I was supposed to do if I wanted to be a Christian. Did I have to go somewhere? Take a test? Fill out an application? I truly did not know.

The Miracle of Modern Medicine

In October 1992, I met my future wife. Rhonda was a "cradle Catholic" from New Orleans and I started learning from her a little more about Catholicism, Jesus Christ, and all the things that go with it. Rhonda is a wonderful and beautiful woman inside and out, but at the time she was also, unfortunately, what many lukewarm Catholics are: "C.W.C. –Catholic When Convenient."

Rhonda and I married in June of 1994, and she got pregnant about two months later. A watershed in my faith journey was seeing the first ultrasound when Rhonda was about eight weeks pregnant. I vividly recall pointing at the screen excitedly and saying, out loud, "I want to meet the person who says that is not a baby."

I had never had this thought so strongly before, and a flood of emotion from my two abortions came back and convicted me of how wrong abortion was. The light had finally penetrated my blindness and I now saw it!

I became convinced that abortion was indeed The American holocaust, a holocaust not very much unlike the one my father survived, or the one he feared would come again. I kept this conviction to myself, though, mostly out of embarrassment and shame, feelings I had never before associated with abortion.

Off to Rome

Our daughter Christine arrived in May 1995, and seeing her – this glorious miracle from God – convicted me even more. I was convicted because the truth was not clear: I had allowed my first two children to be dismembered and thrown into a garbage can because I was not a man and because I did not know any better. Heck, I had even paid for the privilege.

When I coupled my newfound conviction with the majesty of this astounding gift from God, the emptiness of my religious life overflowed. At one moment I felt so blessed with God's love holding my beautiful daughter, and so empty and lost at not having a clue about the mysteries of God's grace and role in my life. There had to be a bridge between

these two extremes, and my life of relativism surely was not it; there was most definitely a truth – an absolute truth – about abortion that could not be found in relativism.

But what does a New York Jew do about these feelings of conviction and religious confusion? Thankfully, my wife solved this problem for me in late 1996 when she enrolled me in the St. Peter Parish R.C.I.A. program in Covington, Louisiana. By the grace of God, I entered the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass in 1997, just one day after God gave me a second miracle – my first son Kyle.

You're Catholic??!!

Now that I was Catholic (becoming Catholic was the “What” part of my faith journey), my desire to learn about my new faith (which was the “Way” part of the journey) was growing, but I was still a novice.

As soon as I became Catholic, I learned, once again for the first time in my life, of the many different branches and denominations of Christianity. I also discovered, sadly, that many of my friends were fallen-away Catholics, and some were even subtly or even overtly anti-Catholic.

When a friend, who I later learned was a fallen-away Catholic turned hard-shell Southern Baptist, invited me to a Bible Study, I quickly accepted.

A wonderful and kind non-denominational pastor who was obviously on fire for his faith led this Bible Study. At my first meeting, I was told that the group “seeks to leave denominational differences at the door, and to look just at what the Bible says.” Not knowing any better, this sounded fair and reasonable to me, and I started attending regularly. There were about 10 guys in the group, two or three of whom were Catholic.

In the first few months of this Bible Study, discussions occasionally came up that, for reasons I could not explain, seemed a little “off.” I was hardly an expert on the Catholic Faith, but I would hear things that sounded inconsistent with what I thought I understood the Catholic Church to teach.

For example, I recall one person saying, “Matthew 23:9 says ‘call no man father’ – why do you Catholics call your priests ‘father’ when that goes directly against the Bible?” This made me uncomfortable because, after all, Matthew 23:9 did say just that. I let this comment slide without discussion or investigation.

I recall a particularly troubling day when the pastor explained that when Jesus said, in John chapter 6, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life . . . My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink,” He was speaking figuratively. I thought, “Gee, I sure don’t read it that way.” I didn’t voice my concern, though, because this pastor had a seminary degree, and, further, I did not have enough confidence in my own knowledge of the faith to discuss or debate it. I just sat in silence and scratched my head.

Later that day, I still could not shake my confusion. Why did this pastor tell us that John chapter 6 meant something figuratively when it rather obviously read quite literally? I decided that I could not accept this “non-denominational” teaching at face value, so I went to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. I quickly realized that my pastor friend had a very different view of John chapter 6 than the Catholic Church did.

Truth Never Contradicts Truth

Words mean things. The words in John chapter 6 were clear, but what was the truth they were conveying?

As a lawyer, I need to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. As a budding anti-relativist, I also knew that truth never contradicts truth. Thus, my pastor friend’s teachings *and* the Catholic Church’s reasoning on John chapter 6 could not *both* be true. Putting aside for a moment which teaching was true, it was clear to me that one of them was untrue. To put it more bluntly, one of them was dead wrong. But which one?

Since this was not an insignificant difference of opinion even to my novice Catholic mind, I started to wonder how I could leave this “denominational difference at the door” of the Bible Study, which I had agreed to do. This was doubly troubling because future differences of interpretation were inevitable. I didn’t know what to do, so I again decided to do nothing, mainly because I still did not know, for sure, who was right, or why.

As time went on, despite my revelation about John chapter 6, I kept hearing things in the Bible Study that sounded to me, as a rookie Catholic, to be so clear and so directed against the Catholic Church. My Catholic faith was being tested.

Feet Planted Firmly In Mid-Air

The phrase “blind faith” does not fit me well. Despite the apparently persuasive weight of these anti-Catholic teachings I kept hearing, I could not accept them merely because someone, who seemed more informed than I was, encouraged me. Even though I liked and respected my friends, understood *what* they believed, and presumed they may be right, I felt like I had to learn *why* they believed what they believed.

To “fish or cut bait,” as they like to say in Louisiana, I compiled a list of the many reasons my friends had given me to support their decisions to leave the Church: Call no man father; Jesus had brothers; Worshipping Mary and statues; Praying to dead people; Purgatory; Works righteousness; Infant baptism; Adding books to the Bible; Sinful popes; Dead liturgy; and so on.

With this list, I was going to figure out how, and more importantly why, my learned and faith-filled friends believed these things when the Catholic Church plainly believed otherwise, and why my friends had fallen away from the Church. I assumed that they had made the right decision, but I needed to prove to myself and for myself that the Catholic Church was wrong, so I could, in good conscience, abandon what I had just joined a year

earlier. The ultimate goal was to graduate to the “upper echelon of Christianity,” as one of my closest ex-Catholic friends called his new faith.

What a failure I was, thanks be to God. God had a different plan for me as I embarked on this part of my journey, and, gratefully, while my mind was made up, God made sure it was not closed.

The first thing I learned was that virtually all the anti-Catholic beliefs I had heard were grossly exaggerated, or, worse, outright false. My friends, accidentally or by design, had created a straw man and then attacked the straw man. They did not know the *true* teachings of the Catholic Church, and, as a result, they certainly were not proving the *true* Catholic Church wrong at all. They were only exposing, without knowing it, their own lack of knowledge or, worse, their intellectual dishonesty.

I next learned the *true* teachings of the Catholic Church on the issues my friends *thought* they understood. I began to fully comprehend – for the first time - Biblical context, the difference between veneration and worship, the proper understanding of works in our salvation, the real meaning of papal infallibility, and all that goes with the majesty of Holy Mother Church.

A momentous event in my faith walk was reading what Bishop Fulton Sheen said about the Catholic Church: “There are not over a hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church. There are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church.” So simple, yet so profound. And exactly what I had personally experienced.

The more I studied, the more it appeared that Bishop Sheen was right. The Catholic Church did indeed have a reasoned, thoughtful, and Biblically based theology that was taught from the time of Jesus on, and that had been accepted virtually unchallenged for 1500 years until Martin Luther came along.

I was finally able to see this so clearly because, unlike my friends who had chosen to leave the Church for many and varied reasons, I was not reading the Bible or seeking the truth through a smeared lens of a preconceived agenda. I was open to the totality of the Biblical and historical evidence, and when I looked at it, my glasses were clean. The whole picture of truth, frankly, could hardly have been clearer.

A House Built on Firm Ground

As I neared the end of my journey to prove the Catholic Church wrong, which, thanks be to God, had turned into a galactic failure, I came to the end of the line. In the last Bible Study I ever went to, my pastor friend was discussing baptism and whether it was necessary for salvation, or just symbolic. Being a little bolder after many weeks of study, I was not shy to speak up and say, “Yes, baptism is definitely necessary for salvation.” He challenged me that my belief was not Biblical. I knew that it was, but I was still not proficient at finding the addresses in the Bible. So, I backed off. But only temporarily!

Later that day, I went before the Blessed Sacrament to read the Catechism and some other resources on baptism. I then emailed my friend a lengthy analysis of the Catholic position with two citations from the Catechism supporting my view of baptism: John 3:5 (“Jesus answered, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being *born of water and spirit*’”) and Mark 16:16 (“Whoever believes *and is baptized* will be saved . . .”). My challenge to him was, “Explain to me why the Catholic Church is wrong on this.”

He wrote me a lengthy epistle on why, in his view, the Church did not properly understand or interpret John 3:5. He did not, however, address Mark 16:16. When I called this apparent oversight to his attention, he at first did not answer. When I reminded him a day or two later that he had not answered, he sidestepped the question twice more before eventually dismissing the question without answer.

It had finally become apparent to me that he did not have an answer to this question. This, of course, is now rather easily understandable – there is no coherent answer. At that very moment, I invited my pastor friend to lunch and told him I would not be returning to the Bible Study. Seeing this as his last chance to save me from the Whore of Babylon and the Antichrist, he pulled out all the stops. Thanks be to God, I was now ready to defend my faith with confidence in two ways.

First, I had the confidence to know, with certainty, that the Catholic Church has an answer to *all* challenges, and that the answer is profound, thoughtful, and deep. No matter the anti-Catholic claim, the Catholic Church has heard it before, and has an answer that only the church that Jesus Christ started – the one true Church with the fullness of truth – could have.

Second, I had become familiar with at least the first layer of the Church’s multi-layer teachings – the deep truth – so I could light the fire of defense to most anti-Catholic claims. It was at that lunch that I severed all ties with concern or doubt about Holy Mother Church, and became a house built on firm ground, a seed planted in rich soil. Since then, I have become a warrior for truth. Time and again, I marvel at the depths of the treasure of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and time and again, my faith is comforted with truth.

God’s Gifts Bring Me Home

God’s goodness is awesome, particularly how He can bring good out of evil. Without God showering down His love and grace on me after my two abortions, and giving me eyes to see and ears to hear, I don’t know if I would have learned the truth. Without God giving me the blessings of curiosity and skepticism, it would not have occurred to me to consider *why* people leave the Church, and I would not have undertaken my misguided study to “prove” something wrong that could not be proved wrong.

For a long time after I found my true faith, I couldn’t help but explain my conversion in extreme detail to anyone who would listen. The amount of evidence to support the Catholic Faith, I had discovered, was overwhelming and could not be challenged

logically. I was on fire for the Faith! My zeal, however, was also, at times, overpowering. So now, when asked why I believe in the Catholic Faith, my answer is far simpler: Because it is true!

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