

Amy Bentley

*The Conversion of a Catholic Nun:
My Testimony of Turning to Christ*

Knowing about Christ has been a roundabout sort of thing for me because I became a Roman Catholic after being taught the truth as a child. It was the example and influence of my dear mother that eventually brought me to the relationship I have with God today. She saw to it that our family attended church regularly and we were taught the Word of God. How thankful I am for each and every day I spent at home with her when bronchial asthma had prevented me from attending school. I was still quite young when Mother was diagnosed with Huntington disease. Though placed in a nursing home, her encouragement and guidance was still consistent to the end. In spite of the difficulties, those times continue to be warmly cherished as the years pass.

Joining Catholicism and the Convent

When relatives from out of state offered to care for me, I left California for the Midwest. It was during my sophomore year of high school, at the age of sixteen, that I converted to Roman Catholicism. Convent life held promises of carrying the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, a spiritual life, an excellent education, sisterly love, and a home forever. So, after graduation, I became a Franciscan Sister where I served the Roman Catholic Church for twenty-four years. I applied myself to intense periods of training in meditation, prayer, the Gospel, vows of religion, and physical overwork. In addition to college subjects, I studied the sacraments of the Church, the commandments of God, the Church itself, the necessity of penance, and other aspects of spiritual life. The Bible was used to show the value of a virtuous life, but it was not fully taught nor was it considered to be the highest authority. The daily requirements of spiritual reading were centered on our espousal to the Church and Christ, rules and customs of the community, lives of the saints, and vows. Because of my upbringing, I frequently used the Bible.

Observations

Not long after I began teaching school, my emphasis narrowed down to “The Church says versus the Bible says....” Often, when students and parents questioned interpretations of Scripture, i.e., proof for the sacraments, origin of their prayers, Mass, rosary, etc., rather than having steadfast confidence in the teaching of Roman Catholicism, I found myself thinking that their questions were quite valid. I believed and tried to practice II Corinthians 4:2 where it says we are not to adulterate God’s Word and that we are to “*renounce the hidden things of dishonestly, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.*” The catechism lessons contained references to see the Bible, but seldom were there Bibles available. Whenever possible, I used available finances for student Bibles and also encouraged students to request Bibles as gifts.

While practicing “obedience” in the convent, I sustained two back injuries. The result was severe pain whether sitting, standing, or lying down. There was very little relief even from traction or the back brace, which I used for seven years. Yes, the proper care of a physician would have made a great difference, but requesting a medical service was considered non-virtuous, a form of seeking attention. Of course we were made aware that doctor bills are usually very expensive. Those who did request medical care were likely to be reprimanded and admonished in front of others. (This was difficult for me to understand because the Church taught that it is a sin to neglect the care of the body.)

In time I became aware of how little inner peace there was in the lives of the sisters, how we lacked Christian love. It was common to be discouraged, to think negatively. Much time was spent job performing and attempting to control thoughts. Other convents were no different. While away from my own community for hospital lab studies, I had the opportunity to observe sisters from other religious orders. Stress, negative practices, and vows were all “on the rule book.” Those who made any effort to correct the wrongs risked being punished, and life was made even more difficult for them.

Vows

In time, I did some research on the formation of religious foundations and vows within the Church. I was surprised to learn that several religious professors actually taught that vows could not be binding in God's sight, for they were man-made. Rome has always allowed for revocations, but few know much about such things. Permission to leave the order would involve a formal letter of request to the “Reverend Mother” and “Holy Father” in Rome stating three reasons, but frequently the answer was no or was conditional.

From time to time we were warned about the danger of living in mortal sin should we ever leave. Yet, several sisters did receive dispensations. Others wanting to leave could not. They either had no place to go or lacked the means to provide for themselves. Others were too ill to make such a drastic change.

Contradictions

It seemed that those in administration gloried in tyrannical authority, non-scriptural works, and contradictions. They added to and changed the Word of God by impressing upon us the importance of vows as defined by men. While they bound us to “sanctify” ourselves through good works, they failed to teach verses like Ephesians 2:8-9, “*For by grace are ye saved through*

faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” Our Church leaders taught a daily sacrifice, yet according to Hebrews 10:10 we are sanctified through the offering of Jesus “*once for all.*” It never occurred to me to question how the “true Church” could be filled with leaders who teach that the sacrifice of Calvary was incomplete.

It was many years before I realized that history clearly shows how the Roman Catholic Church denied the use of the Bible while teaching that “the Church” is infallible. It was not until after the Second Vatican Council that many Catholics, including priests and sisters, began studying the Scriptures. I adhered strongly to my religious commitments while many sisters, brothers, and priests left. But my eyes were eventually opened. I saw my Church approving of and directing its members into such organizations as the World Council of Churches and the Masons, encouraging the Irish Mafia in their support of war in Northern Ireland and the Italian Mafia in supporting crime syndicates, backing the United Nations (which misrepresents peace in the United States and abroad), influencing Congress to legislate for One World Government (for inter-dependence, directly opposed to our American Constitution), papal donations to political and social organizations and causes while many religious communities are not even caring for their ill and elderly.

Courage to Leave

While my health continued to fail, I could see that my Church was failing its members spiritually. I had partial paralysis and it was advancing. It was, indeed, a very difficult task to hobble about on crutches. In serious consideration of my situation, I pondered deeply the advice of one priest, “If you have a bad investment, do you continue with it?” I watched how others adjusted after leaving. Many of them also left the Church. I wondered if breaking my vows would also mean spiritual death for me?

Finally, in August of 1973, I did leave, but I remained within the Church, studying Scripture and comparing various churches and cults. I was concerned for Rome and hoped that somehow I could have a small part in a change from within. The more I studied, however, the more clearly I could see the radical difference between my Church and the fundamental truths of the written Word of God.

The Holy Spirit began to work in my thinking as I listened to Christian programs, read tracts, and met a few of my brother’s Baptist friends. As it turned out, I had three appointments a week with my chiropractor, a non-practicing Catholic who was searching for the truth. When I made known to him my past position as a “religious” teacher and counselor in the parochial schools, these sessions turned out us reading and comparing Bibles, along with my treatments. I learned that this sincere man had studied with the Jehovah’s Witnesses for two years and was intent upon going over to them. He was concerned with giving his two teenage daughters a better example and exposure to God's Word, something the Catholic school was not providing.

Back to Biblical Truth

As it turned out, he never did join them. He accepted an invitation to my brother's church for a special program and then returned the following Sunday for a regular service, which he continually praised with an air of satisfaction. Then another one of his patients invited him to a

church where Bart Brewer, a former priest from *Mission To Catholics*, was the special speaker. He brought me some of the *Mission To Catholics* literature, and then I sent for more. Within a few days, this former priest and another gentleman visited me, bringing the Word of God. Soon, they contacted me again to counsel me on trusting the Lord Jesus Christ and His written Word rather than remaining in a church that failed to teach the Bible.

The pain I had in sitting for any period held me back from committing myself to attend services. Also, as a member of two conservative groups fighting communism, I was hesitant to attend just any church for fear of getting into a liberal one. But that week the Holy Spirit worked and I accepted a ride to Mission Valley Community Chapel where Pastor Jim Mader faithfully teaches the Scriptures. His preaching emphasizes the following: the need to be a born-again Christian, the deity and incarnation of Christ, i.e., being both God and man, His coming to earth and being born of a virgin, His living a sinless life, being crucified and dying on a cross, completing the sacrifice for sinful man, rising from the dead, and that He will judge the living and the dead and take those who have been redeemed to glory and those who rejected Him into the everlasting fire. Since “*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), God has provided a gift which “*is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23).

Salvation at Last

As Sam (a former-Catholic) and Mary Mancino prayed for me and witnessed to me concerning these truths, I recalled hearing of them from my mother and the Baptist church many years before. The following Sunday, I raised my hand indicating my desire to have the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. Later in the week, I met with Pastor Mader and expressed my desire to renounce Catholicism. I asked God's forgiveness for all my sin, and I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. That day, in September of 1976, I found a peace that the Catholic Church had never given nor could ever give.

Now I have a contentment that can only be found in Jesus Christ and Him alone. He has satisfied my soul, something that twenty-four years in the convent, vows, sacrifices, Masses, rosaries, “offering it up,” processions, saints, trifle traditions mixed-up theological debates, and a controlled religious system could never begin to do. It is the written Word of God that showed me the way, not Roman Catholicism.

Some may think that those years were a waste of time or that I might feel bitterness for all the hardship in a false religious system. I can honestly say I do not feel even a slight bitterness, nor do I consider one moment a waste of time. I know that God had a purpose in allowing it all. I do, however, feel sorrow for Roman Catholics, especially priests and nuns, because they do not consistently study the Bible and do not know biblical salvation and peace with God.

Overwhelmed by Jesus Christ's love for me, my thanksgiving and praise is ever before Him. I manage even though my health is still not good. I know that Jesus Christ will always keep me close to Him, for that is the desire of my heart. Also, I desire and pray for you who read my story that you may be touched by His Spirit, that you will hunger and thirst for His righteousness, and that you will be filled as you study, believe, and obey the Bible. First, it is vital that you have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is by God's grace we trust on Him alone; He is our Lord and Savior, and God the Father is personally our Abba Father. As the

Apostle writes, *“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”* (Romans 8:16) And as the prophet wrote, *“let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the LORD”* (Jeremiah 9:24). Each one of us who has left Roman Catholicism and have come to biblical faith can testify that God personally has been, and is, our *“Abba Father.”*