

How I Became a Christian

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

First, the question is: what is a Christian? To me the answer is quite simple. A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who was sent to this earth to save men from their sinful natures, to offer them salvation and eternal life after death. God's purpose was to extend the covenant he had made with Abraham and, through Jesus, extend it beyond the Jewish people to the rest of mankind. That is why Christ's mission was so important: to bring to the rest of pagan mankind a knowledge of God and, for each human soul, a personal attachment to God through Jesus, his son.

Many Christian scholars and theologians have written thousands of pages to explain what Christianity is. And so I don't know if my definition of a Christian would coincide with their's. I am not a theologian and therefore cannot give any explanation beyond my own personal understanding. That is my humble conviction, and it has provided me with an intellectually and spiritually satisfying way to explain my beliefs.

I believe that all important philosophies can be explained simply, or summed up in a simple paragraph. If they can't, they are not true. The truth does not hide behind an impenetrable curtain of verbiage, but falsehood always does. All of my life I have had a tremendous respect for truth, for reality, for fact. I have never avoided reality. I love it too much, even when it is cruel. But I can understand those who would love to escape it.

How I, a Jew, came to accept Jesus Christ was part of an intellectual journey that started in high school, continued in the Army during World War II, and continued in college. In the Army my closest buddies were Catholics. At the City College of New York my friends were Christians and Jews. After college, I studied in France for two years. Most of the friends I made in Paris were Christians, or I should say, non-Jews. They were American expatriates of a secular persuasion. The Europeans I got to know were typically non-religious.

In Europe I visited the Cathedrals and was awed by their grandeur and beauty. During my stay in the army in Italy I had visited the Vatican and climbed the stairs in St. Peter's Basilica right into the ball at the very top of the dome under the cross. Christianity was, of course, full of Old Testament references. Michelangelo had carved that great marble statue of Moses in St. Peter's and the breathtaking statue of David in Florence. With my Christian friends I attended Christmas mass at both Notre Dame de Paris and at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Catholic priests officiating at the Mass in their splendid dress never looked particularly holy to me. The men who looked holy to me were the old men in the synagogue, covered by their prayer shawls, swaying quietly in prayer.

In other words, despite my visits to cathedrals and attendance at Masses, I was not attracted to Jesus. I simply ignored Him. As an American Jew, I had become quite

secularized and hardly practiced my own religion let alone the religion of my Christian friends who for the most part were as secular as I was. For me, Christianity provided the esthetic enjoyments for a lover of the arts. I had no interest in Christian theology or any other theology for that matter.

There was a brief period, shortly after my father's death in 1958, when I was an atheist. I wasn't proud or happy to be an atheist, I simply believed, much to my sadness, that God did not exist. I had undergone psychoanalysis during that period, trying to understand myself, and I probably adopted Freud's atheism. Most New York intellectual Jews were atheists or agnostics, practitioners of modernity and the secular life style. Jews took a liberal view of the dietary laws, ate bacon and lobsters, and the synagogues were sparsely attended on the Sabbath. It was only on the Jewish holidays that secular Jews celebrated their heritage. And it was more cultural than theological.

After Freud, I got to know Ayn Rand. At the time, I was an editor at Grosset & Dunlap, and a literary agent had brought a manuscript by Isabel Paterson to me for possible publication. Paterson, a great believer in individual freedom, had inspired Ayn Rand in her early days as a writer, and the agent suggested that perhaps Rand might be willing to write an introduction to the book. Paterson had died, and an introduction might be a tribute to a friend.

I called Rand and invited her to lunch. It was a delightful occasion. We discussed our mutual love of laissez-faire capitalism. I was a libertarian and she was an Objectivist. She suggested that I attend a series of lectures on Objectivism being given by her protégé Nathaniel Branden at a midtown hotel. Objectivism was a new pro-individualistic philosophy which Rand had formulated, with the assistance of Branden. I attended the lectures and was delighted with Branden's well-reasoned and rational opposition to Socialism and collectivism. The only problem with Objectivism was Rand's strident atheism. While my atheism was of the sad variety, Rand's was unrelenting. I truly wished that God existed, while Rand rejected anything resembling "mysticism."

But it wasn't until the 1970s that reality posed so many problems in my life, that I finally had to call on God for help. Both Freud and Rand had failed to provide the spiritual certainty I needed. But how do we find God? By simply crying out to Him whenever life's burdens seem unbearable. We cry out to our Father in Heaven when no one on earth can help us. And God, in some way, answers the prayers of the wretched and bewildered and suffering.

It is said that Charles Darwin rejected God because he could not believe in a deity that would permit his favorite child to die. But what would life be like if God suspended all natural phenomenon, including illness and disease? We would be living in an unnatural, supernatural state which Darwin's theory of evolution says does not exist. Darwin preached natural selection. His daughter died because of the process of natural selection. In other words, Darwin simply used the death of his daughter to justify his rejection of God, when in reality it was his intellectual pride that was behind it.

I never had that kind of intellectual pride. So when I turned to God, it was in the way that men seek a lifesaver when ship wrecked. You float in a hostile sea hoping to survive. It is not a very rational nor dignified way to seek God. It is more like a child's way. But atheists are more like petulant children than mature seekers of the truth. And slowly but surely I found my way onto dry land with a new belief in the mysterious power of the Creator of the universe.

But I was still not a Christian, and knew very little about Christianity. I could not really tell the difference between a Methodist and a Presbyterian. To Jews, all Christians are alike, and all Christian denominations are essentially alike. They all profess to believe in Jesus Christ.

In the early 1980s I began to write a book about the origins of public education. As a libertarian I wanted to know why and how the American people gave up educational freedom so early in our history and opted for a government owned and controlled system of education. And it was through that process of research that I became a Christian.