

WHY I AM STILL

A CATHOLIC

VOLUME TWO

**FROM ATHEIST LIBERTINE TO DAILY
MASS CATHOLIC**

by

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Ronda Chervin is a Professor of Philosophy,
writer, presenter on Catholic TV and Radio,
and a Dedicated Widow.



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ABOUT THE WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC!

A SERIES OF BOOKLETS

by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor

In the year 2016 I read somewhere that 60% of Catholics have left the Church or only attend occasionally!

I was shocked! Myself a convert from an atheist but Jewish background, Jesus, manifested and coming to me in the Catholic Church is the greatest joy in my life...from time into eternity!

How could it be that so many Catholics have lost faith in a church that offers so much?

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that suggested to me a remedy.

Suppose the parish racks had little booklets written by strong believers, such as myself, describing why we are still Catholics in spite of many of the same experiences which have alienated other Catholics! Such a series of booklets could attract wavering Catholics or be given by strong Catholics to family and friends who have left us. In this way our series was born.

So, now I address all wavering Catholics, and all those who have left the Catholic faith, and beg you to give us one more chance. Could it hurt to say a little prayer, such as this?

Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, and you want me to receive fullness of grace through the Word and Sacraments in the Catholic Church, open me to the witness of the writers of these booklets. As they tell me why they are still Catholics, please tell me why I should still be a Catholic!



*“The Church is like a great ship
being pounded by the waves
of life’s different stresses.
Our duty is not to abandon ship,
but to keep her on her course.”*

St. Boniface

NAMELESS, SHAMELESS WOMAN!

TRAINED IN AN ART AS OLD AS TIME! she served a mob of terror
and violence... her one mission is to destroy! Trading her love...
yielding kisses that invite disaster, destroy... then - KILL!



MY CHILDHOOD ATHEIST BACKGROUND



Thinking back, I imagine that my twin-sister and I were among the most alienated little children in New York City. I have never met anyone with our peculiar background.

We were the children, born in 1937, of unmarried parents who met in the Communist party, but had left it shortly before our birth and, later, became informers on the Communist party for the FBI!



In our father's arms



Both father and mother, though militant atheists, had Jewish backgrounds, but neither had been brought up as Jews – not even observing high holidays at home or

at a synagogue.

My mother's father came to the US from Russia. He was a doctor; one of the European Jews who had been invited by the Czar at the end of the 19th century, to help modernize Russia. Once arrived from Germany to Russia, he became a fervent atheistic communist. When news reached their city that the police were rounding up suspicious revolutionaries in the squares to shoot them, my grandparents, the children, and some of the Polish servants, fled to the United States.

Once established in New York City, my grandparents exulted in being free-thinking socialist Americans whose brotherhood was with all mankind.



My grandfather on my father's side was of Sephardic Jewish ancestry – born in Curacao, South America – a descendant of a Spanish family, De Sola, half of which became Catholic during the Inquisition. He was from the Jewish half, and had

migrated to the United States under a program initiated, I believe, by secret Jewish Masons, to bring young men to North America. The idea was to enroll them in professional dental colleges, so that they could eventually become well to do high status leaders in Masonic lodges. Grandfather Solomon De Sola studied dentistry.



My paternal grandmother was a blond, fragile, Pennsylvania woman who met my handsome Hispanic grandfather in the dental chair. A deeply believing Christian, Grace Geist De Sola moved up the ladder economically and doctrinally from Quaker to Presbyterian to Episcopal.

She never missed a Sunday at Church, prayed constantly for her atheistic husband, son, and grandchildren, and read the Bible night and day. She was forbidden on pain of never seeing us again to mention God or religion to us. After her death I inherited a copy of her Bible printed back in 1876 with inked messages throughout such as "someday I pray that my granddaughters will read this passage."

In spite of her prayers, my father became an atheist in his teens.

Growing up, my parents had nothing but scorn and ridicule for my Christian grandmother. She was used as a proof of how only weak and stupid people still believe in God after Nietzsche and evolution had proved God dead or non-existent.

Since my parents were never legally married, my father left us twins when we were eight years old. We saw him on Sundays with his new wife and new daughter.

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH



Fast forward: Public Junior High School English class. The assignment: write a page about what you want to be when you grow up. It had to be done on the spot. "How can I know what I want to be, if I don't know the meaning of life?" I wrote spontaneously.

Majoring in philosophy in college was my way of searching for truth. In the non-religious universities I attended, skepticism was so much in vogue that by a year of graduate school I felt hopeless. Where was truth? Where was love? Why even live? I looked for love in the excitement of love affairs, but these always ended in rejection.

In this frame of mind, Thanksgiving vacation in NYC, 1958, my mother, who never watched TV during the day and never surfed channels, turned on a program at 3 PM called The Catholic Hour. The guests were Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Alice Jourdain, soon to become Von Hildebrand. They were talking about truth and love. Spontaneously I wrote a letter to them c/o the station telling them of my unsuccessful search for truth.



This led to a meeting and an invitation to sit in on a few classes at Fordham University. What impressed me most was not the ideas of these Catholic philosophers which I didn't understand very well, but their personal vitality and joy.

The skepticism, relativism, and historicism, that characterized most secular universities at that time left many of the professors sad and desiccated. Drawn to this joy, as well as the loving friendliness with which everyone in Dietrich and Alice's circle of Catholics moved out to greet a newcomer, I quickly switched to Fordham to continue my studies.

After a few months at Fordham, I could not help but wonder how come the brilliant lay Catholics and the brilliant Jesuits in the philosophy department could believe those ideas, ridiculed by my parents, such as the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, the reality of objective truth, moral absolutes, and the need for Church-going. To my amazement these professors could prove in a few sentences that the mind could know truth and that there were universal ethical truths.

What followed were wonderful miracles that brought me into the Catholic Church at twenty-one years old. Since this narrative is not about my conversion, but about why I am still a Catholic, I

will not tell you about these miracles here. You can find in my autobiography *En Route to Eternity* or, on my web-site, www.rondachervin.com under free leaflets – Saved! Within a decade my twin sister became a Catholic, and also my mother!



My twin sister, a modern dancer, Carla De Sola



FIRST PERSONAL CRISIS



To understand my first conflict with the Church concerning a marriage dispensation, you need to know more about the type of Catholics that surrounded the Von Hildebrands.

All of these Catholics went to daily Mass. Nowadays, I would call us 24/7 Catholics. Nothing was as important as being faithful to Jesus in the sacraments of the Church so that He could bring us, some day, from earth into heavenly beatitude.

When I came into the Church, my dream was to find a holy husband. He should be someone with the personality and character of St. Francis of Assisi. It didn't occur to me that men who want to be like St. Francis become Franciscan friars!

Instead I would fall in love with an atheist, divorced, middle-aged Jewish businessman! Decades later I realized that this was because, with the loss of my father when still a child, I was desperately searching, not so much for a husband as for a Jewish father substitute!

Now Catholics are not supposed to marry divorced people. The only way to resolve the conflict was to look into whether Martin Chervin's

first marriage was really a marriage. Since it was legalized in a jiffy wedding in a border town of Mexico, was it really a commitment, until death do us part in the Catholic sense?

We spent three years working with canon lawyers in New York City and Rome, where the man I loved so much had his headquarters as an international book salesman. The canonist we had last consulted said it was not possible. This was because the Church does not consider itself justified to make an absolute judgment on the intentions of people of other faiths who marry and then divorce.

I will never forget the evening that I made my choice. I knelt down in the little chapel I had put together in a closet in my apartment. Christ seemed to be asking me to choose between all happiness on earth and Himself in His Church.

“I choose you, Jesus!” I got the grace to respond.

Three weeks later we were informed that the marriage tribunal had approved our marriage under a clause called “*in favorem fide*” possible in cases such as ours where Martin’s previous marriage had no children, and appeared to be made without a full commitment, and his marriage to me was deemed something positive toward his coming into the faith.





Our twin daughters

SECOND PERSONAL CRISIS



Fast forward to 1964. Now happily married with twin baby daughters, living in New York again, something happened that seemed to kill all my chances of happiness on earth.

I do not wish to write about this incident except to say that I got through it because the Church teaches that we have to forgive. If I hadn't been a Catholic, I think my disappointment would have led me to give up on marriage.

The Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage doesn't mean only marriages that are "perfect", but all marriages entered into as a sacrament. Of course, there are "marriages," even of two Catholics, where an annulment is granted on the basis of reasons such as something in the character of one or both that makes a Catholic marriage impossible. Examples would be bigamy concealed at the time of the wedding, or a deep same-sex attraction to the exclusion of sexual love of the partner, etc. or severe mental illness.

However, things like personality conflict, or sins against each other which can be repented of, need to be addressed not by divorce but by deep

forgiveness and, often, by marriage counseling.

Just the same, some Catholics, when confronted with such problems decide to leave the Church to seek happiness in defiance of their sacramental bond.

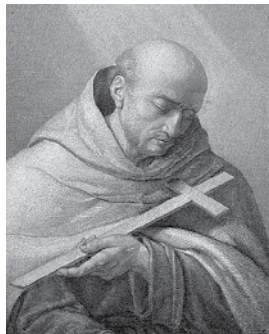
Why didn't I?

I didn't make a conscious decision about this matter. My spiritual mentors, while deeply sympathetic to my suffering, thought the remedy was prayer and forgiveness.

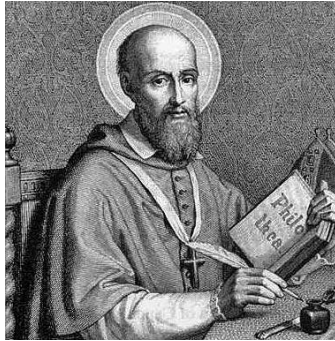
Without making any kind of conscious decision about this matter, I think God used the conflict with my husband to bring me into a much more personal faith in His love. I started reading the great spiritual masters such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales. Just the same, looking back I detect a certain pride in not insisting that we go to marriage counseling to overcome the conflict better.



St. Teresa of Avila



St. John of the Cross



St. Francis de Sales

Hindsight, I see that the conflict with my husband weaned me from a tendency to idol-worship human love. It moved me from viewing marriage as the greatest source of happiness to seeking Christ as the source of hope. Years later, as you will read in this story, when I had forgiven my husband and he had forgiven me, I could more clearly see human love less as a life-raft and more as a gift.





OPENING TO MORE OF THE GIFTS OF THE CHURCH



Being a Catholic forever and ever became an even greater reality in the year 1969. More back story: When my twins were two years old I heard of a fellowship for women designed to help women with a break in their graduate studies to go back and get doctorates.

Even though my dream was to have thirteen children and be like the mother of Little Therese of Lisieux, my husband and my mentors thought it would be very good to get a degree in philosophy so that one day I might be a professor as well as a mother. Two miscarriages made the possibility of one day working as a part-time teacher realistic.

What a good decision this was, because shortly after I started finishing up my philosophy degree at Fordham University, my husband became cripplingly disabled with late onset asthma.

By 1969 we moved to Southern California seeking a better climate and he became too disabled to work. Now a Ph.D., I took a full time job at a Jesuit/Marian University.

Now this was the time of the beginning of what would be called Catholic Charismatic Renewal. All

over the world Catholics appeared to be receiving gifts of the Holy Spirit including healing, tongues and prophecy.

My twin-sister was visiting us and told me about her involvement in this movement. I thought she was crazy! However, she laid hands on my head and prayed over me. A fire seemed to go through my whole body, and I began to pray in tongues.

The way I described this experience was that before when I prayed, it was as if I was standing on tippy-toes trying to reach God; but after receiving the Holy Spirit in this manner, I felt God inside my heart, easy to talk to at all times.

It happened that the Catholic university at which I was starting to teach had a small but ever-growing charismatic prayer group. Participating in the Praise and Worship of this group brought about many changes in my spiritual life.

One of them was this: as a convert from a bohemian and culturally Jewish background, I found the great formality of Catholic worship beautiful but also hard. As a child I had never been either silent or reverent. But at these prayer meetings the Catholics were dancing around, singing, and hugging each other.

At Holy Mass I always walked into the Church trying to look as good as possible – as much as

possible as the way I thought a saint would look. At these charismatic gatherings we often came in broken by the week's struggles and sins – rushing to the confessional but also into each other's arms for healing prayer.

Never did I think praise and worship was a substitute for the glory of daily Holy Mass where, as I like to ask: “if Jesus wants to leap down from heaven into our bodies, shouldn't we be there?”

But, just the same the informality of the prayer meeting was a form of spirituality with some life-changing side-effects. The most important for me concerned teaching and writing. Before becoming a charismatic, my goal was to teach just as my mentors had at Fordham, even using my course notes from their classes, and maybe to write a few scholarly articles.



Instead, propelled by the gift of teaching from the Holy Spirit, I came to teach and write on a much more popular, evangelical level. By now I

have been granted almost fifty years of teaching, writing, giving talks and presenting on Catholic TV and radio.

In terms of the theme of why I am still a Catholic, I love to give thanks for the great treasury of our Church. We don't have to choose between, say, the beautiful extraordinary form of the Latin Mass, so formal and celestial, and charismatic praise and worship. We have both, and many other forms of spirituality, group and individual.



POST VATICAN II CONFLICTS ON DOCTRINE



Even though the actual documents of the Council of Vatican II involved no changes in Church teaching on faith and morals, many priests and professors, in the name of “the spirit of Vatican II” began to question some teachings. Predominant was dissent about contraception being intrinsically wrong no matter what the circumstances. But equally upsetting was the way some Catholic teachers began to talk about the Eucharist not as really the Body and Blood of our Lord but more as just a symbol.



Since I was teaching ethics at my Catholic university, disagreements about contraception soon became portentous. Indeed, some Catholics left the Church over moral issues. Most others who dissented remained in the Church, but with the view that it was only a matter of time before teachings on contraception and other moral issues would evolve in the direction their dissent was taking.

My reaction to this conflict was not to leave the Church or to join the dissenters but to begin a battle in defense of Catholic teaching that would last the rest of my life. You will find the defenses I have taught in my book, *Making Loving Moral Decisions*. (Presently part of a large collection of small books called *The Way of Love*.)

Teaching ethics, as well as subjects such as Philosophy of Woman, also led me to seek creative ways to explain our teachings. For example, concerning the idea that it would be good to ordain women, I give the following argument: If you were presenting a Nativity play in your parish would you choose a famous male actor for the part of Mary? Everyone would say “no!” Then why have a woman play the role of Jesus in the Eucharistic ritual?

Once I was at a meeting that included some Catholic Bishops and a radical feminist Sister. She looked at the Bishops and asked “What has the Church ever done for me?” Spontaneously I witnessed this way: “My father left our family when I was eight years old. We were worried about having enough to eat. Now as a Catholic I have thousands of men who are called Fathers who lay down their lives to give me the celestial bread that will bring me to heaven.” Listening to this the Sister got tears in her eyes.

(See my book *Feminine, Free and Faithful*, Enroute Books and Media, for a positive description of teachings about woman and more about other controversial topics.)





A DESPERATE SINFUL EPISODE



Since this writing is not an autobiography as such, I will not go into any details here. I will only say that finding myself to be miserably lonely in spite of being a wife and mother, I started engaging in disordered relationships.

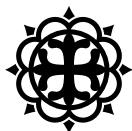
When these finally erupted into a crisis, the Church rushed to my aid in two different ways. The first was that God sent me a wonderful Catholic psychological counselor to work with me on deep-seated causes of my problems. Through sacramental confession with full repentance, and this therapy I came to a much more merciful attitude toward myself, and also to others with similar problems who I had previously judged harshly.

The second was a miracle! At the daily Mass I attended there was a group of women of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima. They asked me if I wanted to host a statue of her that was going around for home visits. One of the prayers said by the women and the recipient during a long ritual was this: “Our Lady, take my heart, and give me your heart.”

Even though I said this prayer in a perfunctory way, just muttering the words, the moment I prayed it, I felt an incredible peace. As well, many contemplative graces I had only read about in books about holy people, were given to me. I filled a whole journal book with narratives of these graces under the title of *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord* (Enroute Books and Media)



THE GRACES OF UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS

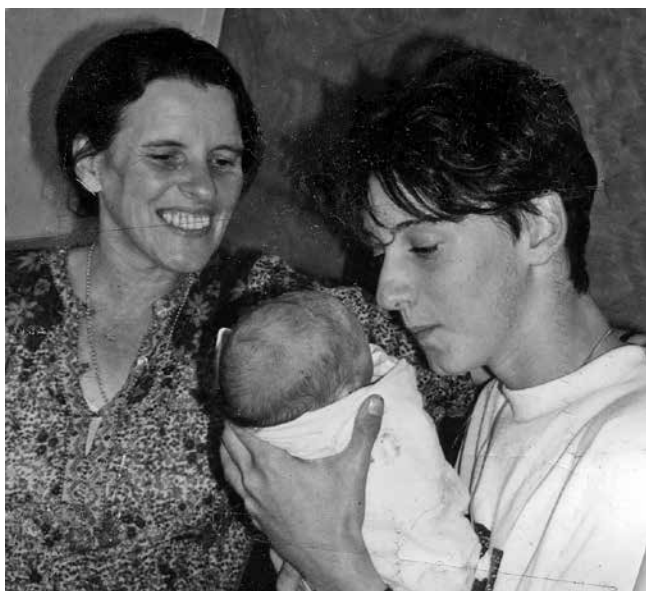


Just as spectacular as a gift of the Church was something that happened at a Healing Prayer Evening some years later. Although the theme of the Healing service was physical healing, unexpectedly the priest proclaimed to some two hundred of us the following:

“The Holy Spirit told me that there are married couples here who need healing. I want every couple to stand up and raise their locked hands. Now, God wants you to unconditionally forgive each other for every sin or hurt you have ever in your whole marriage given to your spouse.”

Now, even though my husband had become a Catholic, he was not a charismatic: so he wasn't present. Since I couldn't stand up with him, I just grabbed my wedding ring and spoke out the words of forgiveness the priest led us in praying.

This moment became the beginning of fresh new love in our marriage. It seemed as if the anger so often in my eyes when I looked at him, dissolved to be replaced by loving kindness.



My son Charlie holding my first grandson

THE WORST TRAGEDY OF OUR LIVES



Going back to the 1970's, three miscarriages after the birth of my darling twin girls when they were eight years old, I was able to give birth to our son. This boy, the child of my husband's elderly years, was to become a great joy, beloved of parents and sisters. He was an extremely merry little tike, popular at school and a fine student. He studied cello and also composed music.

Unhappily, by the time he entered college in 1990, some dormant manic-depressive and probably schizo-phrenia began to surface. (See my book, *Weeping with Jesus: the Journey from Grief to Hope* about the sufferings my son went through and we all went through when he finally committed suicide by jumping off a bridge in Big Sur, California.



I know couples who become so angry with God when such a tragedy occurs that they leave the Church. For us, it was the opposite. Every day I brought my broken heart to Mary. There was a wooden replica of Michelangelo's Pieta in the

parish Church. There I united my tears with those she shed when she held the body of her dear, dead son.

After many months of quaking agony, I got this word from Jesus:

“Your son experienced his foretaste of heaven in his joys on earth; when his pain became too great, I let him leave the earth; you will find him in my Sacred Heart.”

I didn't take this “message” as a sign that suicide isn't a terrible act, but rather as a personal confirmation of the passages in the Catholic Catechism that teach that even though suicide can be a dreadful sin, in many cases the person committing the act is mentally ill, and therefore not responsible, so we need not think they are in hell.

My husband was angry, not so much at God as at everyone he thought might have helped his son more than they had. However, his acute grief brought him to realize that the only place he felt hope was at Holy Mass. And, so the last two years of my husband's life, he came with me daily to Church. Making his Holy Communion, Martin would say softly “Dear Jesus, cover the naked soul of my son with Your Body and Blood.”

Finally, it is only in the Church that we have

hope to someday be united with the source of all Love who will dry our tears and unite us with those who have sought His kingdom. And we may not know on earth how many did seek that kingdom even if they have left the Church or have committed some great sin and then repented in their hearts as they were dying.





My sister and I, the old hag twins

AND NOW IN THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH?

Here I am now, an old widow, but still a professor of ethics, defending the Church and also teaching spirituality to urge myself and others to go for the great pot of gold at the end of the rainbow! Amen! Alleluia!



Visit Ronda's websites at

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<http://www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com/>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P8MPfgCrSk>

