



26. January 2020

“Conversion of Roy Schoeman”

Part 1

Having heard St. Paul's testimony of his wonderful conversion, I would like to introduce Roy Schoeman to all our listeners. Roy also experienced the grace of conversion and enlightenment.

As we have heard from St. Paul, such a testimony is very important, which is why he told it again and again, also as a legitimation for his ministry. He was sent by the Lord.

We know the "giving testimony" also today, when people talk about their way with God or even better about God's way with them. All this should lead to gratitude and praise. When I gave a retreat in Mexico, some participants asked me about my testimony: how was my way to find faith?

Also when I hear about people who were called by Jesus, I am very interested in knowing how this happened: to praise God for all the ways He finds to the people.

When we now hear the way of Roy, who as a Jew found the Catholic faith, I think of St. Paul, for whom it was so important that the children of Israel would recognize their Lord. He was burning with zeal for that! I can also discover something of this burning in Roy, with whom we sometimes collaborate in Israel. He, as well as we of Harpa Dei, has a great desire that the "first-born Israel" will finally recognize his Messiah.

The words of St. Paul sound like a never ending call until it is answered:

“But to you, the Gentiles, I say: It is precisely as an apostle of the Gentiles that I praise my ministry, because I hope to make the members of my people jealous and to save at least some of them. For if their rejection is reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom 11,13-15)

Let us now listen to the first part of Roy Schoeman's testimony of conversion:

“I was born and raised Jewish in the United States, outside New York City. Both of my parents were german-jewish holocaust refugees. My father left when it was still possible, a little bit after Hitler came to power. My mother was less fortunate and

she fled to France, but was picked up by the Gestapo there and put on a train to the concentration camps. But she managed to escape while she was still in France and made it to the United States, where my parents met and married.

My childhood education and my whole childhood was very Jewish. I went to Jewish religious education all the way until University. I was quite pious as a Jew, but I lost my faith at University and essentially became atheist. Then I went on to Harvard business school and did quite well there and they invited me to be a professor. So there I was at 29 a new professor at Harvard business school.

That's only the beginning of my witness testimony, because all my life I thought, I knew, there had to be a real meaning to life, and as a child I thought that would come from entering the personal relationship with God. This relationship I really thought it will happen at my Barmitzva, which is like the Catholic confirmation and takes place when the boy is 13. But when that didn't happen, it was one of the saddest days of my childhood. Then I thought, the real meaning of life would come when I got a driver's license, or when I began University, or if I got into Harvard business school, or when I began my career...

At this point I was more successful in my worldly career than I ever expected! But there was still no meaning or purpose in life!

The difference was at this point, that there was nothing more I could look forward to, that I could imagine would give my life a meaning. So I fell into the deepest despair of my life, thinking that we are just like a chemical accident that lives for 80 or 100 years; and there is no meaning or purpose of life.

It was in this despair that I was walking in nature one morning, when I received the greatest single grace of my life! I was just walking along, lost in my thoughts, when the veil between Earth and Heaven disappeared. I found myself in the presence of God, very knowingly in the presence of God, and saw my life as I would see it after death in the presence of God. I saw how I would feel about everything after I died. I saw everything I would be happy about and everything I would wish I had done differently.

I saw that my two greatest regrets after I died would be first of all, all of the time and energy I wasted worrying about not being loved; while every moment of my existence I was held in a notion of love, greater than I ever imagined could exist, coming from the all knowing and all loving God!

The other great regret would be every hour I had wasted doing nothing about in the eyes of heaven. I saw that every action has a moral content, which is observed and recorded for all eternity. Every moment has the potential to do an action of value in the eyes of heaven, even if it's just throwing up a little prayer, for which we will be rewarded for all eternity. In the same way every opportunity that we let go by will be a wasted opportunity for all eternity.

I was at the time a professor of economics and everything was about maximizing returns. I saw how I had lived all my life, looking in the rear view mirror, saying to myself: if only that hadn't happened, than I would be happy today! Nothing could be further from the truth! Absolutely everything that had ever happened to me had been the most perfect thing that could have been arranged, coming from the hands of an all-knowing and all loving God. Not only including those things that had caused the most suffering at the time, but especially those things that had caused the most suffering. I saw there was no reason to ever be anxious about anything. Absolutely everything that happened to me had been perfectly arranged.

But the most powerful single part of this experience was to come into the absolutely certain awareness that God himself, the God who not only created everything that is, but created existence itself, not only knew me by name. He had been watching over me, caring about me, arranging not only everything that ever happened to me, but caring about how I felt every moment of my existence in a very real way. He was made happy by everything that made me happy and was saddened by everything that made me sad. I was coming to this awareness of how intimately God knew me and cared about me.

This was absolutely the most overwhelming part of this experience. I knew that the meaning and purpose of my life was to worship and serve my Lord and master and God, who was revealing himself to me. But what I didn't know, was what his name was and what religion this was.

I couldn't think of Him as the God of Judaism, who in the Old Testament appears far more distant and severe than this God, which is only logical, because the relationship between God and man was entirely different before Christ.

So, as I was walking, because I was still walking at the time; I prayed to know his name, so that I would know what religion to follow, to worship and serve him properly. So I prayed:

Let me know your name! I don't mind if you're Buddha and I have to become Buddhist.

I don't mind if you're Krishna and I have to become Hindu.

I don't mind if you're Apollo and I have to become a Roman pagan! As long as you are not Christ and I have to become Christian!

So he didn't reveal his name to me. I obviously wasn't ready to hear it at that time.

But after this experience I went back home happy for the first time since childhood. I knew there was never any reason to worry about anything! I knew that we live forever! I knew that life has an infinite meaning and depth, because every moment has the potential for a moral action, a value to happen, for which we will be rewarded for all eternity!

So after that experience all I wanted to do, was to learn the name of this God. So every night before going to sleep, I would say a short prayer I had made up, to know the name of my Lord and God and master, who had revealed himself to me that day.”