

From Southern Baptist to Catholic

by JP Brown

My conversion story isn't too "exiting" per se... but looking back, it is pretty humorous... so here it goes!

I grew up in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in a pretty normal Protestant family. My mother's side was mainly all Southern Baptist and my father's side was all Church of Christ. When my parents got married, my mother persuaded my father to go with her to the Southern Baptist church (to the dissatisfaction of his side of the family, because as you know, the Protestant Church of Christ founded in 1836 claims to be *the* one and only "Church of Christ"). The one thing that both sides of the family agreed upon was politics. Both sides were *hardcore* Democrats. Soon after meeting my mother, my father converted over and in 1982, I was born and raised Southern Baptist. My father became a Sunday School teacher and we went to church every single Sunday. Never in a million years would I *ever* imagine that I would become a Catholic.

My Sophomore year in high school, our Youth Department at church decided to do something different. Normally, we would have little booklets (called "quarterlies") that we would read and follow during Sunday School. But the Department decided to make us high school kids study other non-Christian religions to make us "well-rounded" and to better defend our faith against non-believers at school. So one week we studied Buddhists, one week Hindus, and so on... until one week we came upon *Catholics*. Now, as I mentioned before, everyone in my family are *hardcore* Democrats. In fact, my grandmother even had a portrait of John F. Kennedy hanging up in her house! Being taught my entire life that the Kennedys were America's "Royal Family" and J.F.K. was "the best president of all time" – this caused a specific problem for me.

So I sat there throughout the Sunday School lesson just plain horrified. We learned how Catholics worshipped Mary, how Pope John Paul II was probably the antichrist mentioned in the Book of Revelations (and, if *he* wasn't the antichrist, the antichrist would *surely* come from a future pope), how Catholicism was the 'Whore of Babylon', all Catholics were pagans and non-believers who needed be saved and "accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior". It just went on and on and on and on. In only an hour and a half, I was absolutely bombarded with every single myth about Catholicism there is under the sun. This, as you can imagine, severely altered the image I had of "America's Royal Family". After church, (and I'm sure my eyes were as big as saucers), I frantically asked my family if what they said was true – and if J.F.K. was rotting in Hell as we spoke (as I was told he probably was unless he had "accepted Christ into his heart and rejected Catholicism before he died"). My parents assured me that he wasn't. So now I was on a quest – I *had* to prove to my Sunday School class that what they said just couldn't be true!

So I read and read about Catholicism. I went to the public library and to bookstores every chance I got. When I had the extra money – I bought every book on Catholicism that I could get my hands on. The more I read, the more curious I got. Yet, I NEVER intended on converting! I just wanted to prove to my teachers that J.F.K. wasn't in Hell just because he was Catholic! Then my Junior year in high school, a Vietnamese girl from one of my classes invited me to go to Mass with her and her family. Since I was incredibly curious from all that I had been reading, I eagerly jumped on the opportunity. I found it to be fascinating. So for about a whole year, I went to Catholic Mass on Saturday nights and Protestant Sunday School and “Service” on Sunday mornings. Finally, the word had leaked out to my Sunday School class – JP Brown was going to Mass! You would have thought that World War III had started!

Next thing I knew, I was sitting face to face with the Head Youth Minister. Although, I think he ended up getting the shock of his life. I assume his intentions were to tell me the errors of my ways, the errors of Catholicism, and to get me back on the “right track”. Far from it. Instead of him instructing me – I ended up instructing *him*. I asked, “How old is the Southern Baptist church again? What was there before the Baptist church?” And the kicker... “what about *Sola Scriptura*?” Then I went on to talk about Scripture and Tradition, Peter and the Papacy, and on and on. Of course, at this point, *his* eyes were as big as saucers! He definitely didn't expect such a response from a 17-year-old kid. Although I had *never* intended on converting, at this point it was clear what I had to do. I guess I had to hear myself defending the truths of Catholicism before I would actually believe them for myself. So I just smiled, shook the guy's hand, and walked out the door never looking back.

Finally, on Easter 2001, during my freshman year at the University of Oklahoma – I was confirmed into the Catholic Church. While at the University, as I was going through RCIA, I met the girl of my dreams (who was also a big Southern Baptist). So day after day at school she had to hear me rant about how great Catholicism was. And just like me, the more she read – the more she learned the truths of Catholicism and she converted on Easter 2003. Now four years later, to the ultimate dismay of our Protestant-Democrat families – we're two Catholic-Republicans engaged to be married this May! Talk about being two black sheep!!

If I had to recommend one book that really helped me during my conversion, it would be: Where We Got The Bible: Our Debt to the Catholic Church by Henry Graham.

For my fiancée, she really enjoyed “Sola Scriptura: The Cracked Foundation of the Protestant Worldview” CDs by Ken Hensley.

Everything on Catholic Answers (<http://www.catholic.com>) is absolutely golden.

And of course, nothing helped explain Peter and the Papacy better to our families than Steve Ray's “Peter: Keeper of the Keys” video from the ‘Footprints of God’ series.