

Conversion to Christianity

My Testimony

Ps Andrew Thinagaran

Family background

My name is Andrew Thinagaran. I was born on 27th Oct 1961 as a Hindu. I have two elder brothers and two younger sisters. That would explain my double middle child syndrome if any. For the most part, I was not very religious minded although I followed my family in whatever religious activities that they participated in. We grow up in a single parent situation but did not face financial problems during our childhood.

Early Christian influences

On hindsight, there was a Roman Catholic “uncle” who gave us children Christmas money each year. He also brought us to watch “The Ten Commandment” movie starring Charlton Heston which was impressive although I did not know that it was a Christian movie at that time. He also brought us to watch “Ben Hur” – for the record.

When I was 15 years old, I picked up a book that my eldest brother had discarded; it had his name on it, a gift from his friend. I was in the habit of reading and so read the book. Well another reason was that the cover had the picture of the Taj Mahal which is a world renowned symbol of love and one of the wonders of the world. The title of the book was “The Greatest is love.” It was not a worldly romantic book but it had a message that I appreciated. It spoke of Jesus promising heaven to those who believed in him. That was about the only thing I remembered clearly from reading that book. In later years, I would discover that the book was actually the New Testament portion of the Bible.

When I was 16 years old, a guy gave me a pamphlet as I was going home from school. I read it and it had a simple message about Jesus Christ. At the back of the pamphlet, there was a prayer and the author encouraged praying along if one believed the message. I did believe in Jesus’ promise of going to heaven. I remember praying the suggested prayer. The funny thing was that there was no statue or any idols to face while praying. So I faced a wall and prayed. This did not change my religious status or worldview. I continued going to temple and did other things that Hindus do because I did not connect Jesus to Christianity or anything religious. Till then no Christian had spoken to me about the Christian faith. Jesus was just a private and personal thing to me.

When I was 17 years old, a friend invited another friend and I to his church. It was in a HDB home (Public housing). I did not understand much of what happened there and only remember leaving that place never to return. That was the end of my early Christian experience.

Confusion leads to Church attendance

After my military National Service, I entered the workforce. About that time my eldest brother married. At his wedding I saw a girl related to my sister-in-law. I dated her for a year. Starting career and entering into a relationship, I began for the first time to ask about the meaning of life. I understood that there would be good times and difficult times in both work life and in marriage. Therefore, the immediate question that popped up in my mind was, “What is the point of work and marriage?” For all practical purposes I was a Hindu and knew only a Hindu worldview. My Hindu understanding was that life is a cycle that is repeated through rebirth till escape from birth was achieved. Escape from birth meant either extinction or merging with the eternal god which was still the loss of personal self. The end goal of Hinduism was meaningless to me. Why endure all the troubles of this life and every other rebirths if it meant non-existence of self?

I was troubled enough to ask everyone at work for their meaning in life. I was not looking for a religious answer; just a satisfactory answer. No one seemed to have an answer. The usual answer I got was to go through each stage in life and do what is expected in each stage, then meet death and who knows what after that. One guy said he will explain the answer if I met him weekly for a few weeks. I agreed. We met outside YWCA, Fort Canning. He used a book from the Navigator’s discipleship series to guide me. I had no problems with his teachings because whatever he taught was in line with that book that I had read at age 15. After 8 weeks, my friend told me that he attended a church which met inside the YWCA. He told me that there was nothing more for him to teach me and I had to decide if I would follow him to church. Out of obligation to him, I attended the church because he had cared for me by spending eight weeks with me. Still I told myself that after three times of attending church, I would leave it if I did not like church life. Three times seemed a fair deal.

Church attendance was very different from my Hindu experience of going to a temple. Going to temple, one washed one’s feet and went around the temple praying to the various idols. True one could join other worshippers at the main sanctuary to offer prayers to the main deity of the temple. For the most part, one could ignore others and have a personal time of prayer and worship in Hinduism.

Church worship is a corporate experience with the people singing together in worship. There is the regular preaching and people spend time with one another after the service ends. The focus on relationship was awesome but the unfamiliarity of Christian gathering was awkward. Fortunately, within my own stipulated three times of testing church attendance, I became comfortable with church gathering. Church attendance is not conversion. I was still a Hindu and participated in Hindu activities – even going to temples.

Coming to faith in Christ

I attended church and even got baptised in 1981. Meanwhile, there was another Muslim colleague who wanted to introduce Islam to me. He discouraged me from attending church and pointed out “errors” in the Bible and the fact that a man called Jesus cannot be God’s Son let alone God himself. That made me search for answers. I asked the Christians in church and I studied the Bible. All the questions posed to me, I answered over a couple of years. This grew my faith in Christ and the Bible. To this day, I tell people that the one who made me a strong Christian is a Muslim. After a few years, I realised that Christianity was incompatible with other religions. One could not stand on two boats. Finally I came to personal faith in Christ. Yes, I am slow in understanding.

What Christ means to me today

I believe in a Creator God; not chance evolution. I believe God via Jesus Christ and not an unknown god. I can know about this God in studying the Bible. I can experience his love as I worship him; his reality in answered prayers, his grace as I depend on him for salvation (entry to heaven; better still to live with Jesus Christ who loves me).

I believe in Jesus Christ because he is a historical figure and so Christianity is based on reality and not myths and folklore tales. I believe in Jesus because his teachings are solid and sound. I believe in Jesus because his power can be experienced in life as I lean on him daily. I believe in Jesus because his character is flawless. I believe in Jesus because he loved me enough to die for me on the cross. I believe in Jesus because his resurrection points to my own resurrection in time to come. I believe in Jesus because God revealed himself to me in Christ.

The good news to you

The good news is that you can also turn to Jesus Christ and find God’s love and promise. There is only one Creator God and not many gods. All humans of every nation, race and colour were created by this True and Living God. God created everything good and gave them to mankind as a gift and responsibility to manage under God. The troubles and turmoil that we face today is the result of our sin and rebellion against God. The Bible reveals that mankind will get from bad to worst and this is evident in the ethical and moral decay in our society today. Rebellion against God and foolish acceptance of chance evolution; seeking personal freedom and glory instead of living for the common good of all; confusing natural sexuality and promoting homosexuality; blurring clarity in favour of relativity in everything, etc. are going against God’s ways and is destroying our communities and relationships. True man has advanced in science and technology and improved his external environment but at what cost? There is lack of peace and joy within. Relationships in families are broken and marriages are troubled resulting in weaker societies.

The solution to all our ailments are not in human efforts to correct everything. The starting point is to reconcile with God and find peace within. Then we can start making peace with one another. This is possible in Christ who is the Prince of Peace. Seek God in Jesus Christ. Live life to the fullest in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. God bless you. Amen and Amen