

Roy Schoeman, was born in a suburb of New York City of "Conservative" Jewish parents who had fled Nazi Germany. His Jewish education and formation was received under some of the most prominent Rabbis in contemporary American Jewry, including Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, probably the foremost Conservative Rabbi in the U.S. and his hometown Rabbi growing up; Rabbi Arthur Green, later the head of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College who was his religion teacher and mentor during high school and early college; and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, a prominent Hasidic Rabbi with whom he lived in Israel for several months. His secular education included a B.Sc. from M.I.T. and an M.B.A. magna cum laude from Harvard Business School. Midway through a career of teaching and consulting (he had been appointed to the faculty of the Harvard Business School) he experienced an unexpected and instantaneous conversion to Christianity which led to a dramatic refocus of his activities. Since then he has pursued theological studies at several seminaries, helped produce and host a Catholic Television talk show, and edited and written for several Catholic books and reviews.

Interview starts with a minute of shared prayer to Our Lady, asking for her intercession for us.

SFC: Thank you for meeting with me Roy. So do you have much of an interest in films?

RS: Well I didn't see a movie for about twenty years. I am kind of getting into it now, but I'm not sure if it's healthy or not. Actually I'm starting to spend more time on aeroplanes and watching more movies there.

SFC: I do question it myself sometimes; especially when I hear a few Catholics are even giving up their televisions, but I do think it has a place.

RS: You know what bothers me? If I see a movie, for the next two or three days, when I'm trying to pray, images and even situations in the movie come to mind. In other words, when you're stilling your mind, those images are so strong, not only physical but even emotional violence and situations, that when things start slowing down, you're getting this almost flood of irrelevant images.

SFC: I can relate to that, but on the other hand, if that can affect you in a negative way, I think there's certainly the possibility that it can affect you in a positive way and bring you peace too.

RS: Give me an example.

SFC: Okay, *Into Great Silence*, have you seen that one?

RS: Oh yeah well, that's not really fair!

SFC: Okay what about *Babette's Feast*, have you seen that?

RS: I have seen *Babette's Feast*, but before my conversion. I have to see it again because at the time I thought it was a horribly anti-religious, but since I became Catholic many have told me it's this Catholic allegory... so I think I got it wrong. See, if you look at it not from Catholic eyes, you have all of these religious Christians that have this completely pointless, dreary, hate-filled lives, and you have this pagan epicurean who brings them salvation through hedonism. And all of a sudden there's peace and love and real Christianity because she's come in with this big feast, so that's how I saw it, but I think I was wrong.

SFC: Okay, and other films, you must have seen *The Passion*.

RS: I did, and I actually saw it with Mel the first time.

SFC: And what was your take on that?

RS: I'm very appreciative of it – I know how many conversions it has produced. Some of it I didn't like though... I did not like the pre-Passion depiction of Jesus at all – I thought it was insipid. He's raising the host at the last supper saying "Taaake and eaaat, do this in memory of me..." it's kind of that syrupy, your soccer-pal Jesus. I'm being a little cruel perhaps, but the Pre-Passion Jesus didn't have enough gravitas for my tast. Does that make sense?

SFC: It does yes, I don't know if you heard of the BBC/HBO production recently made of the Passion, I haven't watched it all through myself, I've caught clips here and there, but from what I've seen and from what I've read, they've just taken all the transcendence of Jesus out of it; they've taken out all his miracles, he's a softly spoken man, and it's a clear example of 2 Corinthians 11:14: "... if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached... you put up with it easily enough", and there is a real danger in that; in presenting Jesus as just another good moral teacher.

RS: Well this is more an artistic call about characterisation, but the last supper was like the heaviest thing in human history, and to have it look like a kind of folksy, relaxed meal... and Mary I didn't like, Mary looked drawn and haggard, and in fact Mary Magdalene looked fresher than Mary, and that didn't seem to resonate with me.

SFC: I take it you haven't seen *The Nativity Story* then?

RS: No, no I haven't seen that one.

SFC: Well a lot of Catholic critics picked up on that one, where Mary is depicted as this sulky teenager in an attempt to try and make it contemporary.

SFC: You state in your book (*Salvation is from the Jews*), with respect to Wagner's opera Parsifal that "Some see its mixture of magic, occultism, and Christian symbolism to be thinly veiled paganism; others see it as Christianity, expressed in allegory. Whichever Wagner's intent might have been, this very ambiguity perfectly suited the Nazi's plan..." (pp224). And I do think that there's a lot coming out in films now with this ambiguity, where people are quite keen to jump on any little Christian allegory that you can take from a film, for example *Star Wars*, and *Soul Food Cinema* has just published the English-language versions of the *L'Osservatore Romano* article on *Harry Potter* in which one guy is arguing for the Christian basis of the books, and one guy arguing against. Also *The Lord of the Rings*, the films anyway (I haven't read the books), I think there's a lot of ambiguity there. Do you think there's a danger in that? In expressing no firm opinion, in being too weak in our art?

RS: Well you're raising another issue there too, which springs more to the forefront, which is: is the Church too weak in its condemnation of popular culture? In the desire not to appear repressive and medieval, does it bend over backwards trying to find the pearl in the dung, and really lead people astray in so doing? And I think that's a real danger. I haven't seen the *L'Osservatore Romano* article, but if anyone is saying anything good about *Harry Potter* and its influence on children and its advisability, then I think they're doing that. In other words the Church is in the business of saving souls, and it's not a matter of an aesthetic or analytical judgement, it's a matter of, you know, will it lead souls towards heaven, or will it lead souls towards hell? And when you glamorise witchcraft, or occultism, or sorcery or disobedience, which *Harry Potter* definitely does, I mean it's designed to be a bad influence, so it's just irrelevant to find Christian allegory in it because there are souls at stake.

SFC: I agree, and I'm not sure all people get that. You talk in your book of the battle that we are in, the spiritual battle, and I really don't think that people appreciate that the movies are used as a weapon in that battle, and there's not - certainly not in this country anyway - that awareness of how movies are used for that purpose. And something like the *Lord of the Rings* films as well, they were immensely popular, and if you were to look at the fruits that they should have produced if there were real Christian messages that they were communicating, you'd be expecting mass conversions, but it just hasn't happened.

RS: By the way I haven't seen the *Lord of the Rings* films, well, I walked out of the first one, just out of boredom frankly, and I haven't seen the others, but I read the trilogy in high school, even maybe junior-high school, long before my conversion, and it did have a profoundly Christianising effect on me. And of course J.R.R Tolkien was profoundly Christian, so I guess what I'm saying is that the book shouldn't be tarred with the same brush as the films.

SFC: No, I agree with that. Switching tracks now, in 1998 the *American Film Institute* compiled a list of their 100 Greatest American movies of the past 100 years. Of these 100 movies, 37¹ were directed by men that were Jewish, or half Jewish. When the Jewish community make up less than 2% of the overall population of the USA, how do you explain that? Is it purely a cultural thing? Or is it the inheritance of a blessing from God? – "See the Lord... has filled him with the divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft..." (Exodus 35:30-32).

RS: I'm not sure I can explain that, but I'll throw a possibly irrelevant ingredient into the stew, which is the numbers associated with Jewish winners of the Nobel Prize is incredible... Jews are something like 0.2% of the world's population, and my memory is vague, but something like 35/40% of the winners of the Nobel Prize in the sciences are Jewish. So there is a possibility that one aspect has to do with gifts given to certain people, and in the case of the Jews we know why they are given. But it is also true that the film industry, from its origins in the United States, was dominated by Jewish people, quite possibly for the wrong moral reasons. Vaudeville (a genre of variety entertainment prevalent on the stage in the United States from the early 1880s until the early 1930s) had been Jewish dominated. And in part that could have been related to it's being immoral, offensive to Christian sensibilities, even though most of the customers were Christian! so it would have been much more unseemly for a Christian to be involved in it. And the film industry when it began was morally questionable, which might have made it tend towards being a Jewish industry, in part because they didn't have the kind of culture, the kind of society, that resulted in the same reservations about doing in those days. So there's an unattractive aspect to that too.

RS: I don't know if you know in America there was the League of Decency, and in the first three or four decades of film the Catholic Church had a strong influence on what was made. And they really cared about what the moral effect of the movies would be, and that's got to be what you're addressing. My understanding of the League of Decency is that everything in that was a judgement call, and they would negotiate with the film maker and say okay I'll let you show that much flesh, if you take out this vulgarity, so it was actually quite intelligently applied rather than absolute rules, which I think in the end is the way you have to do it.

SFC: In your book you mention the conversion of Rabbi Eugene Zolli (the Chief Rabbi of Rome at the time of World War II, who was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1945). I thought some time ago that his story could potentially make a good film, how do you think a film of his life might be received by the public?

RS: I don't think it's a commercially viable proposition. First of all it's extremely antagonistic to Jews; if you look it up in the Jewish encyclopaedia you'll find it's complete calumny, that he stole the money from the Jewish community, that he became Catholic to flee the rightful wrath... you know you're not going to get many investments there! But besides, I'm not sure it has enough twists and turns in order to make a good movie.

SFC: Okay so if you were the guy in charge, which stories would you like to see made into films?

RS: Well when I saw Mel Gibson, one of the projects he had going (he always has about 50 he's thinking about), but he was very interested in a film on the Maccabees, now *that* I think is a good story. Not only do you have blood and guts and gore, but you have the institutional corrupt religious authorities, and you have the kind of maverick, impassioned servant of God winning against all odds, you know there's much more colour in the story there.

SFC: Any other ideas that may be suitable for the big screen?

RS: I think Herman Cohen's story (as mentioned in my second book *Honey from the Rock: Sixteen Jews Find the Sweetness of Christ*) has some potential in it, especially the way he died. The story is basically that there was war between France and Germany, and the French prisoners were all Catholics being held in German prisoners of war camps in Germany, and the Germans wouldn't let in any French priests to minister to them, even though they were dying by the droves, because they were afraid of traitors. But they allowed permission for Hermann Cohen to minister to the prisoners because he was a German national. And he was ministering to them, and he was clearly dying, working 18 to 20 hours a day, and he was called to give last rights to a dying prisoner, and he couldn't find even a little spoon, so he used his finger knowing he was going to get the infection, and he died a few days later. So you know it has the beginning, which could be very picturesque, and then you have his hardcore conversion, and then this tear-jerking death. So that might work.

SFC: And a film on Pope Pius XII? How would that be received?

RS: Oh I'm sure that would be a sell out in the Jewish community!

SFC: Okay, point taken! But in all seriousness, there have been books written that have attacked Pius XII's legacy, such as *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* and also *The Deputy*. So there are clearly forces that are trying to attack him and his legacy. Whereas from what I've heard he did more during the war than Oskar Schindler did to help the Jewish community, in terms of numbers of people saved.

RS: Yeah he was universally acclaimed by the world Jewish community at the end of the war; people were saying what a hero he was. Albert Einstein actually said that it was the first thing that turned him towards the Catholic Church; that his (Pope Pius XII) was the only voice being raised against Nazi Germany and so forth. But that book (*The Deputy*) was all revisionist history that was planted by a Soviet agent, it turned out that the playwright that wrote *The Deputy* was a Soviet Agent, so no that's just calumny.

SFC: On balance the media that comes out of America, is that a help or a hindrance? I mean one of the primary faces that foreigners see of the West is the movies, and especially the levels of violence that come out of them, and these are being produced by supposedly Christian countries.

RS: Well you see that for me is one of the primary sources of hope, in some kind of perverse sense. I mean the ultimate hope for peace has to come from conversion to Christ. But I think you have the (President) Bush strategy, which is some kind of remote possibility, which is to corrupt the Islamic world with Western culture and get them to not care about Jihad and just want swimming pools in the back yard, and starlets splashing around! You know I call it the kind of *Dallas and Dynasty strategy*, if you could get them to lust after that style of life, then you could get them to move down the path of the West and just want freedom, albeit licentiousness freedom. And that would go a long way towards world peace!

SFC: It has potential! How about these romantic-comedies etc? Are they a good thing?

RS: Well you know what I'm thinking, there was an incident in the United States recently where the Democratic candidate attacked Bush on the basis that exports to Iraq actually increased during the Bush administration and that he's being a hypocrite etc. but it turned out that the increase in exports was due to cigarettes, so the Republican candidate said "that's great – we'll kill 'em even faster!" So that's kind of what I feel about those kinds of movies, they're a bad influence, but I'm not sure if they're bad to export.

RS: But I do know what you mean and these romantic-comedies they're extremely upsetting to me because the essence of the relationships, basically the film-makers don't know what love is, and so all of the relationships; the parent-child relationships, the courtship relationships and the spouse relationships, they're extremely distorted and they're actually... and when I talk about the violent images that affect me in prayer, I wasn't talking about the shoot 'em ups, I was actually talking about the emotional pain, the emotional violence. Did you see *The Heartbreak Kid*? which I certainly do not recommend, in which he (Ben Stiller) marries a beautiful girl, not having any idea of who she is, and she turns out to emotionally violate him, and he's portrayed as a good guy, yet what he's doing is totally conscious-less. And you see the filmmakers just have no clue, and it just makes a nightmare out of everything having to do with marriage and romance, without them knowing it. So no, I'm not such a big fan of that stuff!

SFC: I'd agree there, and in my journey into the faith one of the things that hindered me was the likes of the *Annie Halls* and the *When Harry Met Sallys* – they're all packaged in a very saccharine way, but they're not good things.

RS: Right, *Annie Hall* is extremely destructive, because of the non-relationship at the bottom of it all; a total non-relationship.

SFC: Something a little more wholesome though is *The Song of Bernadette*; I understand you've seen that film.

RS: I have seen that film, it's based on the novel by Franz Werfel. And the story there is that Franz Werfel was Jewish, he was fleeing the Nazis and he found himself in Lourdes, France, he wanted to get over the Pyrenees and get into Spain and from there a boat to the United States. He was trapped in Lourdes, praying to be able to get over the Pyrenees to escape. He was with his wife, who was Alma Mahler, who was the widow of Gustav Mahler (a Bohemian-Austrian composer and conductor) – I don't remember whether he was still alive at the time – but either way she was an extremely unfaithful wife to Gustav Mahler. And Gustav Mahler was Jewish and he converted and he became a fanatic Catholic, and so she was already a Catholic, whose first husband was a Jew and become a fanatic Catholic, and now she had run off and I guess re-married with another Jew who was trapped in Lourdes! So anyway, he (Franz Werfel) prayed while he was in Lourdes, to Our Lady of Lourdes that if he escaped with his wife, he would write a song of praise to her. And he did have a semi-miraculous escape, and he made it to the United States where he wrote *The Song of Bernadette* as a novel, which became a best-seller, and he also wrote the screenplay. And as far as I know, I don't know this for a fact, but he knew the truth of the Catholic faith, but he was never baptised. But I hope I'm wrong about that.

SFC: And a final top recommendation?

RS: Well that would have to be *Ushpizin*. See with this film I have a friend who is hyper Catholic, she's from a Ukranian family, ten children, the most Catholic family you could imagine; father's a Catholic philosophy professor, most of the kids daily communicants. She saw *Ushpizin* and she said it changed her relationship with God. The story takes place in a Hasidic community in Israel, the film was made by Hasids, and the leading couple in the film are actually married in real life because it's against Jewish law to pretend someone is your wife if she isn't. So it's a real married couple. And it shows the good side of Judaism; a tremendously deep allegiance, and in essence consecration, to God and total reliance on God, which moves the story along; it's the kind of plot-device along which the movie unfolds. And it's kind of I don't want to say a romantic-comedy, but an engaging character-study with love and suspense and so-forth, but it just so well shows whole-hearted devotion and reliance on God, in a very, very beautiful context. And really it communicates the sense, which is true, that God is absolutely at the centre of all of our lives, and is intimately involved with them as you could ever hope – so that's my top film recommendation.

SFC: A good one to finish on – thanks for your time and your thoughts Roy.

Roy has authored a couple of articles on Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of The Christ'. To view these articles please visit [The Passion of The Christ film page](#).

This interview took place during the Evangelium Conference held at Fawley Court, Home of the Shrine of the Divine Mercy, Berkshire, England, on August 8th 2008.

To visit Roy's website please go to: www.salvationisfromthejews.com

¹ Casablanca (1942) Michael Curtiz - Jewish; The Graduate (1967) Mike Nichols - Jewish; Schindler's List (1993) Steven Spielberg - Judaism; Singin' In the Rain (1952) Stanley Donen - Reform Judaism (lapsed); Sunset Boulevard (1950) Billy Wilder - Jewish; Some Like It Hot (1959) Billy Wilder - Jewish; All About Eve (1950) Joseph L. Mankiewicz - Jewish parents; Chinatown (1974) Roman Polanski - Jewish Catholic (lapsed); One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975) Milos Forman - Jewish father; 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) Stanley Kubrick - Jewish; E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial (1982) Steven Spielberg - Judaism; Dr. Strangelove (1964) Stanley Kubrick - Jewish; Annie Hall (1977) Woody Allen - Jewish (raised Orthodox); High Noon (1952) Fred Zinnemann - Jewish; Midnight Cowboy (1969) John Schlesinger - Jewish; The Best Years of Our Lives (1946) William Wyler - Jewish; Double Indemnity (1944) Billy Wilder - Jewish; West Side Story (1961) Jerome Robbins - Jewish; A Clockwork Orange (1971) Stanley Kubrick - Jewish; Jaws (1975) Steven Spielberg - Judaism; The Philadelphia Story (1940) George Cukor - Jewish; From Here To Eternity (1953) Fred Zinnemann - Jewish; Amadeus (1984) Milos Forman - Jewish father; All Quiet On the Western Front (1930) Lewis Milestone - Jewish; Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) Steven Spielberg - Judaism; Tootsie (1982) Sydney Pollack - Jewish; Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) Steven Spielberg - Judaism; Network (1976) Sidney Lumet - Jewish; The Manchurian Candidate (1962) John Frankenheimer - Jewish; The French Connection (1971) William Friedkin - Jewish; Forrest Gump (1994) Robert Zemeckis - Jewish; Ben-Hur (1959) William Wyler - Jewish; Wuthering Heights (1939) William Wyler - Jewish; Platoon (1986) Oliver Stone - Jewish father; Fargo (1996) Joel Coen - Jewish; My Fair Lady (1964) George Cukor - Jewish; The Apartment (1960) Billy Wilder - Jewish; Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967) Stanley Kramer - Jewish; Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942) Michael Curtiz - Jewish.