

A Nun's Story: From Convent Bondage to Jesus

Stories from Former Nuns

By Richard Bennett

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Bible Text: Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 2:8-10
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Announcer. If you would like a free newsletter on this or other subjects, just give us a call at Christian Answers. The phone number is (512) 218-8022, or you could email us at cdebater@aol.com. Thank you.

Larry Wessels. Hello, this is Larry Wessels, Director of Christian Answers of Austin, Texas, Christian Debater Ministries. I'm pleased to introduce to my audience a dear brother in the Lord, Richard Bennett, Director of Berean Beacon Ministries, an outreach to Roman Catholics.

Richard Bennett. It is great to be here, Larry.

Larry. For people that don't know you, you were a Roman Catholic priest for 22 years, is that right? Please give us a short account of your life.

Richard. Yes, I was a Catholic priest for 22 years. I was a Catholic altogether for 48 years, having grown up in Dublin, Ireland, and I was trained very early on in my education in what we call secondary and elementary education by the Jesuits, and then I decided to become a Catholic priest and I spent 8 years in preparation. It was a novitiate year, then 6 years to ordination when I was ordained a priest in Dublin, Ireland in 1963, and then one year in Rome, 8 years in all. Then I spent 21 years in Trinidad, West Indies as a parish priest carrying out the work of a priest. I had the best academic training you could get, finishing up in the city of Rome itself near the Vatican, and I really had a desire to bring Catholics to what we thought was a way of being right with God so that they could get to purgatory and then that they finally could get to heaven, and I was grateful doing penances and sacrifices and then I was very devout in Trinidad, baptizing babies and hearing people's confessions and doing all the sacraments. It was in 1972 I had a very serious accident where I was three days unconscious after the serious accident, and then after that time when I got out of the hospital in the sanatorium, I began searching in the Bible for what is truth. It took me 14 years of comparing the Bible to Catholicism before I realized that I was dead in trespasses and sins and it was by grace alone that we are saved. One night I got on the floor in my house and I cried out to God for faith and his grace to save a wretch like me, dead in trespass and sins, and he gloriously did that. It was about 2 months afterwards I very reluctantly left the Catholic

Church because my prayer after I was right with God by biblical salvation was that I could really love Catholics and give them the real true Gospel of grace, that it is grace alone, faith alone, and in Christ alone. But then in prayer over those 2 months after I was saved, the Lord showed me that I could best serve him and love Catholics if I left actually the priesthood and the Catholic Church and reached out to Catholics nonetheless and I did that, I left the priesthood in 1985 and reached the States in 1986, and I just prayed and prayed that I would have a love for Catholics to reach out. I thank the Lord that after 1 year as a missionary in China, I was able to start the ministry that I now have called bereanbeacon.org. It is to show Catholics the real truth of where salvation is in a person, not in any church, and it is by God's grace not by any ritual that any church does.

So this has been really wonderful. I've seen priests saved. I saw 2 priests in Poland, you know, through our ministry we have a Polish webpage besides many other languages, and of course, in English, and I thank God that I have seen God's grace poured out and that is my heart's desire, Larry, that Catholics would know the truth and that evangelicals in this very false ecumenical age would see the differences. I have a very interesting article on the webpage, "Are Catholics Christians?" and we've had tremendous response that evangelicals whose eyes have been opened in reading that article. So it's with love for Catholics and to show the truth of Christ Jesus that God would be glorified and many many souls saved, particularly Catholics to the glory of his name.

Larry. Outstanding. That was a wonderful testimony, Richard. Could you just real briefly tell us about, you've written some books and you've already mentioned your ministry but what are these books you've written and how can people find them?

Richard. Yes, I have written or edited, written some and edited others, and they have been amazing. I just thank God. Our most well-known book is "Far From Rome, Near to God," the testimonies of 50 converted Catholic priests. Since 1994, that book has sold steadily across the world in English and in other languages and it's on the third edition now. And the other book that has my heart really displayed and my love for Catholics is the book I've written about Catholicism called "Catholicism: East of Eden," insights into Catholicism for the 21st century. This book is published by Banner of Truth Trust like the book of the 50 testimonies of former priests, and I thank God for that because the Lord has used that book and brought many Catholics to himself by that book. The other book that my heart was in in editing together with Mary Hurtel(ph) is a book called "The Truth Set Us Free," 20 former nuns tell their stories and that book has been used mightily of the Lord as well and I thank God for those women, most of whom are still alive and active in reaching out to Catholics themselves and it is just a wonderful testimony of God's grace. And the other book I've written is called "On the Wings of Grace Alone." I've edited that and that is just 30 ordinary Catholics and what we call lay-Catholics and how the Lord brought them to salvation and that is an amazing book too.

How can you obtain these books? Well, go to our webpage bereanbeacon.org and just go to the folder on the lefthand side, "Books," and when you click on that, it gives all the details of how you can get those books.

Larry. Outstanding. Well, Richard, we're gonna go into showing people your videos now, here across particularly our audience on YouTube, but many people don't know that you and me go to the same church here in Austin, Texas, so it gives me a special opportunity to be around you a lot just so we can do ministry work. But anyway, I want to thank you for allowing us to post your videos on the internet through YouTube and other internet servers.

Richard. Praise God and may souls be saved and the Lord glorified! Amen and amen.

Larry. Amen.

Reaching the Catholic In a World of Compromise

Berean Beacon
presents
By Grace Through Faith In Christianity

Richard Bennett. Good evening, I welcome you to our program "Contrast," and we have a contrast tonight that is startling. It is from bondage to freedom and it is the story of a former nun, Mary Allen. I'd like to welcome you to the program, Mary.

Mary Allen. Thank you, Richard. I'm very happy and pleased and honored to be here to share what God has done in my life.

Richard. Yes, your story has been published in this little booklet, "From Bondage to Freedom," and it is an amazing amazing story so I want to go over some of that so that our precious Catholic listener or anyone who is interested in the convent life would know what it is to have lived most of your life as a nun. Was it 26 years in all, was it, that you were a nun?

Mary. Yes.

Richard. So I'd like that if you could begin by explaining something of your family background, where you grew up and what your Catholic family background was like.

Mary. Well, first of all, I was born in January of 1928 and I was the 3rd oldest of 8 living children. My mother was 46 when she had her last child, her 9th child, one child in between was stillborn. My mother was 29 when she got married and her last child was born when she was 46 so life was very much of a burden for her and she was an angry unloving woman, unfortunately, and that's the atmosphere I grew up in until I was 13 and leaving the home at 13 was a blessing for me. My father was not home very much. He left early in the morning to go to New York City where he was a clerk and he returned at night about 7 PM, and after he ate supper, he went to bed right away so that he would be able to get up in the morning. Then on weekends, he spent a lot of time sleeping so there

was really very little, if any, relationship between me and my father. My mother was the head of the household and she was very domineering on all the children, but my father also.

Now, I have 2 older brothers, one was 4 years older than I and he's 79 now, and he entered the priesthood when he was 13, which was a great honor to the family, especially my mother.

My second brother was 2 years younger and he also went away at age 13 to study for the priesthood but, unfortunately, he had a violent temper always and I'm assuming because we never did find out what actually happened, he came home after 2 years and that was the end of his studying for the priesthood. I imagine they put him out but, as I say, we never found out. There were lots of secrets in the family. And he grew up to be a severe alcoholic. He was married and had 3 children and he was very abusive to his children. My mother was abusive to us also, so when I went away to the boarding school at age 13, it was a relief for me to be away from home.

My oldest brother is a priest. He went away at 13 to study for the priesthood and he finished his studies and still is a priest on Long Island and my siblings were very put out that the only children that my mother ever spoke about was my priest brother and me. She was very proud of us but she did not say anything to me about being proud of me. It was just her, she got the glory from me to vocations.

Now it's interesting about my brother, he's in an order that's devoted totally to Mary and they preach Mary. He was instrumental in building three shrines to Mary: one on Long Island; one in Connecticut; and one in Ephesus, Turkey. And I visited Ephesus, Turkey a number of years ago and told the group that I was with that my brother, there already was a shrine there when he was sent to Ephesus, but he added to the shrine and when I went to Turkey with a group of Christians just a few years ago, I asked them to pray for his salvation.

At age 13, I then went into the convent boarding school for my high school studies. I needed to be a good girl and bring glory to my parents. At that time, parents who had children in the religious life, especially the priesthood, were considered specially blessed by God, even guaranteed heaven. That's really what my mother thought so she was really very happy about it. My father never expressed anything one way or the other. He originally had been a Lutheran before he married my mother, but my mother refused to marry anyone but a Catholic so he turned Catholic when he married her.

Richard. For those watching, if you are not Catholic you might wonder how somebody would leave age 13 to become a priest. Well, that was when we had minor seminaries where people could go in at age 13 or 14. Nowadays, people usually leave to become a priest after high school but in the olden days, that was fairly common and not only here in the United States but particularly in Europe where I am from, basically being from Ireland and, of course, having been a priest myself for 22 years, a Dominican for 30 years.

Can you explain what life at the age of 13 and going into this boarding school with the nuns, what life was like during those days, Mary?

Mary. Well, for me it was a good life. I got along very well with the girls in my class. I was in 2 separate places, one was on Long Island close to my home, and the other was 100 miles out on Long Island. I spent my first year close to home and the last 3 years way out on Long Island. When I was close to home, my brother was only about 15 miles away so my mother would pick me up on a Sunday and drive me to Bay Shore where my brother was and then she'd bring me back. Other than that, she never visited me and when I was way out on Long Island, she only came out twice in 3 years to visit.

Richard. Can you explain actually how you went into the convent itself and began the novitiate?

Mary. Oh, I wanted to say something about the high school that I forgot. There was a fairly young priest, I guess he was about 40, who was a chaplain out there and the nuns picked one of the senior girls to bring in his meals where he ate in a special little alcove in this building, and then also at night once a week that same girl would manicure his nails in his room at night. When I became a senior, I replaced the girl who was ahead of me and I did the nails and then I was in his room at night with him doing his nails. One night, he started to kiss me and I became very frightened. I was only 14 at that time and very naively I said to him, "Are you able to kiss me? Are you allowed to kiss me?" So he did not continue. I guess he saw that I was frightened and then when I went home, we went home Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, I was home for Thanksgiving holidays and I was writing him a little note, now I would only be home a week, and my mother didn't say anything to me but when I went back after that Thanksgiving holiday, the priest said to me, "Oh, I received a lovely letter from your mother." I said, "Oh, you did?" She didn't say anything to me and I don't know what she said to him, but I was saved from a lot of pain, I believe, by that. So she protected me in that way.

Richard. Yes, well then, as I was asking you, can you explain what is a novitiate and when did you enter the novitiate?

Mary. When I was 17, I entered the novitiate. It's a 2 year preparatory program and primarily, actually, it was preparing you to teach school for the local parishes and, of course, we didn't get paid for teaching. The Superior got paid for each one of us. We didn't receive any pay.

In the novitiate, it was a year of what you call the postulant, you were dressed all in black and you still had your hair. As a novice in those days, the night we became a novice and we received the habit, they shaved our heads completely. Now, we did that for about 5 years of our convent life and then after that nobody checked on us, so we let our hair grow.

Richard. I'm learning a lot. I never knew that. I never, I just thought when you couldn't see the hair that there was hair there. I didn't know...

Mary. Well, our order, we did shave it, yeah.

Richard. What was the daily life like as a nun?

Mary. Well, it was difficult. For me it was boring and I looked for ways to be not so bored. In the beginning, I obeyed most of the rules and regulations but after a while, I started to break all the rules and eventually that led to my leaving. We were modeled, our lives were modeled after the laws, rules and regulations and constitutions of the Order of St. Dominic. I believe you're familiar with that. And then after the lives of the Catholic Church saints. We would become holy, absolutely holy, and live a life pleasing to God by observing these rules and following the lives of these different saints. We were to keep close guard over our looks, thoughts and words, and try never to offend God or man, and actually I was pretty good at that in the novitiate and maybe the first or 2 years after I was teaching, but gradually as we started to go to college and get out of the convent more, I really broke all of the rules. Now this is all self-effort and accomplishment on our own self-effort, and of course, I was a perfect candidate for this life, especially in the beginning because we grew up very disciplined at home and we were punished severely if we were disobedient. So I lived in that fear most of my life, especially in the juniorate and in the novitiate.

Now we wore a long heavy habit which was modeled after the 13th century women. It was the lay-dress of the 13th century women. And our laws and the regulations were written by St. Augustine. So those 2 things were tied together.

The habit was very hot and binding and as the years passed, it became really a very tremendous burden and I had been sent to Puerto Rico and we wore the same habit in Puerto Rico and it was very hot and uncomfortable.

Richard. You were explaining there earlier about control of your thoughts and your actions. Was it all plain sailing, you know, in that line and as the years went on in the convent?

Mary. No, it was very difficult because what was there to think about? My primary thought after a while was what is this life all about, you know, and what is it like in the world? I think I perhaps liked to be in the world to find out the way people out there lived and had a lot of fun. I thought life was fun in the world. Although we did have some fun in the convent, I have to say that, depending on your Superior, we had parties once in a while, and depending on the Superior also, you could have a cocktail once in a while, but generally that wasn't permitted. Life was very difficult for me.

Now I was 19 when I first started teaching school and there were 5 young priests in this parish and I had my eyes on one of them because he seemed to be the most handsome and I used to in the morning when we had Mass, I'd be hoping that he would say the Mass.

And also we had devotions on Wednesday night, I think it was a Novena to Mary, and I was hoping he'd have the Novena and would say the sermon and I would just sit there and just bask in his good looks and in his presence.

Richard. Wow, that's amazing.

Mary. Now this priest, I always had fantasies about him and when I was transferred to my second convent, every once in a while I would call him on the phone and once in a while he would visit me, but after I left the convent, I called him and we started to date and we got involved in sexual intercourse.

Richard. Wow, yes. It is amazing what goes on and I thank you that you're able to speak about these difficult things in a compassionate and very realistic way. As a nun, you're attempting to be holy, how was it that you really were wanting to be holy?

Mary. Well, actually I entered the convent to serve God, I thought. I thought that was what it was all about but actually, actually I know now that I wasn't serving God, I was serving man and God was not even my ultimate authority. I very seldom, actually, thought of God. I was so wrapped up in pleasing man and being subject to human authority that God was pretty much out of the picture. And Jesus was not in the picture at all except during the Mass which was supposed to be about Jesus and his sacrifice, but to me it was only words. There was, I knew the terms the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, but there was no life. They were just words to me and I was obedient to these words.

Richard. Can you give some account of your 20 years as a teaching nun, just what happened in those 20 years?

Mary. Well, I was 19 years old when I was assigned to a convent in Queens. I started teaching the third grade and I had 70, 7-0, children in the third grade and I did that for 4 years. My second convent, I'll get back to the Superiors a little later, my second convent I taught the fifth grade and I had 55 children. Then they changed me back to Brooklyn where I had 2 separate Superiors and I taught the sixth grade and had 60 in each class. Then I, this is every 3 years, some reason or other they changed me every 3 years. At one time, I asked the Priors why they changed me so often and they said, well, I adapted well, that's why they did. I went to the fourth convent and taught the eighth grade and it just so happened that I was only there 1 year because the Superior and I had a personality conflict and she decided we couldn't both be in the same house at the same time. So all of a sudden I was sent to Puerto Rico, so I was in Puerto Rico for 3 years but I loved Puerto Rico. Those were the 3 best years of my life. Then they brought me back to Brooklyn. I taught high school English, in high school 6 classes, 60 girls in each class a day. I had the yearbook and the play also in one place. Then the last school I was in was the high school with the same amount of girls but I was on the verge of a breakdown at that time and that's how I...

Richard. Yeah, I can identify what you're saying like in Puerto Rico because I spent 21 years close to Puerto Rico in Trinidad in the West Indies and I really liked the type of

people there, even though, you know, I experienced difficulties myself in the priesthood which is a whole story in itself. But I really liked the West Indian context.

I would like you to explain something about your studies in the novitiate and then as a nun. Did you study the Scriptures, was the Scriptures a personal thing to you and did you get into the Scriptures each day, or what was Scriptures to you in your training and life as a nun?

Mary. Scriptures had no part of my life. When we went to the juniorate, we were told to bring a Bible but I never opened that Bible for 26 years. It was kind of a precious book. My uncle gave it to me. It had gold edges and it was very pretty but I never opened it and I just carried it with me from place to place but never read the Scriptures. I had no idea about Scripture reading until I was saved 15 years ago and go into the word of God.

Richard. Well, that is amazing and it's quite similar to so many other former nuns. We have a book of 20 former nuns called "The Truth Set Us Free," and it's really sad to see the quite similar, that nuns in general do not read the Scriptures even though we have exceptions to it, praise God.

Were most of the nuns sincere in trying to live according to the constitution, or were they trying to please God, or what was the attitude of most of the nuns?

Mary. Well, I really can't speak for anyone else because we never, we really never discussed this among ourselves. When I started to go to college in 1950, I had entered in 1945, in 1950 they started sending us to college because the state started to require the nuns to have at least a Bachelor's Degree. So when we traveled together to college maybe twice a week, all we did was talk about the next vacation coming up and where, if we could get permission to go away someplace for a week, where we would go. It was very hard to get permission but as you got older, they were more lenient with permission, and then you needed to have money to spend on these vacations.

Now I'd like to say something about money. We had to ask for everything we needed, including stamps. So I went to one Superior and you had to ask on your knee, I asked her for a 3 cent stamp, in those days it was 3 cent stamps. I was on my knee for 20 minutes. She was complaining to me about all the letters that the different nuns were writing and all the 3 cent stamps she had to give out. So I was very very upset by the time I left her office and I started to cry and it was confession day, so I was crying when it was my turn to go into confession and the priest said to me, "Sister, what's wrong?" So I told him about the 3 cent stamp and he said to me, "Sister, God doesn't want that." So any gift money that you received, you keep that and use it for things so that you don't have to ask for them, and that really was the beginning of a sense of freedom and I praise God for that priest because it made life a lot easier.

Richard. But that was not according to the constitution.

Mary. Oh, I know.

Richard. I was also Dominican. I know the Dominican rules.

Mary. Yes.

Richard. You're supposed to ask your Superior.

Mary. Yes, on your knee.

Richard. Yes, yes. It is really difficult.

What led you to leave the convent after 26 years altogether that you had in the atmosphere of the convent?

Mary. Well, as I said, I was starting to break the different rules and regulations and the guilt was tremendous, so I started to be very very nervous and actually I was having, I was close to a nervous breakdown and I had a priest friend who was very good to me whose sister was in the convent 1 year ahead of me, and she had had a complete breakdown, so bad that she wouldn't even come out of her room and she was in bed all day with her face to the wall. So when he saw that I was so nervous, he recognized that perhaps I would be the next one in his life to go through the same thing, so he suggested that I go for psychotherapy and I thank God for the psychotherapy because these men that I was able to speak to were very kind to me and I didn't have to live a secret life anymore, I was able to reveal to them all the terrible terrible things that I was doing. So I thank God for him.

Richard. Were there other relationships besides that priest that you mentioned earlier on? Did things like that happen or maybe I shouldn't ask?

Mary. Oh no, oh well, maybe you shouldn't. Well, I was involved, I counted up the number of priests that I was sexually involved with to different degrees. Now I didn't have intercourse with any of them until I left the convent but whenever, if I met a priest and we were attracted, then they would come to the convent and visit me and we'd do some smooching, as it were, in the parlor. Then when, what's it? They sent me, yeah, in Puerto Rico I met a really handsome priest and things were more lax in Puerto Rico, so when I came home, I used to visit him in Jersey and we went to bed together but never went all the way. I was afraid of becoming pregnant. So there was quite a bit of sexual activity.

Richard. Yes, it is, it is difficult to speak about these things but I think we've got to be honest and in the atmosphere of where the United States is in the rest of the world where a lot of these things are being spoken about and we wish to speak about them in the context of the Gospel because Mary Allen, like other former nuns, have come to accept Christ Jesus and his finished work alone and have trusted on him and that's the context. So we're trying to deal with these things compassionately and not in a way that is highlighting the sins but in a way that is highlighting the finished work of Christ Jesus,

because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. What Paul says in Romans 3, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and that is the message that we want to be heard tonight, that it is the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So precious viewer, we're speaking about Christ's redemption and all are sinners before the all-holy God and it is not any religion, we're not preaching religion tonight, we're preaching true faith in Christ Jesus, to trust on him that his righteousness would be credited to you, and that you would have cleansing from all sin and the everlasting life that he has promised.

Mary, did you not pray during all those 26 years in the convent? Was prayer not a big part of your life?

Mary. Prayer was a very big part of my life but not personal prayer. We prayed at the sound of the bell, we were called by a bell 5 times a day, in the morning, noon, afternoon, evening and before we went to bed, and we repeated the same prayers over and over again each day. And it's interesting because at the number 5, I was in Turkey a few years ago which is primarily Muslim, and the bell would ring and the Muslims would go to prayer those 5, the good Muslims went to prayer 5 times a day, and I thought, this is after I'd been saved, I thought look at the similarity between Islam and the Catholic Church. I thought that was very interesting.

Richard. Yes, there's a lot of other similarities and the Pope has spoken highly about the faith of Islam and the new catechism of the Catholic Church talks about the same faith of Abraham as we believe, talking as a Catholic, and that's a whole topic in itself. But there are a lot of similarities because the Muslims are quite into ritualistic prayer and that's what basically you're saying that your life in the convent was a lot of saying an office probably like myself and my 8 years of priory living....

Mary. And it was in Latin.

Richard. And in Latin in those days, yes, and all my years in training for the priesthood, it was all in Latin where we had the divine office. Of course, we also had the office of Mary, we had the office of the dead once a week, so we had 3 different forms of what was called office where you repeat prayers and you say the Psalms back and forth from one side to the other.

Mary. Yes, yes, we did.

Richard. So it's the same sort of thing that we've all gone through.

Can you explain what it was like after you left the convent? Did you immediately find biblical faith, or how was it with you?

Mary. Oh no, no. My life when I left the convent, I was happy to be free from all the rules and regulations but I was still into self-effort and then I was looking for a way to be happy. So I thought that marriage was the answer to happiness, so at the wedding of this

girl that I mentioned before whose brother was the priest, I met her cousin who was a divorced Catholic, and we started to date. We only dated for a year and we got married after that year. Now we couldn't get married in the Church and because of that, none of my family would attend the wedding. Then I felt like I was back in the convent again. I was still very submissive and he gave me \$20 a week to run the house on. I was teaching at the time and received a salary but I had to bank that. So I was still being submissive to someone and I got really tired of that after 3 years and then went back into therapy not thinking I was going to get divorced but I did.

And I married again 2 years later. He was a gambler and I put up with that for 10 years and was ready for a breakdown again, so I went to therapy again and left him.

Richard. Yes, you've had a hard road. How did you eventually come on? I really want to know and I'm sure that the viewer tonight, how did you finally come to biblical faith?

Mary. Well, it was truly a miracle and gift of God, believe me. During my second divorce, I was drinking a lot. I had some lady friends on my block and we used to, I had left my second husband and met these ladies where we did the cocktail thing every evening at 5 o'clock. And then, oh, then I met, I forget how I met this lady, but she told me that I probably was an alcoholic. So in those days when you said something to me, I believed it, so I thought, "Well, maybe I am."

So she suggested that I go into a rehab. Now it's interesting that her brother owned the rehab house and it was, it was, what's it? It was 4 weeks for alcohol and two more weeks for drugs. Now it was \$10,000 for 4 weeks and \$5,000 for the other 2 weeks. She, they told me I was a drug addict also because I was taking sleeping pills to sleep. Ah! If I didn't sleep, I knew I was gonna kill myself.

Richard. So you paid them the whole \$10,000 + \$5,000.

Mary. Well, actually my husband had very good medical coverage with his company and I, mine was secondary, so everything, the \$15,000 was paid completely. So thank God for that. I mean, God was so good to me all along. I didn't even recognize his hand in things.

Richard. But you haven't yet explained how you came to biblical salvation. This is more of the trauma.

Mary. Well, in the rehab I had a lady friend who visited me. She happened to be a Catholic but she brought me a Bible and I started reading the Bible and then when I left the rehab, she took me to a monthly meeting of Christian ladies, and at the end of the teaching, during the meeting at the end of the teaching, there was the salvation message, salvation through Jesus Christ alone by his grace, by faith. And first of all, I didn't understand the word "salvation." Of course, I knew who Jesus was but I certainly did not understand the salvation message so it took me 12 months of hearing the salvation message before it finally clicked that I didn't know what they were talking about. And I was sitting in the front row at this last meeting, and the teacher could see that I wasn't

understanding so she said, "If there's anyone who doesn't understand what I'm talking about, stand up and we'll speak to you later." So I did that and they took me aside and they explained the salvation message that I had been hearing and I accepted Christ very happily and that really started a big change in my daily living.

Richard. And praise God. Yes, when we get convicted that we are sinners and we accept that salvation is in him and him alone, it does certainly bring fruit.

You spoke in your written testimony, I think it was the following year where you really discovered more about the holiness of God and what it was to live, you know, the true Christian life. Could you tell me how that happened?

Mary. Well, that happened by reading the Scriptures. I really didn't understand what holiness was all about but, of course, especially the Old Testament. I started reading the Bible from Genesis and God spoke so often about being a holy God and we should live a holy life, but I also learned in the New Testament, Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and I knew that the only way to renew my mind because I had been sitting also in different Bible classes, was by reading the word of God which washes the mind and cleanses the mind. So I really fell in love with the word of God and I had been divorced for the second time and I was very lonely and very much alone except for some of these ladies, so I spent many hours in the word and my mind really was renewed gradually and I'm thanking God for that too.

Richard. Is there any special text that really spoke to you, you know?

Mary. Well, I had lived my whole life in fear so 2 Timothy 1:7 is a very, was really the first Scripture that I ever memorized, "God has not given us a spirit of fear but power and of love and a sound mind," and I always thought that I was a little nuts so when I found out that God had given me a sound mind, I appropriated that to myself. Then also since I always trusted in my own efforts, Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to your own understanding." Wow, when I read that, I said, "Oh, I need to change." "In all they ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths." And then I when I was reading Isaiah, Isaiah I think is my very most favorite book of the Bible. He said and he spoke to me, "Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and called thee from men and said to thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away." And I, so often I had felt that I had been cast away in different relationships but he wouldn't cast me away.

Richard. That is so beautiful. I really thank you for sharing that.

Mary. And the fear, he said, "Don't fear. I'm with thee. I am thy God. I will uphold thee with my right hand."

Richard. And I think I remember just before we started this interview you said that there was a passage in Daniel that I was supposed to ask you about.

Mary. Oh yes.

Richard. I have forgotten the passage, but can you remember what it was?

Mary. It's Daniel 2 and it was King Nebuchadnezzar came to the realization...can I look for it?

Richard. Yes, yes.

Mary. Now let's see if I can find it. Nebuchadnezzar came to the realization that God was sovereign because he thought he was the boss. Let's see now. Daniel, here.

Richard. Yes, a lot of us have to come to this conclusion to know that God is sovereign.

Mary. Let's see, it was 20, I think. No. Well, anyway, Nebuchadnezzar came to the realization that God was in control, he wasn't, and God really made sure that Nebuchadnezzar found out that he was not in control.

Richard. Yes, some of those things actually hit me in my own life where I was listening to some evangelistic messages as a priest and I could hear nobody talk about God electing, predestinating these big big words, and you know, knowing us before the foundation of the world like he speaks about in Ephesians, and I was saying I wonder why it is that nobody says this, "Let God be God," and it's God who saves and if he has chosen to save me, I would prefer to be his choice than mine because I know if I make the choice, I'm going to blow it afterwards, you know?

Mary. Tell me about it.

Richard. So I really want to know that God was sovereign and that it was he who elected, he who planned it all, and that salvation was in Christ. So I can identify with you there in wanting to know the sovereignty of God and I think it's really important to know that, precious viewer, that it is God who elects and chooses and that are you willing to know that he has chosen you, and how do you qualify, as it were? And it is to know that you are destitute, dead in trespasses and sins, and that we have to admit that we need to be saved and that's the hardest thing to admit that we can do nothing of ourselves and that salvation is only of God and he is sovereign, absolute, and that Christ's perfect work is perfect and it is only believing on him and nothing of ourselves, to know that we are perfect in Christ and that we are absolutely cleansed by the precious blood of all our sins.

I remember the text, Mary, in my own search was from the Apostle Peter, that Christ when he had taken our sins upon his body on the tree, it was Christ taking our sins upon himself so that we could be rid of those sins.

Mary. And the burden of those sins.

Richard. And the burden of it, and I really see a joy in your step now, even over after all those 26 years in the convent and then the turmoil that you went through after the convent life.

Can you explain some of the highlights of your life as a believer and have you traveled much and how has it been for you as a believer?

Mary. Yes, I have traveled. I went to Turkey, Bosnia and Sao Paulo, Brazil. I was to Brazil last year and Sao Paulo is primarily Catholic and it was very difficult to minister to the Catholics. Now we had one young man, thank God, he was about 20 who was saved and he was really out to share the Gospel, but even his own mother refused to accept the work of Christ. She was so connected with the church and I shared with her a little of my testimony and she was very pleased to hear it but she wasn't touched at all.

Richard. Yeah, it is really sad to see the things in Brazil. I just today answered an email where I've been asked to go to Brazil next year and one of the things I was asked to address is ecumenism, the false ecumenism here in the States where leading evangelicals have said Catholics are our brothers and sisters in Christ, has affected even life in Brazil and it's really ghastly that leading American so-called evangelists have said Catholics are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Those of us who were Catholics most of our life, I speak of 48 years as a Catholic and you similarly so many years of your life, those of us who were know that the Catholic may be sincere but they do not have any assurance and would to God that so much of the false ecumenism that is around us could be swept aside. It is a whole topic in itself but I really have now a desire to share in Sao Paulo as I will be there, Lord willing, in October next year.

So it's really sad that American fluffy evangelical living, I call it the evangelies rather than the evangelicals because they have lost all the primary bases that God is all-holy, that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and that all glory is to God alone, and it is all based on Scripture, these primary biblical facts seem to have gone by the board so that they can build up their own fame and their own so-called ministries of glory. So it's really sad and, Lord willing, we will address that in other programs as we come to them.

Mary, I'd like you to really share your heart now with what would be your word to the precious Catholic watching you tonight.

Mary. The freedom that I experience in Christ Jesus is the most remarkable thing that I have ever experienced, as you hear from my testimony. And also the desire in my heart to serve the Lord and to bring the Gospel message to as many people as I possibly can simply because I want them to have the gift, the free gift that I have received and the peace and the joy that I experience as a result of my belief in Jesus and his finished work.

Richard. Yeah, that is really beautiful. That's quite similar to the testimonies of 20 former priests that we have in the book that Mary Hurtle and myself put together called "The Truth Set Us Free," 20 former nuns tell their stories. We hadn't got your testimony at the

time, Mary, and other testimonies we've got since then that are not in the book, but these testimonies are a wonderful demonstration of the peace that these ladies came to and the security and that's our message to you, "that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe on him would not perish but would have everlasting life," would not be in turmoil, in conflict, in utter agony and pain, but would know the peace that passes all understanding of knowing that you have a secure place in Christ Jesus.

My own personal word is a fairly difficult one but I think it's got to be said and it is the words that Christ Jesus said, "Not everyone who says unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does the will of my Father in heaven." Now it's not everybody who says, "Lord, Lord." As good devout Catholics, we've said, "Lord, Lord," we've believed in the Trinity, we've believed in God the Father, we've believed in Christ Jesus as the Savior of the world, the one who came to take away sin, we believe in the Holy Spirit, and we had a lot of the essentials but we did not believe that it was Christ Jesus' perfect finished work alone that saved us, and we thought somehow it came through 7 sacraments, it was communicated or conferred through the different rituals we did.

Now so this is really serious because if you're looking to sacraments to save you, they do not save and you end up like Mary Allen or myself who spent most of our life in a religious context, Mary Allen, 26 years as a nun, I was 30 years also as a Dominican and 22 as a priest, it does not deliver and we only have to look at the headlines and different stories that are coming out of the priesthood and of the convents to see that it does not deliver. But there is a message that Christ Jesus, he gives salvation, and the whole word is summarized, I think, so beautifully in the book of Hebrews and that book is written as if it were for Catholics because it talks about the finished work of Christ and that there is one sacrifice once offered, it says, "Looking to Christ, the author and finisher of your faith." Look to Christ Jesus. Know that he paid the price for your sin; that he is perfect. Trust in him alone and know that everlasting life.

And let's hear from you. We hear from many of the viewers and it's a great encouragement to us and I will let Mary Allen know and other former nuns know because it's always a great joy to us. So I look forward to hearing from you. Read your Scripture and know that God is faithful and to him be the praise, the glory, the worship and the honor now and forevermore.

Mary. Amen.

Richard. Thank you so much, Mary.

Mary. Thank you, Richard.

Richard. Thank you.

Announcer. Thank you for listening. If the Lord touches you, we'd love to hear from you. Visit our website at www.bereanbeacon.org.

Announcer. Check out our websites: biblequery.org, this site answers 7,700 Bible questions; historycart.com, this site reveals early church history and doctrine proving Roman Catholicism is not historically or doctrinally viable; muslimhope.com, this site is a classic refutation of Islam, a counterfeit religion created by Mohammad. Free newsletters are also available.

Larry Wessels. Hello, this is Larry Wessels, Director of Christian Answers of Austin, Texas, Christian Debater. My daughter Marlana has come out with a Christian music cd entitled "Win This Fight." It has 8 songs that she has written and performed herself. Some of the song titles are, "Win this fight; Love song to my Lord; Vessel to you; Waiting to hear from you; Jesus is"; and others. YouTube viewers can listen and see Marlana's music video, "Jesus Is," right now free, just type "Marlana Wessels" in the YouTube search box and click on her video on the page that comes next. If you would like more information about getting a copy of her cd, just email us at cdebater@aol.com or give us a call at (512) 218-8022.

Thank you and may the Lord bless you and yours.