

Jennifer Irvine

## The Lord in Whom I have redemption

I was born in Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, during the Second World War. My parents were from several generations of Roman Catholics. I am the third of four daughters. This is a brief outline of my life and later conversion to the knowledge of salvation and the Lord Jesus Christ. When I was a few weeks old, a priest baptized me by sprinkling, and thus, I became a Roman Catholic, a daughter of the One True Church. Much of my very early years are sketchy, but I do have recollection of some things; a few of which are very clear in my mind. There are things I will endeavour to share with you, and may the Lord be glorified.

As a very small child, my dear father encouraged his children to say by heart, the Hail Mary and the Our Father. He often rewarded us for our achievements. When I learned the Hail Mary he gave me threepence, and for learning the Our Father, I received sixpence!

I commenced school at the convent, Broken Hill, when I was four and a half years old. I am naturally left-handed, but I remember the nun trying very hard to make me write with my right hand. However, that effort was not successful! Fox was the name of the bishop of Broken Hill. As I remember, the community did not speak well of Bishop Fox. He was a large, stern, rotund man, and looked formidable in his lavish bishop's attire. One by one, the children lined up to meet the bishop on one of his visits to the school. We were to address him as "My Lord" and kiss the ring on his finger, supposedly embedded with martyr's bones.



From this early age, I trained in what I would later learn to be Rome's doctrines, idolatries, and superstitions. Above all, I believed that the Roman church was the One True Church. I always wore my Brown Scapular and a Miraculous Medal as did my sisters. The Brown Scapular consisted of a piece of brown cord made as a long necklace with little pieces of cloth at opposite ends, (one worn at the back and one at the front) which were imprinted with religious icons of "saints." This I wore under my outer clothing. The story goes that some saint long ago received an apparition that if this piece of cloth was faithfully worn, the wearer would never go to the fires of hell! The "Miraculous Medal" was a little oval shaped piece of metal with a graven image of Mary, and this was worn to ward off evil happenings to the wearer. There were many medals and paraphernalia that "good" Catholics pinned, draped, or hung on their personages.

In later years, my favorite medal was the St. Christopher medal. He was the patron saint of safety when traveling. This I wore at all times on a chain around my neck. No Catholic would be without his St. Christopher medal in his car. Sadly, in later years, St. Christopher mysteriously disappeared from Rome's list of "saints." Our travel "protector" had vanished!

I made my First Confession when I was seven years old. The priest would come to the school; we usually did not go into the Confessional Box but would kneel down at the priest's side telling him our sins and from him receive absolution. The priest would then give me my penance which was sometimes three Hail Mary's and three Our Father's. The penance was for reparation (or to repay God) and help share in Christ's sacrifice. I remember the way I would cringe when I had to kneel down at the feet of a "holy priest" and tell him just how naughty and wicked I had been! My first Holy Communion soon followed my

first Confession, and the nun told all the children that we had received Jesus into our hearts. I recall the words of the second commandment in the Bible, which Rome removed and changed to accommodate her idolatry, *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, or serve them....”*<sup>1</sup>

In 1953, Elizabeth II was crowned Queen of England and the Commonwealth. As a coronation gift, the children of the Commonwealth received a lovely little white Bible, that is, except the children who attended Roman Catholic schools. We were not permitted to have a Bible by orders of the Vatican and the bishops. Instead, we received an ordinary looking “Four Gospels.” At school, Bible lessons were taken from a book called “Bible History.” This in fact, consisted of selected stories rather than the true and living words of God, which *alone* can save. We had the Bible stories, but NO BIBLE!

Secondary school became more concentrated with religious instruction. For one hour, it was given as the first lesson of the day; before lunch for half an hour and immediately following lunch for half an hour, perhaps for one hour. On special “saints’ days,” there were Masses and other religious duties, including confessions to the priest.

The words of the priests and nuns were sacrosanct<sup>2</sup> and therefore never questioned. Every classroom at Catholic schools had a graven image of Mary in a prominent place. Each year on May 1, this image was crowned with flowers, and there would be special hymns and prayers offered to this idol. Religious instruction consisted of stories from saints’ lives, learning hymns—sometimes written in Latin. Hymns were sung to all, including Mary, St. Joseph, the Sacred Heart, the Guardian Angel, St. Patrick, the Blessed Sacrament, and only occasionally to Jesus. I learned the Gregorian chants for High Mass in Latin, and prayers by rote in Latin and English.

## **A Friend Named Connie**

At school, I was friendly with a little girl named Connie. Connie was one of those bubbly, friendly children, and even though she was a couple of years younger than I was, we enjoyed each other’s company. In the large complex, along with the school, there was a church, a convent, and the priests’ priory<sup>3</sup> to which new priests were assigned when they had arrived from another country.

As an eleven year old, my mind began reeling at the story Connie began to relate to me one day after school. A new priest had lured her to the priory on the previous day and sexually assaulted her in a most debauched way. I was so horrified! Unknown to us, a senior nun was listening to us talking from inside the building. The following day the nun summoned me to her office, and she told (or rather warned) me not to repeat what Connie had told me. She said that the priest was sick and we needed to pray for him! I did not even tell my parents, as I was silenced and afraid. Who would believe me anyway? I still think of Connie from time to time, and wonder if she ever did get to tell her story. That same priest moved to a parish in another suburb. When I saw him many years later, I remembered him.

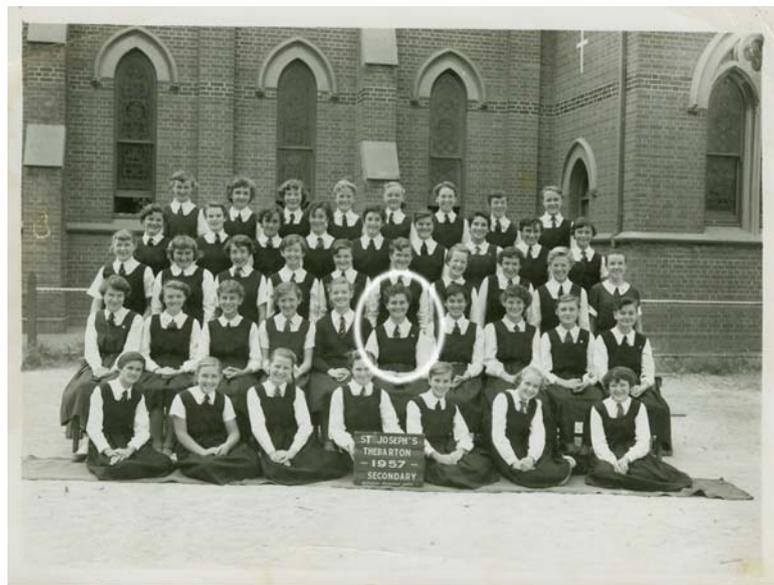
## **The Missionary**

During my early and mid-teen years, my family often invited visiting missionary priests and friends to our home for meals. One priest in particular was a favorite among many of us, whom I will only call G.P., as he was affectionately known. He would visit the schools and the churches around Australia, and he was very popular and charismatic. His mission in the area would last for a week, and then he would move on to another area. Sometimes a group of young people would go to other districts to hear him. He would hear confessions, and because he knew me, he would always chat with me after absolution and say how nice it was to re-acquaint. Looking back, I remember feeling uncomfortable around him. At times, he was too touchy-feely, and over-complimentary for a holy priest.

In the neighbourhood where I lived was a girl named Ruth. She lived with her mother and older half sister. Ruth played classical and modern piano, and we all enjoyed the entertainment of her skillful playing. Ruth, and her sister, would often join us when the priest, G.P., came to visit. There was an “incident” with the priest and this young woman when he took her for a ride in his car one night. I was never told what happened, I was too young, but I was aware of the whisperings around me, and the silence, when I asked questions. Of course, it was, as always, the “flirtations” of a young woman to blame!

Sometime after I was married, this priest contacted me when he was in town, and asked if he could visit. Because of him being a long time friend of my family, I arranged a time when my husband and children were present, and we all had a meal together. A couple of days later, he telephoned me at home to thank me for the meal. Then he added, “I would have liked to see you alone!” I made sure he did not!

In 1970, my dear father died, and in the years following, I was aware of a strange emptiness and an ache somewhere in my being, but I knew by then the sacraments and Mass of Rome had no comfort for me.



There is so very much more I could write about, but for the sake of brevity, I will end here with my journey in Rome.

One night I had a dream about a friend whom I had not seen for many years. This friend was married to a Pentecostal pastor. I told my husband, and he said I should contact her. She and I had a happy night of fellowship and a meal together, and not long after that, we began attending the same Pentecostal church. This was such an exciting time for me, as never before had I heard the Bible preached. Several weeks later, I committed my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. In retrospect, there was no real foundational teaching, no sound doctrine, Antinomianism<sup>4</sup> and much confusion. I began hearing things like, “You’re a King’s kid,” and

“God wants you to have the best!” The teaching was that we were no longer under any of the Old Testament Law, but rather we were “in Christ” and God’s Holiness. His Law and His Justice were never preached. It was “peace, love, and let’s get together!”

The Charismatic “renewal” was in full swing, and to my amazement, the Christian churches were getting together with priests and charismatic Roman Catholics who were still attending the Mass, praying to Mary and the saints, and continuing business as usual. “All is well,” the shepherds told me. “This is a ‘New thing’ the Lord is doing.” The Roman Catholics were also speaking in tongues. They had the baptism of the Holy Spirit, too! Who was I to question what God was doing? Some pastors were involved in the local Ministers’ Fraternal and even took members of their congregations to visit the Catholic church with their singing groups. Priests were invited to speak at conferences and paintings of Jesus began appearing for sale in Christian bookshops.

Down in my stomach there was a feeling of deep foreboding. Sometimes on returning home I got to feeling quite ill from some of the large meetings with “superstar” names. Kathryn Kuhlman and her protégés were extolled as super spiritual beings with gifts of healing and prophecy, and the local pastors were coveting and practicing the same deceitful “gifts.” A spectacle we often witnessed was “leg growing.” I later discovered it was actually “leg pulling!” A person with one leg supposedly shorter than the other would be seated in a chair, and the preacher would gather others around and they would stretch their hands toward the person seated. With much noise and clapping, the leg would “grow.” Things were going from

the ridiculous to the bizarre. Through all these trying times, I was aware of the Lord's hand on my life, and I prayed He would lead me (us) in the *truth*. Jesus said, "...*thy Word is Truth*."<sup>5</sup>

During my years in the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement (they are the same years), there were many times when alarm bells would ring in my head, but by not having the appropriate biblical or doctrinal knowledge, it was difficult to "put one's finger on the error" pushed by religious deceivers. However, there was *no way* that I was going back to, or even having fellowship with, Rome.

### **"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..."<sup>6</sup>**

The Word of God was my mainstay, and though not being a scholar or theologically trained, I would read texts in the Bible that were at variance with what I had been taught, leaving me with more questions than answers. I knew that things in the Pentecostal/Charismatic arena were deteriorating at breakneck speed; I was becoming a "spiritual leper" by not being in step with the rest, and I was always asking the "wrong" questions. My protests fell on deaf ears. When I raised my concerns and protests, one man said to me, "Stop putting out fires!" He did not seem to see that his house was ablaze! Condemnation set in, and I began to feel that I was wrong. I soon became despondent.

*"But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill." ...I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. ...Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon Thy people."*<sup>7</sup> Yes, SALVATION BELONGETH UNTO THE LORD!

### **The Book Shop**

All the "Christian" bookstores I knew about were full of what I would call junk: versions and perversions of the Bible; charismatic books with the Word-Faith/Prosperity preachers like Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, the Copelands, Kathryn Kuhlman, along with Contemporary Christian Music, and all manner of trinkets similar to what Roman Catholic shops had in them. A lady who had heard about me through an acquaintance, and whom I had never met, would phone me occasionally. We were, as one would say, "on the same wavelength." She had been a Roman Catholic, and we had many good chats on the phone about past things. This lady would go to the large libraries and investigate Rome's history. I began to hear about things like the Reformation, the Inquisition, the way "martyrs' bones" were sometimes obtained, and so on. She, too, had reservations about Pentecostalism. Then one day, she told me about a little bookshop called the Reformation Bookshop, which was located in the city. This shop is now called "Faith and Freedom Ministries."

I began making trips into the city to buy books bought by money saved from my precious housekeeping allowance. Somehow, the Lord seemed to multiply my pennies, and the kind minister who owned the bookstore would sometimes give me a book free of charge. I loved reading and studying the books, and I would read at every opportunity. Slowly, things were making sense and Scriptures were coming alive. I began sharing these books with my husband, and the Lord began to open our eyes to the truth. I soon learned that the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement had grabbed the shadow and left the substance.

Later that year, I began to pray that the Lord would find us a "way out" of the Pentecostal church. He did, but not in the way I would have liked. It proved to be a very painful and rather devastating experience, and yet His grace sustained us. "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.*"<sup>8</sup> I found myself in spiritual turmoil and in a vacuum, not knowing which way to turn. After all, the "Spirit-filled" church was supposed to be "the one." What were the others? Although I

knew I had begun a journey as a Christian—my own rebellious heart, a lack of biblical teaching, a worldly church, wrong doctrine, bad experiences, and now mistrust—all made for a “bitter cocktail.”

The Pentecostal/Charismatic mindset told us that churches without the baptism of the Holy Spirit do not have the Holy Spirit at all! “Ordered” services were considered dead “*churchianity*,” and the old hymns were not “new songs.”<sup>9</sup> In our Pentecostal/Charismatic mind, obeying God’s laws and His precepts were tantamount to legalism. Therefore, settling into the “old paths” of Christianity was very difficult, and in fact, took us many years. The reading of Puritan books and some of the teachers from bygone days of true revivals became a great help. I began to read about the doctrines of grace in God’s eternal plan of redemption and His everlasting love toward His own. “... *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.*”<sup>10</sup>

“New Evangelicalism” and “Modernism” were definitely not for us! Charismatic leanings were creeping into most churches. After several years of “going nowhere” to church on a regular basis, and just visiting wherever we could, I knew I was slipping backward. We lived in a small country town for a few years, and by God’s merciful providence, we came across a house church in a neighbouring farming community. The preaching was so different, and so challenging! This was a blessing and a turning point. The doctrines of grace were so clearly taught, and the elder taught the holiness of God from the Old and New Testaments. The uplifting and beautiful hymns of the faith sung in the services were “from the heart.”

A verse from an old hymn really spoke to my heart one day. I had sung it many times before, but this time was different.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling.  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me Saviour, or I die.

We will never come to the end of our trials in this world, but like Job of old I can say, “*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*”<sup>11</sup>

I am not a “King’s kid,” but I am His child. I have been washed in the precious blood of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. With the help of God’s grace through His Holy Spirit, there is much still to learn and a long way to go in this earthly journey. I deserve nothing but His judgment, but I found *grace*, undeserved and precious *grace*.

We moved back to the city five years ago, and we found many (formerly sound) city and suburban churches awash with *Alpha*, Rick Warren’s *40 Days of Purpose*, the *Emergent Church movement* and all kinds of weird and cunning allurements to bring unchurched “Harry and Sally” in. Mega-churches with “another gospel” and “another Jesus”<sup>12</sup> were popping up all over the country. Contemporary Christian Music has played a leading role in these false movements, along with the Bible versions and perversions. Many churches, which would have been described as Evangelical/Protestant/Fundamental, have succumbed to the beat of a different drum. Most have been influenced by the Charismatics; and basically, “anything goes.” Sound churches in our city, and probably in most of this country of Australia, are few and far between. Many young people are drawn to the crowds and the “good times” these churches offer them. They give the people what they want, but sadly, not what they need. May the Lord, in His kindness, preserve the few faithful men who “*have not bowed the knee to Baal*”<sup>13</sup> and may we be given the strength and courage to stand with them.

If you wish to share your thoughts with me or my husband, please email us at: wesnjenn@iprimus.com.au

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:4, 5a

<sup>2</sup> Regarded as sacred and inviolable.

<sup>3</sup> A monastery or nunnery governed by a prior or prioress; prior: the head of a house of friars (or nuns).

<sup>4</sup> Believing that Christians are released by grace from obeying moral laws.

<sup>5</sup> John 17:17

<sup>6</sup> Hosea 4:6

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 3:3-4, 6, 8

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 55:8

<sup>9</sup> Psalms 96:1

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 31:3

<sup>11</sup> Job 42:5-6

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

<sup>13</sup> “*who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*” Romans 11:4