

Carmen da Mota

The Lord's Providential Call by Fire

During the Brazilian depression in 1934 my father abandoned our home and my mother found herself with the total responsibility of caring for her family. We were quite poor, my parents had struggled to overcome difficulties and hard times, but our family had togetherness. That is, until my father's frequent visits to a "Spiritist Center" began to cause many arguments and generate friction between my parents.



Carmen as a young girl

I was six years old when he called my younger brother and me aside to tell us, "I'm going away, and I'm never coming back!" Hearing my father speak those words deeply hurt me. I never saw him again.

We matured quickly trying to help Mother overcome the hardships of raising four children while she worked at anything and everything God graciously sent her way. In the beginning we suffered, lacking the necessities of life. As the years went by, my two older sisters and I were able to help more. While my sisters took some simple jobs, I cared for my little brother and my aging grandmother at home, and at the same time kept up with my schoolwork. As we grew older everything began to change. Now our responsibilities at home had to be worked around our full time jobs. Our combined salaries not only permitted us to survive, but we were able to help people who were more destitute than us. Mother constantly

emphasized the following: “If we fight, we’ll win!” She was tremendously enthusiastic, facing life as if nothing in the past had changed our circumstances.

Being a devout Roman Catholic, Mother excelled in teaching us her religion. It was amazing how much she communicated in the little time we had together. I sought to be faithful in everything I learned. My First Communion was at the age of eleven, at St. Anthony’s Church, located at the top of the mountain in Petrópolis, near Rio de Janeiro. This commemoration thrilled me for my heart burned to serve the Lord. Yet, I had a very serious problem, how could I serve God when I stuttered? One day, I shut myself in my bedroom to pray. Surprisingly, I did not say the Ave Maria or the Hail Mary; a prayer formed in the depths of my heart and I cried out to the Lord Himself. I asked Him to help me speak like other children so I could use my voice and my life to serve and love Him forever. God heard me! Soon I was able to speak normally.

Immediately, to serve my Master better, I began to teach catechism, the doctrine of the Catholic Church, to the neighborhood children and interested factory workers. I met with them on their lunch hour, using the catechism booklet to teach them how to remain strong in their faith, and do their best for God. I was also given responsibility to care for the altars of the church, cleaning and arranging them with flowers and decorations.

Feeling there was something more I could do, I joined “Mary’s Daughters.” It was a thrill to receive the small blue ribbon presented to beginners. Then came a larger ribbon, and finally the ribbon I had been waiting for: the one giving me the right to be called a “Daughter of Mary.” Now I felt I was really prepared to serve the Lord.

It did not take long to realize that peace still eluded me. What worried me most was the thought that at any moment I might have to present myself before God to give an account of my soul. For this reason, I never grew tired of doing more for God. Meditating on the death of Christ, thinking of His great love shown by dying on the cross for us, I thought, “What can I do to repay all that Christ did?” I continued to feel that my works were as nothing before God. Constantly, there was a voice accusing me, saying, “You are a terrible sinner!”

After Mass one Sunday morning, I stopped to talk with some friends. One of them mentioned that the best way to serve God was to enter the convent. The others agreed, while I said nothing. Although I believed they were right, immediately in my mind’s eye I foresaw a multitude of problems to stop me from entering the convent. I was from a poor family and a dowry consisting of a large amount of money would be necessary. There would also be the expected large trousseau, and on top of all that, there was my color. I was black! The Franciscan Order would not give me the habit, even if they accepted me. There were so many obstacles! Even if I could somehow arrange the money, there was still my color. I could not change that! In spite of all these impossibilities, this now became my dream, and it gave me something to hope for, keeping me from discouragement. Two years later, I walked through the doors of the Franciscan convent.

Life in a Convent yet not formally a Nun

To reach my goal, I had prayed the Rosary constantly and subjected myself to many penances. I was in this convent, not to receive the habit (which was not possible because of my color), but to learn many things until I became older. When I reached the proper age to be accepted by another convent, my dream would come true; I could become a nun and serve God better. To get to this

point, I had suffered tremendously. Leaving my mother whom I loved deeply, my brother and sisters, my friends and the neighbors who played constantly at our home, was the highest price I could pay. Somehow, I was content. At the moment, everything seemed perfectly beautiful. I was accomplishing the great desire of my heart. A new panorama lay before me: one I thought would really resolve the problems of my life...or better yet, of my soul. However it was to be rather a way to death, as the scripture states, *“there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Proverbs 14:12).

Before long, a surprising observation began to awake within me. My desire was to serve the Lord, but I found myself serving creatures more than the Creator. The discipline of the convent was rigorous. All were to be up at 4:30 a.m. when we began to put everything in order. Tasks were divided so that two took over kitchen duties, while all others began morning prayers in the chapel. One hour later, Mass was celebrated, including Communion, with all present. At 8 a.m. we resumed our duties in absolute silence since talking was prohibited. Around 5 p.m. the Mother Superior directed a brief time of rest. She controlled everything; no one could do anything except what she ordered. The bells echoed through the hallways at 8 p.m. calling us to evening prayers. Now, in one hour, the lights would be turned off and there was nothing for me to do but wait for another day, just like the day before. As the monotony of my days in the convent passed, I became convinced that my dream of studying and preparing for service would never come true. There was only time to work and pray. Even after the Superior granted a time for study at the request of a group of girls, we were so exhausted we could not retain what was being taught.

My disillusionment increased when some of the nuns showed signs of envy and jealousy.



Carmen, as she got ready to enter the Convent

They resented my receiving any attention from the Mother Superior. She usually chose me to meet her at the bus station when she returned from a trip. More surprises were in store. Two nuns had become my friends: Sister Sebastian and Sister Josephine. The latter was well educated and had been in the convent for 12 years. These two were the only ones who trusted me enough to share what they were feeling. With only one or two exceptions, all the other nuns were a mystery to me. My best friend, Sister Josephine, explained the goings-on both in the heart of the convent and in the Roman Church. Hardened from all her experiences there, her despair was increasing with each passing day. Sister Sebastian shared her sentiments: “I can’t stand this kind of life, I’m beside myself!” she moaned. “Tell me what’s wrong,” I said. But she refused to say more.

Waking up one morning, I discovered that both my friends were gone. They had escaped from the convent! A tremendous disappointment took hold of me. Now I was alone. To make matters worse, the

Mother Superior suspected me of helping them escape. My protests of innocence fell on deaf

ears. She insisted that I was guilty since there were circumstances that seemed to point directly to me. When I was awakened early the next morning to light the fire, which was my duty, I discovered that the matches, always kept in the drawer of the kitchen table, were nowhere to be found. I had to go to the sick ward to find some. It was strictly prohibited for any nun to enter another nun's working area. As I quickly searched for the matches, I was surprised by one of the nun's who accused me of being guilty of the escape of my friends. Because of this, I was separated from all the others, and suspended from my studies for a year. As punishment, I was prohibited from talking to anyone, and given the most difficult jobs like kitchen, laundry, and caring for the poultry. Many times I worked until dawn just to finish my responsibilities. There were times when the bell rang, calling all from their beds to start a new day, and I had not yet lain down. During those awful days, while I did my work in the laundry room, I knelt before a crucifix, and cried: "Oh, Lord, I'm looking for the way, but I still haven't found it." How I cried in my despair, seeking a little encouragement or consolation, but it never came.

It was during those terrible days that my mother became seriously ill, and was hospitalized. She sent word for me to come to her, but I was not permitted to leave. The Superior told me I ought to say a prayer to God, since my life belonged only to Him, and I should not think of turning back. All I could do was to say the most fervent prayers I could for my mother's health. One day one of my sisters showed up at the convent. She said I would have to come immediately if I wanted to see Mother alive. The Superior relented, giving me two hours. The bus ride through town seemed to take forever. When I entered Mother's room, she opened her eyes, her gaze resting on me for a few seconds. Then she whispered, "I thought you weren't coming to see me during my last minutes." and her eyes closed. Maybe it was from living in silence through those recent weeks of punishment, but I could not say a word. No words would come. My suffering was almost too much to bear. At that moment bitterness flooded my soul. Here was the person I loved the most, who had dedicated her life for me. She was leaving this world, going into eternity, and I could do nothing for her. With my heart torn to pieces, I returned to the convent to continue an arduous life of labor and penitence.

Life in another Convent and dreadful suffering

It was after this that the Mother Superior resolved to separate some of the sisters, spreading them around in different convents. I too, was sent to another convent. In spite of the severity practiced there also, I was treated more like a human being. They cared for my health and helped me in many other ways. But, the penance practiced in this convent was cruel. Many times we had to get up at one in the morning, go to the chapel and carry out a penance so severe that nuns were forbidden to tell about it under punishment of mortal sin, even after they left the convent. This penance begins with a prayer, followed by the words of the Mother Superior: "Jesus was struck in the face. So all should be struck in the face!" Jesus was whipped, she would say, so all of us would be whipped. Jesus crawled on his knees; therefore, we crawled on our knees from one end of the chapel to the other, until our knees were badly bruised or actually bleeding. For six hours Jesus remained on the cross with his arms spread open. We too, were to hold our arms spread open and unmoved for about an hour, praying the rosary. Remember, this was at 1 a.m. That penance had the purpose of seeking conversion for sinners, the relief of souls in purgatory, and the salvation of our own souls. Going through this ritual, we were imagining that the souls in purgatory needed us to suffer, so that they could be saved.

After some time had passed when I had proven my obedience to my superiors, the Mother Superior told me I could stay in this convent to receive the habit and make my vows. But first, I ought to visit my family for the last time. When I returned, I would never leave this convent again. I was given a month for this visit, which was unusual.

New Purpose with the Foundation of Missionary Nuns

I made good use of the time, teaching catechism to some children who were my friends. I even took them to the royal city of Petrópolis, and showed them Our Lady of Fátima's chapel that had been built when I was a child. There I met Friar Joseph Pereira de Castro who had given me spiritual guidance for many years. After our greetings, I told him I was in a convent of seclusion where, upon returning, I would stay for the rest of my life interceding for the salvation of sinners and the relief of souls in purgatory. This Friar was quite elderly, dedicated to religion, and he had a request. He asked if I would be willing to help him open a convent for nuns right here in my hometown, Petrópolis. Of course I refused! But he continued, fervently explaining our city's need for dedicated young girls who could help him against the inroads the Protestants were making in our area. This last argument left me tremendously interested. And so, that is how I became a missionary of the Foundation of Missionary Nuns. My job was to climb the hills where multitudes had built temporary lean-tos and to go to more distant places, teaching the catechism, paying particular attention to those areas where the Protestants had begun to work. We aided the poor, taking them food, and clothing. Wherever we furnished help, we were successful at keeping out the Protestants. Because of my zeal against these evangelicals, I would sit next to someone quite ill until he or she died. That way they never heard any explanation of Bible passages from the mouth of some believer. I acted out of ignorance because I did not know the Bible.

In two months, we managed to surround the city with 42 catechism centers, where children, young people, and adults were trained. The Catholic Church carried out a very successful campaign at that time, keeping the evangelicals from growing in our city. One more example of my zeal was the following. I was a close friend of a poor family with 6 children. One day the father heard believers singing in a neighborhood park. His heart was touched and later, he accepted Christ alone as his Savior. I was very unhappy that this had happened. So I went to the father's boss, who was a member of a Catholic parish, and told him what had taken place. His boss fired him. Later, I learned that his family was in need. Unfortunately, I was still disgusted with him, even angry. I felt no sympathy at all. "Let the Protestants take care of his family," I thought.

Later on I learned that the evangelicals were visiting prisoners in jail. So I thought, "Let's go there, too!" That week, we took cigarettes and sandwiches, doing all we could to cancel the effect of the believers' visit. The following Sunday, when I was handing out pictures of saints, I noticed tracts on the table in each prisoner's cell. There was also a book with a black cover. Even though I knew what was going on, I asked, "What book is this?" They answered me, "It's the book the believers left for us." I protested, "Why, this book is diabolic! Whoever has this book will have bad luck and God's curse will be upon him! Give me these books and I'll give you our Lady's medal. She'll help you." We left the jail loaded with Bibles and tracts. What satisfaction I felt to tear up and burn all the Bibles. But, when we got to the last one, I noticed the cover was illustrated. There were two young people walking down a road with heavy loads on their backs. There was something written under the illustration. I looked more closely,

and read: *“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). At that very moment, God spoke to me. I felt something strange and incomprehensible. The words said, *“Come unto Me,”* but had not I done that? I had given my all to the Lord. What more could He want me to do? Then the thought came to me: “I’m a very strong Catholic. I know my faith. Certainly I can read something out of this book.” Besides, my curiosity was aroused. What could these believers be preaching to the prisoners?

And so, for the first time I began to read the Bible. After a few pages I felt so blessed that I forgot it was the dreaded book of the Protestants. All of a sudden, remembering the Divine origin of that Bible, my heart skipped a few beats from pure shock. Still, I did not have the courage to destroy it, preferring to put it away in a safe place.

One priority I had never given up, was teaching catechism to the children. Each time I looked out my classroom window, I’d see a blond haired, blue-eyed boy passing by. His name was Helio. He must have been around 10 years old. I happened to know that his parents were evangelicals. Observing him, I always imagined what a wonderful priest he would be, so intelligent and showing such respect. Imagine, if his parents accepted the doctrine of the Catholic Church, became Catholics, and their son chose to prepare for the priesthood? One day when he passed by my classroom, I called out to him, “Helio, would you like to study catechism with the others?” His response was, “I’ll go ask my Mother. If she lets me, I’ll come.” He went home, and, to my surprise, returned, entered and sat down. This particular lesson was about Mary, and the power she had. I explained: “Anything we want, we need to ask Mary, because she has a lot of influence. We get to Jesus through her.” The boy raised his hand, and asked: “Teacher, where is it written in the Bible that we go to Jesus through Mary?” I was very embarrassed, since I did not know the Bible. Nowadays, the Bible is read in the convents, but at that time we knew absolutely nothing about the Bible. When the boy asked me that question, it was very humiliating. I replied that the answer was in the catechism, and later, after class, I would talk to him at greater length. I continued my class, teaching about the value of asking the saints for things; that the saints can help us by taking our requests to God. He broke in again. “Teacher, have you read Exodus 20 in the Bible?”

That young boy had a wonderful knowledge of the Scriptures. If only all parents could teach their children the Scriptures, so that they would come to understand the Bible as this boy did! *“A wise man will hear and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels,”*(Proverbs 1:5)

After he began attending my class, I never gave another lesson in peace. He had question after question, but all were asked with respect and wisdom. Helio studied and memorized the catechism, and continued attending his church. If I was disturbed having him in my class, I became more disturbed after he left. I was not able to believe in the images. I could not believe that asking a saint for something meant he or she would intercede before God on my behalf. The way the boy had explained, I was to speak directly to God, instead of asking Mary or the saints. He was just a child, but he knew what he was doing. When Helio’s Mother allowed him to attend my class, she was sending out a missionary, because this Mother had prepared her son to talk of Jesus. Even though so young, he was the first missionary in my life. I thank God for this boy. (Ten years after my conversion, I returned to visit Helio’s church. He was now married, and actively participating in the life of his church. We had a wonderful time of fellowship together.)

I returned to teaching my catechism classes, but there was no peace in my heart to continue. It seemed like a good idea to talk with the Bishop of Petrópolis, to see if he could help me. I was feeling so sinful that I could not bear receiving Holy Communion. Explaining my situation to the Bishop, he gave me a special rosary, asking that I pray over the beads constantly, for God to strengthen and bless me. The pope had blessed this rosary in 1950, and I knew no one else who was fortunate enough to own one. I made promises to all the saints, asking them to take away the heavy weight I felt within me. I said the rosary, making so many promises that I could not remember them all. However, now when I knelt before the images of the saints, they seemed cold and dead. No matter how much I pleaded with them, I knew they were not hearing me.

Once more I sought help from the Bishop and some of the religious, but there was nothing more they could do. Because of the intensity of my desperation, with no peace or rest for my soul, I decided to follow the example of my two friends. I fled the convent. There was a long personal battle of indecision and tremendous suffering before I realized I had no choice but to leave.

Life after the Convent

When I arrived in near-by Rio de Janeiro, no one wanted to hire me, because they did not know me. When they asked for my last address, I could not tell them, for fear the convent would find out where I was. One day, passing the church of Saint Theresa, I decided to go inside. I had always felt she was a very powerful saint. I knelt down, but instead of praying to her, my prayer went straight to God. I asked Him to show me the way, and to provide me with some place to stay. Leaving that church, hunger and thirst reminded me that I only had enough money for one bus ticket. I stopped in front of a sidewalk café where people were eating and drinking. Just looking had to satisfy me for the present, I reminded myself. The manager of the café came up to me and asked if I were hungry, or if I wanted to drink something cool. Knowing I had no money seemed to keep my mouth closed. I was not accustomed to speaking to men on the street. In the convent, we were warned not to approach, talk to, or even look at a man. But as if he could guess my situation, this gentleman turned around, went back into the building, and came out carrying a plate containing a sandwich and a glass of juice. As soon as he turned his back, I gulped down every bit.

Walking along for some time, I stopped at a house where I asked for a glass of water. The lady who answered the door was elderly and very kind to me. She invited me in out of the heat, and I accepted with pleasure. She brought me the water I had asked for, and also, a good-sized cup of coffee. What a treat! Then I noticed it was beginning to grow dark. When I stood up to leave, she asked, "Now where are you going?" I stood there for a moment, not knowing what to say. Realizing there must be a problem, she asked me to tell her what was wrong. Something about this lady inspired trust. I found myself pouring out my story. The next thing I knew, she was inviting me to stay with her and her 17-year-old grandson, until I could find a job. I was filled with gratitude to God for hearing my prayer and directing my steps. The next day I began hunting for work. After a while I realized that something was wrong. People were staring at my clothes. Maybe that is why they are not offering me a position. Returning to my temporary home, I saw a group of girls talking on the sidewalk. I walked up to them and asked if they knew where I could find work. They replied, "Why, buy a newspaper and look in the classifieds." "How do I find the classifieds?" I continued, not knowing what they were talking

about. When they saw how ignorant of city ways I really was, they laughed until they doubled over. But even while making fun of me, they helped me cut out a 'help wanted' advertisement. Immediately I went to the address given, and was informed the opening had just been filled. Disappointed, I returned home. Someone suggested I try wearing some other style of clothing, stating that the one I was using made me look like someone who had just escaped from a convent. I took their advice! Looking for work wearing different clothes, I was hopeful I would have better luck. Walking past a cemetery, I soon understood that these clothes were not all that great either. Two young people were talking as I came by, and I heard one of them insinuate that I looked like a walking corpse. Be that as it may, on this same day, I was hired as an aid at a private children's school. Interestingly, even though I lacked some of the requirements necessary for the job, I was hired. They required someone who spoke English, and I knew absolutely nothing about English. But I was quite well received by the school, paid a good salary with meals included, and the principal even provided me with my own sleeping quarters. Although I enjoyed this job, the morals of the place were not acceptable to me. Besides that, the principal was a "spiritist." Due to what had happened to my father, I did not want anything to do with this cult.

On my next day off, as I waited at the bus stop, a lady walked up to me, asking if I knew anyone who would like to work as a governess for her niece. "Sorry," I replied, "but I do not know anyone who could help you." Then she looked right at me, and said, "Could not you help her for at least 15 days? You see, my niece is moving, she has 5 children, and it is really too much for her." I accepted the proposal and went to meet my new employer.

If I had wanted to be helpful, I had come to the right place. One of the children in this family had gone to visit his grandparents in Itajubá. There had been an accident, and as a result of being thrown from a horse, the child died. The family postponed their move. The parents left immediately for her parents' city, and the house, plus the rest of the children were now exclusively in my care. Once they returned, I did not have the courage to leave them, so I remained with them in Rio for some time.

One Sunday on my way to church, I came face to face with a religious acquaintance, from my hometown, Petrópolis. She severely criticized me, saying I had done something very stupid when I abandoned my vows, and left the city without telling anyone. I answered that I had not done anything stupid, but had left because I deemed it necessary. She wrote down my address, and a few days later, the priest came to call. He brought me a message of peace, requesting that I return to the convent where I would be received with open arms. I explained to the priest that it would be wrong to suddenly walk out on that family in their hour of need, but I would return to the convent as soon as it was possible, because I was convinced I had committed a great error. However, God had other plans in store for me.

Some days later, an evangelical lady called, to give me a present: a Bible. I cautiously picked up the Bible; I well aware that this was the book the priests had placed on the forbidden reading list. I put it in my room, but could not bring myself to touch it for eight days. I even went as far as to pray for God's forgiveness for having accepted that Bible. After those eight days, the lady returned, and asked if I had begun to read it. I begged her to take the Bible back. Being a Roman Catholic, I simply could not keep that Bible. Even having said all this, she proceeded to invite me to her church. "Only if you come and get me, and take me back home,"

was my answer. If I had thought this would discourage her, I was wrong. When the Sunday agreed upon arrived, so did she. I noticed that everybody in her church sang the hymns, and the whole atmosphere was so different than that to which I was accustomed. After the message, the pastor gave an invitation, saying that if a person did not believe on Jesus Christ that night, he would go to hell. I smiled at what the pastor had said, and thought, "Never would I accept an invitation like that. This pastor did not understand that I was a Roman Catholic, and that I would never leave my faith, nor be converted to another religion." (In this I imitated my mother's zeal for the Catholic religion.) As she had promised, that lady took me back home. When she insisted that I return to visit her church another time, I made it clear that I was not interested, because I was a Roman Catholic, and I would never be converted to another religion.

A young boy selling books began to knock at the doors on our street. I became one of his regular customers. One day he showed up with only Catholic Bibles to sell. That is how I acquired my first Catholic Bible. My idea was that reading it carefully would enable me to combat the Protestants that, according to my opinion, were invading the whole world. That night with all my daily tasks behind me, I began to read my newly purchased Catholic Bible. While dawn crept in through my window, I was still reading. I felt like someone starving who had encountered an appetizing banquet spread before them. For the first time I discovered true joy! Days later, the priest returned to visit me, and commented that my appearance had changed for the better. I could not agree more, and enthusiastically shared that the source of my joy had come from reading the Sacred Scriptures. His tone changed, as he warned of the difficulty of reading the Bible without the help of a priest to interpret. "There's danger of mental confusion trying to read the Bible on your own," he added soberly. I argued that I had seen nothing that seemed difficult, but he counseled me to stop, since he was sure I would have difficulties with interpretation. He knew I would be traveling to Itajubá with that family. He did not like that either, but knowing I planned to return to Petrópolis in two months, he felt everything would work out. If he could have only known! God was taking care of each step of my way, gently leading me to personally know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whether or not I should read the Bible had left me perplexed. One particular night a depression swept over me. I left the house, visited various churches, and talked to some of my friends. Upon returning, once again that same strong urge came over me to read the forbidden book, which had been gathering dust for some time on my shelf. "What does it matter if I read this Bible?" I thought. "It's the Catholic Bible, isn't it, the Bible of my religion, and I must read it to know what it says!" The clock pointed to three o'clock in the morning when I stopped reading. And again, my soul was overwhelmed with contentment. From that day on, I never stopped reading God's Word! As I read, I reached the twentieth chapter of Exodus, which tells about the sculptured images. What a surprise!! I was always against the Protestants because of what they said about the images, but now I was seeing the following words written in my own Catholic Bible, "*Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image, or any likeness of anything 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, nor serve them*" (Exodus 20:4-5). The next Mass I attended, I showed the passage to the parish priest, but he responded that the Bible in my hand was not the true Bible. I showed the page telling who printed my Catholic Bible. He argued that this was only in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, you could have images. The

priest left me with some doubts. I did not have any knowledge at all on this subject, so I was going to have to work hard in order to learn more.

Arriving in Itajubá, I made contact with people who were part of the Catholic Church. They were “Mary’s Daughters,” the ladies who took part in the prayer group, and the single girls of the Catholic workers group. I had to do something. I could not just be idle, so I began to teach catechism to children. “Are there very many Protestants in this city of Itajubá?” I once asked the members of Mary’s Daughters. They answered me in the affirmative. “Do you know we had lots of Protestants in my city of Petrópolis? But in two months we founded 42 catechism centers, and we got rid of some of their places of worship.” I added that we had even chased them out of the jails by giving small pictures of saints plus food to the prisoners.”

We began to organize a theater with plays for the young people. There was a strong Catholic seamstress who cooperated by making costumes for the various presentations. One day, as I checked on her progress, I commented about a party I had to organize for that month, plus so many other responsibilities, I did not know if I would manage to get it all done. There were two girls present at the time, and they offered to help me in whatever way they could. When they left, I ask my seamstress friend who they were. She replied, “Why, they’re both evangelical believers.” At first I was horrified. Imagine, getting help from two evangelicals! But then I became convinced it would be easy to convert them to the Catholic faith. The girls were Marcia and Daya. They were members of the Presbyterian church of Itajubá. How they worked! They helped me with posters as well as all the clean up. My biggest surprise came when they offered to come on the day of the party, and help in the wings, in anyway they could. At the end of the program, as they were leaving, I went to thank them, explaining how impressed I was with their work and their attitude. “Please, look me up anytime you need something!” I told them. Two months later, I ran into one of them at the market. “Miss Carmen, you’re just the person we wanted to see!” exclaimed Daya. “We are going to have a party at our church for the young people.” As she talked, she was searching my face for some sign of early refusal. “Marcia and I really want you to come! Will you, please?” I asked if the party would be inside the church. Daya told me they would be using a large social room they had for such occasions. My next stop was to see the parish priest; I would ask him if it would be all right if I attended. He said for me to go ahead. “However,” he added, “be very careful! Those Protestants are worse than a leaky roof: drip-drip-drip, until everything is completely soaked. Do not stay more than ten or fifteen minutes, and then make your exit.”

The day of Marcia and Daya’s party arrived. I entered the room wearing a special uniform used by nuns when not on duty in the convent. It came to my ankles. I wore a scarf over my hair, long thick stockings, and a large crucifix hanging around my neck. All eyes turned to look at me curiously for an instant, and then quickly they looked away so as not to embarrass me. One of them came up and asked, “Do you belong to that church that has a pope?” I answered, “I’m an Roman Catholic! Why?” Before our conversation could continue however, someone came and took him away. Now I did wish I had never come. And I also wished that the young man who came to ask me about the pope’s church had never come. As I was trying to decide if he had wanted to insult me on purpose, a door opened at the other end of the room, and in stepped a white haired lady.

She made her way directly to me, took my hand warmly, and said, “Welcome, welcome to our get-together. We hope this won’t be your last visit, but that you will return and be with us many more times.” I noticed the joy on her face, and it made a deep impression on me. From the first moment, I liked that lady. Then I made a mental note not to like these Protestants too much. It would not be appropriate to get too close to evangelical believers. As soon as she had gone, I asked my friends who had invited me, “Who was that lady?” They responded, “Oh, that’s our pastor’s wife.” Although I did not say anything out loud, I thought to myself, “Poor thing. She’s the worst sinner of them all.” After a few minutes, she came back with an invitation. “Miss Carmen, why do not you visit me next Wednesday at home? We can have coffee and cookies. I just learned how to make some really delicious cookies from a new recipe, and I’d like you to try them.” What was I going to say? I mumbled something about lots of work waiting for me, but she kept insisting. “You know, we do have to leave our work once in a while and visit friends. Do come!” I felt an affinity for this lady. Somehow she had broken my resistance, and was overcoming me with her kindness. The power of her words was beyond my understanding. This had never happened to me before. But, at the same time I thought, “If I make friends with this lady, who knows, one day the pastor’s wife may become a Roman Catholic and bring part of her church with her. Wednesday I was on my way to Blanche Lício’s home. Walking down the street I thought of what I should say, and what I should not say. Without knowledge of the Scriptures, it is hard to feel confident in expressing your religious thoughts.

Encounters in the Pastor’s home

Arriving at the pastor’s house, which was next door to the church, the realization hit me that, for the first time, I was going to enter an evangelical pastor’s house! The coffee and cookies were delicious, but she did not even touch on the subject of religion. We talked about many things. She told me about her daughters and their schoolwork, talked about her work at the church, talked about the weather, everything but religion. From that day on, I often went to the pastor’s house for coffee and cookies. There were times we did not even have coffee; we just had good conversation. Our subjects were varied, except that she always left out any reference to religion. Surprisingly, I was the one that introduced the subject by saying that I liked to read the Bible, and that I appreciated the various Bible readings. Blanche said to me, “Well then, lets read the Bible.” I hastened to explain that I had not brought my Bible with me and I only read out of my Bible. “But,” I suggested, “next week when I come, I’ll bring my Bible, we can compare the texts and read together.” “That sounds like a good idea! Next week we can begin to read the Bible together.” So, Mrs. Blanche and I were in agreement.

The following week I returned, carrying my Bible. Can you guess what we began to read first? It was Luke’s Gospel. I loved reading those chapters with Mrs. Blanche. She had so much patience, never criticizing, never insulting me, and always treating me with respect. Since she never argued about questions of religion, I began to wonder, “Why does she keep so quiet? It must be that the Protestants know how well versed I am in my religion, and that I have all the answers. It must be that they are afraid of me! I am the one who is going to ask the questions! And I am going to back that pastor’s wife up against the wall.”

The parish priest learned I was going to the pastor’s house. I told him myself that we were conversing about the Bible. I even told him that I was trying to win the pastor’s wife to our church. He became very worried, and as a result, began to give Bible classes right there in our

church, every Tuesday evening. Many Marianist brothers and “Daughters of Mary” came. We asked some very difficult questions about Exodus 20, and John 14. For instance, I asked him, “Father, if the Bible says, ‘Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,*’ why then do we go to the Father through the saints? Why not through Jesus?” Many evenings, our debates with this priest went on past midnight, and although he had no answers for us, Blanche did. She was the wife of pastor Mario Lício of the First Presbyterian Church of Itajubá, and she knew what to say because she knew her Bible. The answers were not hers, but from God’s own Word.

The next time we got together, I said quite firmly, “Blanche, I’ve come here today, not just to have coffee and cookies. I want to ask you some questions!” She looked surprised but replied, “That’s fine. Go right ahead. If I do not know the answers, we’ll look them up in the Bible, or my husband is near and he can help.” “You do not need to worry,” I said quickly. These are real easy questions.” However, I was smiling inside, thinking, “She’s going to have trouble answering me this time!”

My first question was well thought out ahead of time. “What’s the difference between the Catholic Church and the Protestants?” She replied, “Actually there’s very little difference. “Very little difference?” I thought. You have someone in charge, do not you?” “Oh, yes!” I answered. “We have a wonderful leader. Our leader is the pope! He lives in the richest palace this world has to offer, wears a crown of gold on his head, and he is the head of the Catholic Church. I’m ready to fight, and if necessary, die for him, so that he’ll become better known and his power in the world will increase more and more.” After hearing what I said, she said the following. “It’s as I said, the difference is quite small,” and I noticed tears in her eyes. “We who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, also have someone in charge. Our leader does not have a crown of gold on His head, for the crown men offered Him, was made of thorns.” Silence filled the room. There was nothing I could say. From that moment on, I began to envy believers. “So,” I thought, “the Head of the Christians is Jesus Christ, the One who died for us on the cross!” But He’s the One I had always desired to serve. Yet, I could not be mad at Mrs. Blanche, because I, Carmen da Mota was the one who said the pope was my leader! That day I did not want to talk to the pastor’s wife anymore. I was defeated! Returning home, those words rang in my ears, “My leader is Christ; my leader does not have a crown of gold, but of thorns.” No matter where I went, those words burned in my heart. I clearly saw the difference between one leader and the other. It was not a small difference.

On another Wednesday, I returned with some more questions. “Blanche, why do not Protestants like the Blessed Virgin Mary? They say she isn’t a virgin, and they also say she had more children.” Her reply began with a question directed to me. “Before I answer your question, I want to ask you one. Does a married lady lose some degree of holiness if she has many children? The answer must be “yes” or “no!”

I began thinking this one over. In the beginning, I had thought it would be easy to answer any questions the believers could ask me about my religion, but it was not as easy as it seemed. If I say a married lady loses holiness by having many children, I would be wrong! If I say she does not, I’m agreeing with believers. Finally, I had to answer in the negative. She continued, “Look, you have a Bible in your hands, and you do not know it very well. Open your Bible to Mark 6:3 where it tells us the answer to your very question. *“Is not this the carpenter, the son of*

Mary, the brother of James, and Joseph, and of Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" I was surprised to read name after name, and in the end it said, "*And are not his sisters here with us?"*" I was tremendously impressed by these facts. In order to avoid total defeat, I risked one more question: "Tell me, can a sincere Catholic be saved? I am talking about a Catholic who attends Mass, obeys all the rules of the Church, carries out many penances; when this person dies, will she go directly to heaven?" Blanche closed her eyes momentarily, then looked directly into mine and said firmly: "Be careful, Carmen, religion does not save anyone! Christ is the One Who saves!" Again, I had nothing to say. I thought she would say that only her religion could save, but she presented Christ as the solution for my sins. I could not contradict her either. However, not wanting her to have the final victory, as I got up to leave I declared as firmly as I knew how, "I continue to be a Roman Catholic!" and went out the door. Only I knew the state of my own heart at that moment. Walking toward home I was thinking, "Religion does not save anyone; Christ is the One Who saves!" Those words repeated themselves over and over in my mind, wherever I went. I was engaged in an active struggle with God!

A theatrical presentation was being planned in the Catholic city of Aparecida of the North, the Mecca of Brazil. Twenty-five young people and children were taking part. Our goal was to bring in money for the poor. I resolved that this was just what I needed to settle my nerves and take my mind off my problems. We rented a special bus, but even there, my Bible was open and I was reading every spare minute. One polite young man belonging to our group thought it was strange to see me reading the Bible. We talked about the Bible for a while, and he came to the conclusion that my reading it was a good idea. "You know something," he admitted, "I ought to read the Bible, too!" After arriving at our destination, the young man seemed to have disappeared. Some weeks later, someone commented that he had recently become an evangelical believer. Unknown to me, I too was very close to believing on Christ as my Savior - God was preparing everything to this end. "*For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:13).

The next step took place when I once again visited Blanche Lício's home. I shared that I was thinking of moving to another city. "I'm not staying here in Itajubá; I have no peace in this place." She looked at me and tears glistened in her eyes. "Carmen, be careful! God can greatly bless those who study His Word and obey, but He can also deal quite firmly with those who reject Him." At that point, I questioned her, "What does that Bible verse mean that says, '*And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven*'" (Luke 12:10; Matthew 12:31,32)? She answered, "That verse is for those who know the truth and reject it. It means they are resisting the Holy Spirit. For people who act like that, there cannot be salvation." Once more she had spoken to my heart.

The Fire and the Decisive Moment

That night when I got home, Zilah, mother of the children I cared for, had a favor to ask of me. Her husband had gone on a trip, she was expecting a child soon, and she asked if I would sleep in her house. That way, I could be company for her, as well as assist her if she needed help. First, I went to my small apartment outside to see if all was in order. Looking around I saw all that I held dear in this world. The colorful costumes used in the theater by the young people and

children, were hung in their places. There was a large library full of books on the lives of various saints that I loved plus all my images of the saints of the Catholic Church. Then I thought, "If some day I become a believer, I would have to abandon all this." My puppy, only 4 months old, received food and water, and I left, joining Zilah for the night.

Around one in the morning, I woke up, hearing Zilah calling me. "Carmen, Carmen, come quickly! Look!" I ran to the window. Flames were shooting high into the black sky, and what had been my tiny apartment was rapidly becoming only charred brick columns, outlined against the red glow. The fire devoured all my books, rosaries, costumes, and the images of my beloved saints. Only one thing had escaped - my Bible, which I had kept with me to read. I had nothing left except my Bible and my life, which had been saved by His divine plan that I had ignored until that moment.

It was then that I recognized the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had been calling me for so many years. My eyes were finally opened to the light...His light! I could now understand that Christ had died on the cross for my sins, and I needed to trust in Him alone for my salvation. "*Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness*" (1 Peter 2:24). As I looked at the destruction of those objects holding me to the past, I heard again the invitation of so many years before: "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" IT WAS IN FRONT OF THE FLAMES THAT MY HEART BELONGED ONLY TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WHO GAVE ME NEW LIFE IN HIM. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). My desire to serve Him completely until he would call me home was now possible by His all-sufficient enabling grace.

I had forgotten everything around me, for my contact with God was so intimate and real. I had even forgotten the fire! I could talk to God!! I could recognize His presence! That was when Zilah interrupted my rapture - "Carmen, let's put out the fire!" "Oh, yes, the fire!" After we got everything under control, I returned to my bed, but not to sleep. My heart was so full of love, joy, and peace. Yes, I had the peace I had searched for so many years, and had never found, until now! "*For he is our peace*" (Ephesians 2:14).

The following day, Blanche and I were together. However, my pride was such, that although I had told her all about the fire, she knew nothing yet about my salvation in Jesus Christ. It was very humiliating to confess my faith in Christ alone, when just the afternoon before, I had declared my allegiance to my religion, adding that I would never forsake my Catholic religion. But, as our moments together increased, it became impossible to hide the truth from this dear pastor's wife. So I said, "Last night something special happened. I trusted in Jesus Christ alone to be saved. I am a believer, ready to stand together with you for the Gospel!"

What a thrill it was for Blanche to hear those words! But I would have to humble myself even more, seeing that I had to ask her not to tell anyone else! The day the Catholics would hear for themselves, I argued, would be the beginning of persecution and trouble. I continued giving catechism classes, attending Mass and working with "Mary's Daughters." But my Bible was my constant companion.

One day, a Marianist brother asked me why I was not carrying my missal book anymore in order to accompany the Mass. It was at that point I realized I could not walk the fence

between Jesus and the Catholic Church. I knew what the Bible taught! So, I began to attend the evangelical meetings at the Pastor's house. However, I sat in an inner room where I was unobserved, but could still hear the whole service. It was fear of man that kept me from the evangelical service. If someone should see me, it would provoke a lot of unnecessary agitation among my friends and acquaintances. Even though I felt I ought to openly declare that I had become a believer, it seemed to be beyond me to do so at this point. Downtown my friends ran into me, and inevitably the conversation went like this: "Carmen, you're so different! Everybody's saying you've become a Christian!" It was then, that I lost all courage, and answered, "No, I'm not a Christian I'm a Roman Catholic!" This was followed by profound inner sadness. Why did not I have the courage to come right out and confess that I was a believer in Jesus Christ?

It so happened that two Christian friends were on their way to teach a group of children some Bible stories, and I had gone along. We were barely in sight of the children, when they took off running toward us, came up and hugged me. That's when I realized they were the same children to whom I had been teaching catechism. What made matters worse, one of the mothers who recognized me, said, "So it's true what everyone in the city is saying! You have really become a Protestant! Right before my eyes I see you with these two evangelical ladies. It must be true! You must have become a believer!"

I could barely talk. My heart was in my throat. But I managed a weak, "Certainly not! I'm a friend of these ladies, because I've learned they aren't as bad as I had previously thought! But, in no way am I a believer!" Those words were barely out of my mouth, when I was overcome with anguish and remorse. Once more, I had denied the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Turning to my two companions, I begged, "Please, go ahead without me. I must return to the house of the lady who just talked to me." She was still out in the yard, and I hurried up to her. "I've come to ask your forgiveness for lying to you just now." She gasped, "You... lied?" "Yes," I admitted. "The whole city is commenting about my having become a believer. Yet, until today, I've been lying to all of you, saying that I'm not. But, the truth is, my life belongs to Jesus Christ, He is my Savior. It is my desire to proclaim His name to every creature on earth!" No one could have been a better choice to spread the news than that lady! She was the town gossip. But what a relief it was to me, to have made that confession! My joy knew no bounds that day, since it was the first time I could share my testimony, speaking in the name of Jesus Christ!

The news spread like wild fire throughout the whole city. My friends from "Mary's Daughters" came to visit me. Many of them embraced me, weeping, promising to say prayers for me so I would return to the Catholic Church. But my only answer was, "Jesus said, '*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.*' Well, if Jesus is the Way, to whom should I go, if not to Him? I'm happy to be with Christ." And it happened that I repeated that verse many times over and over that evening, to show them that I was really a believer in Jesus Christ.

The difficulties I foresaw began to surface. There were people who mistreated me when they met me on the street. The Catholic Church called a meeting for 8 p.m. and I was the reason. It was not easy, but I went. My plan was to arrive early. I had hoped I could sit in an out of the way place, but it did not work out that way. Everything slowed me down that evening and I

arrived at the last minute. The hall was overflowing. I had to make my way up near the front, walking past all those people, while they stared at me. Finally I was called to the platform where I was asked various questions. My answer was with Christ's words in John 14:6: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*" There was no one else to follow, for me it was Christ alone! It was a wonderful opportunity to give my testimony in front of all my dear friends that I was leaving behind.

Perhaps it seems easy to leave all for Christ, but humanly speaking, it is not! A majority of my friends were in the Catholic Church. There were all the young people, the girls in the "Daughters of Mary" which included the working class Catholic young people; there was the group that performed, as well as those who prepared the props for the theatrical plays we put on; there were the children in my catechism classes; the ladies who separated themselves for prayer; plus so many more friendships within the church itself. I had always been a very social person; I loved those people. But now it was necessary to leave them, because Christ called me. He was the important One to me. He became the owner of my life. Now my life was no longer mine, but His. "*Forasmuch as you know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your vain manner of life received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ*" (1 Peter 1:18-19). It was also necessary to clearly confess Him so that Christ would be glorified. In the midst of struggles, suffering, and contempt, God used His Word to touch the lives of Marianist brothers who had been studying the Bible with me. They also accepted Christ as their Savior and became faithful believers of the Lord. I praise the Lord for all He did for His own honor and glory!

One wonderful thing God did involved a lady that I cared for, who was paralyzed. She had not been able to leave her bed for many years. I was always at her side to help, and to keep her from accepting the Word. But after being converted, I returned to her house together with some believers. I told them, "I do not know how to explain God's Word yet, but please, you talk to her." Then, I said to that lady, "I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, and I'm following Him with all my heart." That paralyzed bedridden lady's eyes shone. She listened to God's Word with joy, and accepted Christ also. It was not long after, that she entered eternity. Thanks be given to our God, she was saved before leaving this earth!

The next day I met the president of "Mary's Daughters." She had held this office for many years. Now she was married, a nurse at Mercy General Hospital in Itajubá, and faithful to the Catholic Church. Talking about spiritual things in regard to the Scriptures, she showed interest, and said, "At the moment, Carmen, I do not have time. But come to my house tonight at 8 p.m. when we can talk with the whole family present." (She had a daughter and two sons, besides her husband.) That night I was finally on my way. It was difficult to maintain any schedule, because wherever I went, people stopped me on the street, wanting to know why I had left Catholicism and was causing so many problems. But thanks be to God, I arrived right on time. The whole family was seated around the table waiting for me. And we began to talk about the Bible. It was truly wonderful! We talked from 8 p.m. until midnight. All of my doubts and all of theirs were cleared up from God's Word. They began to attend the evangelical church and a few months later were baptized. Because of what was happening, people who passed me on the street mistreated me. However, once more, God intervened in my favor.

The Evangelical Bible School

I went to speak to Pastor Mario, Blanche's husband. "Pastor, one day you said you would be ready to help some very dedicated person, someone from your congregation, who desired to go to an evangelical Bible school to study. On that occasion I was resentful, since I had not yet thought of leaving the Catholic Church. But now I have come to ask you to send me to that school!

And that is how it was that Pastor Mario, Blanche, and I were on our way to the evangelical Bible school. They introduced me to the founder and president, Paul Guiley and his wife, Viola. They assured me that I was most welcome. "Here you won't have too many problems. God will help you! And Carmen, we are also ready to help you in every way we can." Pastor Guiley put my fears at rest.

I must admit that even in the evangelical Bible school, I had struggles and problems, due to being an inexperienced and recently converted Christian. But, held up before the Lord in prayer by the believers of my church, I conquered in Christ, and finished the course. Paul and Viola Guiley were greatly used by God in the formation of my spiritual life.

In June of 1962, Pastor Paul and Viola left that school, together with one other couple, Artêmio and Neta Alexandrina, and seven other students beside myself. We went to the State of Paraná with the goal of building another Bible school. I cannot tell you everything, but we had to dig our own wells, find wood to build our fire, as well as make a stove out of rocks where we cooked outdoors for a year. We planted our own food, rice, beans, manioc root, potatoes, vegetables, and etcetera. Plus, we still had four hours of Bible lessons in the mornings, and homework to do after coming in from the fields in the evenings. We did all of this gladly because His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

The evangelical school still serves the Lord at its original location in Eldorado, Paraná, and is called Maranatha. The training we received was really wonderful because it included not only Bible studies, but studies for a practical Christian life. Much emphasis was given to developing intimacy with God and spending time alone with Him in prayer. All of us learned the principle of "living by faith."

Once more I had to leave friends with whom I had struggled and worked, studied and prayed. My first two years were spent at Peniel, and the last two in Paraná, where I graduated from Maranatha. That life of friendship and hardship left an indelible mark.

Now it was time to face the future, going out into the world to spread God's message of salvation in Christ Jesus alone. I traveled to Sao Carlos where I gave my testimony and helped in their camp program. It was there I met Pastor John Stucky, his wife Bea, and their two daughters, Janet and Judy. This couple invited me to stay with them for six months to help in the church work of evangelization.

As always, I loved evangelizing. I accepted their invitation and moved into their home. Every day I got up early, had breakfast, took my bag of Bibles and tracts, and went out distributing literature around the city and its neighborhoods. I spoke to interested people about salvation in Jesus Christ. Usually, I returned rather late, sometimes at 8 p.m. One morning, as I was preparing to leave, Pastor John called me into his office and asked, "Carmen, are you

spending time reading your Bible and praying?” I thought awhile, and then answered truthfully, “very little.” He continued, “It would be better if you stayed home in the mornings, read your Bible, prayed, rested, and then used the afternoons to evangelize.” I pondered this idea, went to my room, and read the Bible until lunchtime.

When I left the house, it was 2 p.m. “Today is practically wasted,” I murmured. “There isn’t time for me to do anything!” My faith in God’s ways was small. I began to hand out some of the tracts. Then, I went to a place I had never gone before and handed out more tracts. I knocked on the door of one of the houses. The lady who answered, told me right off, “I do not want to hear anything you say! I’m Roman Catholic.” “I, too, was Roman Catholic. I have your church’s Bible here with me. Would you like to look at it?” She opened the door and allowed me to enter. The next three hours were spent talking about God’s Word. It was wonderful! She promised that night to be in the church service, she and her family. And they were! She never stopped attending church. Some months later, she and her family were saved, baptized, and became faithful members.

It is marvelous how we can learn the lessons God has for us. The day I thought was wasted, with no time left to work for Christ, was the day the Lord used me to lead others to Him. I praise God for the lives of these missionaries He placed in my life. Their encouragement helped me to grow stronger spiritually so that I could be more useful in the cause of Christ.

The six months at Sao Carlos had flown by. It was time to travel to other places. First I resolved to ask to be baptized by immersion. Pastor John Stucky baptized me together with his daughter Judy, at the Sao Carlos campground. That was a wonderful day. Now, with my bags packed, I began traveling throughout Brazil, giving my testimony and teaching God’s Word. After three years, the Lord prepared my path according to His will, and led me to the giant city of Sao Paulo in Southern Brazil.

Sao Paulo and New Christian Friends

There were two definite reasons for my being there. One was to continue the work of evangelizing; the other was to care for my health. That is how I met Dr. Shedd’s family. They directed me to the Christian bookstore in downtown Sao Paulo, “The Christian Reader,” managed by Pastor Richard Denham. This servant of God received me, taught me to do the work, and gave me much encouragement. One of the things that greatly impressed me in Pastor Richard’s life was his manner of evangelizing. He always had a smile on his face, and treated people with compassion and respect.

In 1968, one more missionary family came to live in Sao Paulo: Earl Mets, his wife Jo Ann, and their three children, Diane, Susan, and Steven. At that time I was living in an apartment with a lady friend. However, they invited me to live with them and help them in evangelism. They wanted to begin a church in their home. I became a member of this family. We worked together for many years, evangelizing and teaching God’s Word.

They returned to the United States in 1971 to report to their churches, and I went too. My goal was to share my testimony of how Christ saved me out of “religion,” so that others could learn of God’s power.

During that year in the States, we traveled a lot. I gave my testimony by way of translation in the churches and camps where we always taught God’s Word. I had frequently

heard there was much racism in the U.S. I have visited there twice now, and I was always treated kindly. Each time I was accepted warmly and respected. I thank God for the life of each American there that made me feel at home while I shared God's Word.

We returned to Brazil in 1972, and continued teaching the Word and preparing people for God's service. For twenty-eight years this has been my labor of love. Once in a while I travel. I have spoken in some churches and meetings. But my time is spent mostly here in Sao Paulo.

Somebody must be thinking, "And where is her family?" I thank the Lord that my family is well. When I was saved, and my family found out, they were saddened and shocked. They accused me, saying, "You abandoned our religion, forsaking our Lady of Fátima! How could you?" But I requested prayer for them for God to touch their hearts. The first to come to know the Lord were my oldest sister, Maria, and my niece, Vera Lúcia. Next was my sister Silvia who was deeply involved in spiritism. I believe she really sought something to satisfy her heart. Once she heard God's Word, and passed through struggles and spiritual battles, she believed in Jesus Christ as her Savior. Silvia was baptized and served the Lord for many years until she became ill with cancer. Eight years ago she was called home to be with her Lord and Savior.

I am so thankful that my nephew and niece believed in Christ alone for their salvation while they were young. Later, their mother, Aidae, my sister-in-law, and my youngest brother, Sebastian, also believed on Christ alone and were saved. So, my whole family is together in the Lord at the foot of the cross, serving Christ.

I do not know if you have noticed that in this brief testimony, there is an apparent lack of security in my life. I was always asking a priest what I should or should not do. This is normal,



Carmen in the year 2000

after spending so many years in the convent where the Superior would always say, "I'm the only one who can think, only I decide, and no one else! Shut up, only I speak here." We literally stopped thinking for ourselves. With the passage of time, our mind was brain washed and it became impossible to make our own decisions.

Coming from the convent into the world was not easy either, because generally there was wickedness around us. People deceived us and we swallowed what people told us. There was so much insecurity within us that it became very difficult to confront the world again. That is why I constantly found myself thinking, "Should I go back? Should I return?" I wanted to flee from "the world." The convent was not good, but out in the world, I was like a bird with

damaged wings, that could not fly by itself. Insecurity was common for those who left the convent.

When I was working at "The Christian Reader" bookstore, a nun by the name Ruth came in one day. Ruth said she had read my life story in the small book, "Searching." It had touched her heart and she pled with me to help her leave the convent. After talking it over with the missionary, Earl Mets, he opened his home so Ruth would have a place to stay until other arrangements could be made. I made the necessary plans and went to fetch her from the convent.

The whole situation was difficult. But, thanks to God's grace, I managed to bring her home. You simply cannot imagine the extent of her insecurity. Ruth had entered the convent when she was twenty and was now leaving at the age of fifty-seven. During those thirty-seven years inside the convent, she taught seven subjects, however, her nerves were gone. Only God could help her. After many battles, Ruth believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as her Savior, for which we praise God. We went together to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ at a few churches. Afterward, I traveled some; she also traveled to different places. I can only thank the Lord that one more soul was delivered from the power of darkness and transferred to the wonderful light of Christ.

Here you have read a summary of the critical parts of my life and of what the Lord did for me! Take refuge in these words of Christ, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). The Lord tells you to come to Him, to believe in Him, and to trust Him only for your salvation. Doing this, He will give you full forgiveness for your sins, free you from the fears of eternal death, and give you everlasting life. Come and cast your burden upon Him, this is the Gospel call.