

Eileen M. Doran

A Labyrinthian Way

Each life comes fresh from the hand of God and winds its way along a totally unique path from beginning to end. Mine certainly is no different from the myriad lives that have come and gone through the ages. I was born into an Irish-Catholic family, the third generation removed from the days of the potato famine immigration. My mom, however, hailed back to revolutionary days in her French heritage and had been raised in Baptist and Methodist churches until she married my father and converted to Catholicism.

Catholic Education

Except for occasional attendance with my parents at church, my introduction to God came when I began to attend a Catholic school in Jersey City, New Jersey, as a first grader. I only remember one lay teacher, a lovely young woman [who taught me in the third grade](#). [I remember she had an artificial leg](#).

My first-grade teacher was a kindly and saintly older woman clothed in the garb of the religious order to which she belonged. I treasured the brief moments when Sister Angelita would place me on her lap and express her motherly affection. As I learned of Jesus and of His death on the cross, I determined to give my life to Him, too, as a member of the same religious order. Throughout the years of grammar school, I ardently participated in the various religious activities presented to me as pleasing to the God I was coming to know and longed to serve as completely and purely as possible.

Several times I made the “nine first Fridays” wondering how God would figure out all the plenary indulgences credited to my account. Aspirations (one-phrase prayers) were generally worth hundreds of days’ indulgence. An advent prayer said every day of advent carried a plenary indulgence. I began to go to Mass daily in the seventh grade. I attended novenas to Mary and to Saint Francis Xavier. I prayed to Saint Christopher for travel, Saint Anthony for lost articles, and Saint Jude for hopeless cases.

Convent Preparation

During the seventh grade, a young woman came to our school to speak of the preparatory high school conducted by the religious order stationed in our school. My desire to serve God found immediate application as she explained that this school accepted girls after graduating from the eighth grade. My Dad was duly proud of me and spoke so to his still deeply Irish Catholic family. There had not been a “vocation” since an aunt of theirs had become a nun somewhere in Pennsylvania.

The four years of high school passed quickly as I pursued a regimen of strong academics coupled with a rigorous schedule of prayer and religious studies. Among the spiritual experiences of those years, two in particular stand out. When we were faced with the possibility or actuality of inclement weather, we interceded via Mary by singing a beautiful Gregorian chant of her Magnificat. If the sun came beaming into the room we, of course, credited her with this event. In another Marian devotion, we recited the rosary beads each noon after lunch. I found a book called Rosary Novenas, which contained meditations on the fifteen mysteries of the rosary and **this** took the monotony out of the recitation of ten “Hail Mary’s” per mystery. We recited them, five mysteries at a time, grouped as the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of the rosary. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were focused on the “Blessed Virgin Mary.”

During these years, I actually dedicated myself to Jesus through Mary after reading books about Saint Louis de Montfort who advocated this method of intercession. Jesus was said to be too unapproachable for us. Mary was more on our level as imperfect human beings. Yet, she was said to have been conceived free from “original sin” and to have lived a perfect life. Nevertheless, her model was seen to be more valid than that of Jesus for the purpose of our emulation. She was billed as the “co-redemptrix” along with Jesus. After all, she was present at the foot of the cross when Jesus died.

Religious Formation

Upon graduation from preparatory school, I was accepted into the postulancy of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth at Convent Station, New Jersey. I spent a blissful year studying freshman college courses and waiting on tables of college girls for their meals.

During the following year I became a novice. This was a cloistered year of preparation for formal entrance into the community by the taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Only studies of religion and religious music were permitted along with various chores in the motherhouse. Silence was observed except for recreation periods, one hour each in the afternoon and evening, and on special occasions as granted by the superior. The philosophy of the Mistress, the woman put in charge of the forty-five of us, was to break any self-will that might arise in each of us during that year. She did this by almost daily accusation of faults, some real, but most imaginary, to each of us both **publicly** and privately. Humiliation was the tool for training in sanctification. On one occasion I received “public penance” and had to recite the fifty-first psalm kneeling in front of the assembled group after night prayers. Keeping the rules perfectly was the answer to becoming perfect. Penance erased any imperfection. It was a higher form of sanctification than a **lay** person could attain. But the method of training precluded any hope for the actual attainment of the goal.

By the end of the year, I was convinced I would never make “sainthood.” Sister Patricia emulated the few who had had “conversions.” Although I prayed as long and as fervently as I

knew how, and tried to look as holy as might be pleasing to her, I left the novitiate convinced something was basically wrong with me. The mistress had said she would admit me to vows but that I would never become a good religious. I felt even God could not approve of me. But I still believed this was the best way to serve God. I knew of no other way to serve God unreservedly. So, I took my vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience at the end of that year. Now I was to live up to the motto of the congregation: "Who lives to the rule, lives to God." Despite the gnawing discouragement eating at my soul, I purposed to serve God as best I knew how. That was all I could possibly attain.

Life as a Nun

After two additional years of college studies on the motherhouse grounds, I was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of Saint Elizabeth. This was followed by an assignment to teach biology in a diocesan high school. During the summers, I pursued a Masters Degree at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. During the school years, along with a normal teaching load, including the monitoring of extra-curricular activities, I obtained federal grants for additional studies related to my teaching, while attending local colleges and universities on a part-time basis.

Life was more than busy. At one point, I was asked by a priest stationed at the high school to team-teach a drug curriculum with him. We became friendly, but I was totally unprepared for his leading us into a more than friendship status. After dinner together in a restaurant one evening, he took me to his rectory room and locked the door. It became clear he wanted something more than friendship. I sought a transfer to another school, but he continued to be in touch. After his proposal of marriage during my first year in the new position, I began to entertain thoughts of leaving the convent. A short time later, he received permission for further study and changed his proposal to a desire for a special relationship within the confines of the religious life style.

Soon after that experience, I was working as director of a retreat. I encountered more than friendly remarks from another priest who was doing the preaching at the retreat. That finalized my decision to leave the religious life. It was the weekend of my twenty-ninth birthday.

A Permanent Leave of Absence

My world came toppling down. I had worked hard for several years now to become truly pleasing to God, only to see clearly that I could no longer continue in this lifestyle. I had seen firsthand an hypocrisy that made my keeping of the vows ludicrous. I began the process of contacting the superiors and making the necessary arrangements for an obligatory leave of absence, although I knew I would never return to the religious life.

Secretly, I wrote resumes and letters of introduction to public school superintendents in the basement of the convent. My family made it clear I was not expected to come home to live or to anticipate any help. A friend I had made while teaching in the new school offered me to stay in her home while she and her husband and two small children were away on a business trip. The previous summer I had worked for a pharmaceutical firm as a research microbiologist and could return to that position at the end of the school year. A lay teacher was selling some very used furniture. The congregation I was leaving gave me two hundred dollars, which they were bound by canon law to return to me, since entering the group I had been required to pay a fee, which was considered as a form of dowry reminiscent of medieval times. I asked to stay in the

convent until my board ran out at the end of August, but I was told Sister Nicoletta was waiting for my room. I had to be gone by the fifteenth. Fortunately, I was hired just before the fifteenth of June for a position near my parents' home in a local public high school.

I stayed in my friends' home while working the summer job and then moved into an apartment with my one hundred dollars' worth of used furniture. In the beginning of September, I began teaching in the public high school.

Six months later I signed my papers from Rome releasing me from my perpetual vows. The Superior told me it was only a piece of paper, but I had seen it as a life commitment to God. I had lost my chance to serve Him in the best way I knew possible. Now I was a layperson, defrocked of any possibility for total sanctification.



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Eileen and Briant

Marriage

Living alone in an apartment brought its own kind of loneliness. After avoiding the company of several other women, I missed the commitment of living with others on a daily basis. Getting married seemed to be the only answer, but most of my age group seemed to be married. The options had narrowed considerably during the years I had spent cloistered in the convent. I contacted a friend who had left two years before me. She suggested joining a dating service, another former member of the congregation had recently met and married a fine gentleman in this manner. After a year of making contacts through such a service, I was introduced to Briant Doran. A profound and enduring relationship began to unfold the moment our eyes met.

As we returned to my apartment on our first date, Briant shared how he had wanted to attend a boarding high school in preparation for becoming a priest. It was suggested to him by a friend that he wait until after high school. The interlude made it clear to Briant that a life of celibacy was not for him. I then shared my sixteen years of association with the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth. He had attended a high school staffed by the same Order and knew several of the nuns I had become acquainted with in my years of affiliation with them. In fact, we grew up unbeknown to each other in the same city in different parishes. He, too, had been raised by an Irish Catholic family and considered himself of the "fifties" generation. He had attended the installment of one of his cousins as Bishop over a diocese in Connecticut. Another cousin, John Doran, had become a priest in New Jersey and would marry us eighteen months later.

First Introduction to Truth

During the months of dating, Briant told me of Tom who had left the Catholic Church. Briant, although a fallen-away Catholic at the time, tried to convince Tom to return to his Catholic faith. While working together, Tom took Briant to his church where Briant learned of a new and different way to look at the things of God. The pastor made it clear in the service he attended that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is none

righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10), and *“all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6). Of ourselves we are permanently estranged from God. Only the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary’s cross can make us right with God, *“and with His stripes we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:5). *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). The Bible was presented as the only source for faith and living.

Briant answered the invitation to trust Jesus by faith alone for his salvation. *“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). *“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation”* (Isaiah 12:2, 3).

Immediately Briant saw the need to make this message clear to those in the Catholic Church who trusted their works to make them right with God. And the saddest part of the doing of the works was that one could never be sure when a person died whether he or she had done enough works to make it through the pearly gates. Thus, through the system of Mass cards, which are left in great numbers for the grieving family at a funeral home, people waste their money buying those cards in hopes of praying their loved ones into heaven. *“And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). Salvation is to be secured through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for one’s sin before death. One’s destiny is sealed at the drawing of the last breath.

It was clear to Briant that salvation was by faith alone through the merits of Christ alone. A perfect sacrifice had been offered for the atonement of sin once and for all. There is no more need of priests, for we have a High Priest Who is able to identify with us in our weakness and Who has passed through the heavenlies and sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. *“And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting [waiting] till his enemies be made a footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified”* (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Briant matriculated for the then newly initiated program for married deacons in the Catholic Church. We had been married for a year and our first son was three months old at the time. For eighteen months Briant faithfully attended classes two nights a week at the diocesan offices. He became known for his “Protestant views” on the authority of the Scripture, Mary, purgatory, birth control, and other areas of belief. For Briant, there was *“one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all”* (1 Timothy 2:5). The intercession of Mary, the saints, and the absolution of the priest were rendered powerless by the study of God’s Word. When he told the priest-director he intended as a deacon to tell people of the free grace available through the shed blood of Jesus by faith alone, he was laughed at and called a “Jesus freak.” Briant knew there was no future for him in the program and decided to leave the Catholic Church.

Suppression of Truth

We both marveled at the obvious knowledge of the truth coupled with the deliberate denial of it by that church’s hierarchy. Briant spoke of their responsibility for leading so many souls to hell by denying them access to the truth. Anyone who took a true biblical stand was ridiculed and

silenced. There was no alternative but to leave a system entrenched in the lies of hundreds of years' duration. No one soul or even several souls would change the course of so large a body of members. John Wycliffe, John Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and so many others had been able to do no more than lead those chosen by God away from the lies of the Catholic Church and into true biblical knowledge of salvation and all truth. Now it was Briant's turn to break with the entrenchment of false doctrines taught for so many centuries by Rome.

Briant's Conviction

Briant chose a Bible-believing church close to our home. As a fallen-away Catholic, he saw things quite clearly. Because of the depth of my personal commitment within the Catholic Church, it would take me longer to discern the truth of God's Word versus the diabolical system of Rome. Although I had long believed that the Catholic Church was wrong about some of its doctrines, I had learned to take its error in stride and believe that a church could have both error and truth. I had read Hans Kung's contribution, *Infallibility*, and had concluded that the pope could not always be right when he spoke "ex cathedra," that is "out of chair" meaning officially.

As I had read the Acts of the Apostles, I had become convinced that the church of the first century had the correct format and grieved that it could not be so today. We had been taught that the Protestant churches were mere corruptions of the Catholic Church, commonly referred to as the one true church founded on Saint Peter as quoted from the Gospel, "*That thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). I was forced, I thought, to accept a much less than perfect church because the "ideal" had not existed since the first century A.D. How could this little group of Christians, with whom my husband now chose to associate and in 1979 were meeting in a renovated chicken coop, approximate the ideal of the Scriptures?

Biblical Truth versus Catholic Doctrine

Through a Christian radio program, I came in contact with a ministry devoted solely to those of the Catholic faith. I wrote Bart Brewer of Mission to Catholics International. Listening to his interview on the radio, I identified with the difficulties he had encountered in leaving the Catholic Church. He had gone through Bible College twice in his quest to be de-programmed from Catholic doctrine. Yes, that was I. He sent me books and pamphlets, which clearly explained the differences in biblical belief and Catholic doctrine. I began to understand.

There was the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, of the necessary sole mediation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection alone for salvation. And what an eye-opener when I read Paul saying in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 that **there would be** those **who** would come in later times demanding that people not marry and that they abstain from meat, "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*" That certainly described the teachings I had thought were from God because they were taught by what I had believed to be God's church.

Truth and lies cannot exist together. Either one believes the Word of God as the infallible rule of faith **and life** or one must accept the contradictions to Scripture taught by the Catholic Church and one day join the father of lies, Satan himself, in the lake of fire eternally damned and

separated from the God Who has prepared a sure way of faith for us that leads to eternal glory with Him for all who will believe solely on the Word of God and not on the mere doctrines of men.

My Eyes are Opened

Finally, I was able to shed the multiple lies of Catholic teaching. The Bible would provide all that is needed for doctrine and practice. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness **that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works**”* (2 Timothy 3:16). I would trust the work of Jesus on Calvary’s **C**ross alone for my salvation and sanctification. I would recognize that works have been prepared for us to do. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). It is God who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. I must trust God by faith alone, for my salvation by grace alone, through the shed blood of Jesus alone.

Believers Baptism

After the birth of our second son, Briant and I were re-baptized together. He had waited patiently for me to “catch up” to him. Although we had both been baptized as infants, the Bible made it clear to us that baptism is a sign of faith in Jesus Christ and must be done after consciously making a faith commitment to Him. *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38).

Home Ministry

A short time later one of Briant’s uncles died. **Briant** had loved him dearly but was quite convinced that **his** Uncle Johnny probably had died without trusting Jesus alone for his salvation. He longed to stop working at his job and enter full time ministry, but after much deliberation, he decided his calling was to his family and the raising of his sons. He reasoned that the ministry could have adverse effects on his marriage and the raising of his children. He decided against it but entertained the idea of one day opening a soup kitchen and “feeding the poor and giving them the Gospel.”

Briant did see, as the steward of his home, to make extra rooms available for use by whoever might be in need of a place to stay. The pastor gave him related materials to read in preparation for such a ministry and referred several in need of such assistance to us over a period of four years spanning the births of our second and third sons. We ministered to a young deaf widow with a two-year-old son; a legally blind woman, a Cambodian refugee orphan, and a family who had lost their home through underemployment and foreclosure, among many others.

Full-Time Mom

We had also become convicted of the necessity of a full-time “Mommy” in the home for the raising of the children. I had dutifully resigned from my tenured position in the public school. “If Jesus is Lord of your life, He is Lord of when you have your children,” Briant explained. We would let God decide when He would choose to fill the quiver, *“but the just shall live by his faith”* (Habakkuk 2:4).

Our first two boys attended a Christian school until “Daddy’s” unemployment made it no longer feasible. We had also become aware that both boys had learning difficulties. The best solution seemed to be to home school the boys. A wonderful experience of lessons and field trips and association with other families began to unfold.



Doreen, with her four boys

After fifteen years of employment with an airfreight company as a manager, Briant was “let go” from the company after months of overtime to try to secure his position. We learned two years later of the buyout of the company by another airfreight company. It was clearly an economic measure to salvage a company in financial distress.

Briant remained steadfast in his position that I remain a fulltime “Mommy.” His conviction found expression in the words, “The Mommy is the heart of the home. Satan is breaking up the family. God will provide through me.” There ensued seven and a half years of relative unemployment. Never was he able to work at a job for more than eight months’ duration. He saw this time as a testing from God of his faith. During the second year of relocating his position as provider, our fourth son, Austin, was born. It was the only time we had health insurance during the long stretch of seeking permanent employment. A caesarian section and the five-day stay in the hospital were covered by the insurance. God showed Himself faithful in our commitment to let Him decide the timing of the births of our children. I continued to home school the boys.

Financial Collapse

Briant changed careers to insurance sales, which he had brief experience during his single years. We refinanced the home at three strategic points to fill gaps in income between jobs. Several friends and relatives helped with our needs from time to time.

Eventually, it became necessary to file a Chapter Thirteen bankruptcy. Briant firmly believed that we were to stay in our home. We had used it for the glory of God during the years of providing hospitality for those in need. He said God doesn’t give talents and then take them away. He multiplies them. We had used our first home for the Lord. He stood firm that we would not lose it. He was convinced that God would see us through.

Briant’s Witness Goes On

As Briant worked at what had become a third job on the Friday night before the first week in October, he experienced a heart attack and went quite suddenly to be with the Lord he had served so faithfully. His friend, Tom, who had shared the gospel with him seventeen years before, which caused Briant to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, had become a pastor of a church. He was willing to preach Briant’s funeral and to give a stirring eulogy. “When Briant came to know the Lord, he never cooled down. He was always on fire for the Lord.” Friends from the job he had lost seven and a half years before came many miles to say good-bye to Briant. One of them shared, “I never saw such faith in a man. He just kept going.”

On his gravestone I would place the Scripture, “The dead in Christ shall rise first...even so Lord Jesus, come!” He always had a great zeal for the Lord and an enthusiasm to share His Gospel of grace.

The Lord’s Provision

Meanwhile, a call was placed to the lawyer’s office to cancel the meeting to re-file the Chapter Thirteen bankruptcy. Briant’s wake took precedence for that date. The notice of the foreclosure process came days after the funeral. I dutifully forwarded it to the lawyer. I had approximately \$150,000 of debt and \$90,000 from two insurance policies.

During this tumultuous experience, I looked back to the convent transition. If God could get me through all of that pain and confusion, He could get me through this crisis. Family had come to the funeral merely to satisfy their social obligations. Communications had ceased years before as we had become unacceptable in our newfound biblical faith. My refusing to work while Briant was unemployed for seven and a half years had only strained relations further. Our help would truly come from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. I remained convinced that God did not want me to return to work at this juncture. I would wait on Him to clearly show me His will.

After months of negotiating and processing, the lawyer for the bankruptcy was able to reduce the \$125,000 in mortgages to a sale price of \$82,000. Since there was only \$90,000 of insurance it became clear that Briant’s death had provided for the bumpy and yet steady functioning of the home to this day. The company he was working for when he died paid for the funeral expenses as part of the worker’s compensation laws and sent a gift of \$10,000 one month after his death. I continued delivering newspapers as I had done for the two years prior to his death. It had been the shifting of child to adult paper route. I had taken it on for my son that he could continue his entrepreneurial experience. Never did I dream that it would provide both before and after Briant’s death for our survival.

Since Briant died working, I was able to obtain worker’s compensation benefits which, along with Social Security payments and a very small pension from the company that let him go after fifteen years, provided for me to continue home schooling and even to drop the paper route.

The deep ache in my heart when I left the convent and what I thought was the only and best way of serving God has turned into a joyous song of praise to God for the mighty works He has done in the places He has led me since. I have been the recipient of much grace over the years to the faithful performance of so many diversified experiences. The roles of wife, mother, teacher of academics for home-schooled children, Bible studies for women, Sunday school for children, founder and coordinator of a home-school support group, and short-term teacher in two Christian schools has more than compensated for my “loss.” And to do all of these “works,” trusting the grace and sufficiency of Jesus’ blood for my salvation and sanctification, has simplified my experience tremendously.

No Turning Back

The road is narrow and few there are who find it, to paraphrase Matthew 7:13, 14. We must enter by the strait gate and look unto Jesus alone, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. We must be daily in His Word, for *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). We must launch out into the deep, trusting God for everything, for the just shall live by faith. His mercies *“... are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:23).

And “*Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6). “*For it is God who works in me to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13).

At one juncture my husband shared an interesting paraphrase of Scripture when he said, “I’m walking on the water and I’m out so far I can’t turn back.” His conviction to maintain his home, as God would have it despite great hardship, has brought untold blessing, both material and spiritual, to his family. We will forever revel in that blessing.

Trust and Obey

My oldest son is now engaged to a born-again believer. They are both nineteen years old. Briant, Jr. is attending a computer school where he maintains his position on the Dean’s List. He works full-time for an ambulance service as a certified EMT. Together this young couple is planning to pursue the values we have taught. “Mommy” will stay home and raise the children. My son has stated emphatically that there can be no fear of hard times. He knows faith is the answer to God’s provision. “God is still getting His remnant ready,” as his Dad used to say. **As the hymn so rightly says**, we have but to “trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.”

There are times when I think in comparative terms with Joseph’s life in Genesis. There are so many pieces of the puzzle that would seem to be extraneous to the sense of my life. But “*I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto Him against that day*” (2 Timothy 1:12). He has numbered every hair on my head and ordained each of my days before one of them ever existed. From eternity, my life has been mapped out. Great is His faithfulness. His ways are not our ways, but His ways are perfect. I need only trust in Him with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding. He is creating His tapestry. I see the knots and crisscrosses on the backside. He sees the finished and perfected work on the “right” side.

He has saved me from my sin by **saving** faith alone in His Son, Jesus. He has delivered me out of the diabolical system of works that is the Catholic Church and shown me that all is of grace. All of eternity will not be long enough to thank and praise Him for His wonderful deeds to the children of men. To God be the glory! Great things He has done and continues to do!