

Convent Living to True Life in the Lord Jayne (Stanford) Baer

Early Upbringing

I was born in 1948 to a Catholic mother and a Baptist father. The rules of the Catholic Church with regard to marriage required my father to agree to raise me as a Catholic; and so it was. Because of the expense, my parents did not send my brother and me to Catholic school, but rather to public school. However, starting in kindergarten, I faithfully attended catechism classes every week until I graduated from high school, the only exception being those rare occasions when I was sick or otherwise unable to attend. Although I have heard some so-called “experts” argue against early childhood memories, I very clearly remember that even as a five-year-old, I wanted to do the right thing and please God.

I remember winning a contest and being allowed to choose my own prize from several that were offered. Most were simple toys any five-year-old would want, but none of them interested me, and I chose instead a bottle of shampoo or cream rinse for children because I knew my mother would like that and I wanted to do the unselfish thing. No doubt, my early desire to “serve God” stemmed from what I had been taught, for the Bible declares of the unregenerate, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes”*¹ and *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*² Until a man has been regenerated, he has no desire to please God and, in fact, he hates Him. Those are strong words, but the Bible declares, *“The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.”*³

My parents were both only children, and they had left their home in Ohio to move to California shortly after I was born. My paternal grandparents, who were first Congregationalists and then later, Baptists, came also, but all my Catholic relatives stayed behind and, therefore, were not really influential in my upbringing. As a little girl, I would stay with my grandparents for a week or two every summer. When I was too young to go to church by myself, they would take me with them. I have no recollection of understanding what the preacher was talking about, and I usually sat quietly drawing pictures until the service ended. Later, when I was older, they would take me to the nearest Catholic Church and drop me off for Sunday Mass and then pick me up afterwards. I also remember that they read in their Bible every morning without fail. They also encouraged me to read along with them, even though they knew I did not understand what was being read. What it did do, though, was make a very strong impression on me because I could see how important reading the Bible was to them. By their example, they were heeding



the advice: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”⁴

There was one other thing, too, that made a strong impression. On the wall of their living room was a plaque that was there from my earliest recollection until they passed away. The plaque read “Only one life ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” And below that was inscribed, “Your life is hid with Christ in God.”⁵ This was a silent witness that I never forgot.

High School

When I was of high school age, I was invited to join a school club but was very disappointed to learn that it was forbidden by the Monsignor of our church. He said it was connected to the Y.M.C.A., a Protestant organization, and Catholics were forbidden to have anything to do with Protestant churches or organizations or they would come under the penalty of sin. It is no wonder, then, that I never heard the gospel, as nearly all avenues to be exposed to it had been cut off. Even as an adult, no one had ever told it to me and I had no idea there was anything wrong with the teachings of the Catholic Church. It was all I knew, and it seemed right to me. But the Bible says “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”⁶ As I look back now, I see how imprisoned and in bondage Catholic people really are, yet they have no idea of their imprisonment! What an ideal situation to keep people from knowing the truth! There is something about familiarity that causes us to think that if it is “familiar,” it is therefore “safe.” But in this case, nothing could be further from the truth. I did eventually encounter two young men who tried to tell me Catholicism was wrong—two Mormon missionaries. You may be smiling at that. I do, as I think back, for we had a very lengthy debate (which I studied hard for using my Catholic theology books) about which religion was right. The reality was both sides were wrong and it brings to mind, “*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*”⁷

Decision to Enter the Convent

Because I had no aunts, uncles, or cousins, and all my Catholic great aunts and great uncles--who were two generations removed from me—were all half way across the country, no one encouraged me to enter what was called “the religious life.” It was entirely my own decision, although the teachers from my high school catechism classes, I am sure, had a lot to do with planting the desire. Even my Catholic mother did not seem to have any particular preference regarding my eventual decision to enter the convent. However, when I was a junior in high school, I knew that I wanted to become a nun after graduation. I had a wonderful childhood, probably the best anyone could ask for, and I was a well-adjusted and self-confident young girl.

In my senior year I, along with an number of other young girls, spent a weekend with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange to see what convent life might be like and in particular to see if I might be interested in joining that order of nuns. I have often wondered if they were testing us girls because for dinner the first night, they served liver. I had never eaten liver before, but I suspected what it was as soon as I smelled it and all doubt was removed after I tasted it! I ate it, but I was hoping nuns didn’t eat it often. The next day, I was invited into the office to meet with

one of the head nuns. One of her first questions to me was, “Tell me about your problems.” I wondered, “What kind of an inquiry is this?” because I didn’t have any problems, could not imagine anyone my age having any problems, and wondered why on earth she would be asking me such a question. So I simply told her I didn’t have any. Looking back now, I suppose she was wondering if I was running away from something, but I was not, so that inquiry didn’t go very far.



Well, then, if I was not running away, what was it that made me decide on the religious life? There were a couple of things: The main one was that I thought I wanted to give my life to God and serve Him, and it seemed to me that entering a convent would be the very best and most logical way to do that. I have never been one to do things half way. I have always believed that if you are going to do something, you should always give it your very best effort. Also, the quiet life appealed to me.

So, in the fall of 1966, after spending a weekend with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, and a month with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Los Angeles, I said good-bye to the world forever (or so I thought) and entered the convent of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd

I really liked the habits (clothing) these nuns wore. I thought they were beautiful. They were all white, except for their veils, which were black. They also wore a large silver heart depicting “The Good Shepherd.” The novices wore white veils, and we postulants wore all black clothing. (During the first nine months in the convent, one is called a “postulant”.) One of the first things that happened after I arrived was they asked me if I would consent to having my hair cut short. Since, as postulants, we never saw the other nuns’ hair, this came as a bit of a surprise to me, as it never occurred to me that I would have to cut my hair short, but I considered this to be the first of many adjustments I would have to make and so I did it willingly.

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd were “semi-cloistered,” meaning that they only left the convent when absolutely necessary, which was almost never. It was a world within a world. It was quiet and yet it was right there in the heart of busy downtown Los Angeles. To me, it seemed representative of what a life committed to God would be like—in the world, but not of the world. The grounds were spacious and beautiful—a very large garden where you could walk and pray and be alone with God—or so I thought. But in reality, I soon discovered that there was little time for that, as we were constantly going from one activity to another. Every day was full from the time we rose early in the morning for Mass until we, very tired postulants, finally went to bed at night.

I would sometimes go up on the roof and look out over the city and the contrast between the two worlds was quite evident. I would think about the religious life inside the convent and

how different the world “out there” was with all its sin, never once realizing what a perilous condition all unsaved people are in, regardless of whether their external trappings are that of a convent or of the busy city night life.

For the next three months, I thought I was in heaven. When we went to chapel to sing the Psalms, the voices of the nuns sounded like a heavenly choir. I was quite impressed by the funeral of an old nun who had passed away while I was there. She looked very peaceful in her casket, but looks can be very deceiving for if she was not trusting Christ for her salvation but instead had died trusting in her own good works, then she began her trip toward eternity in hell at the very moment of her death. This is a very sobering thought. How many are deceived!! Two verses of scripture come to mind: *Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*⁸ and again, *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.*⁹

Since we did not go out of the convent, but did continue our education, teachers came from nearby Mount St. Mary’s College to instruct us there in the convent. The only class I remember specifically was an English class and also studying from a book by someone named “Tanqueray.” I do not remember any classes on the Bible itself. I had brought mine with me, and I did attempt to read it, but there was no real interest there because I did not know where to start and had no one to help me understand what I was reading. I am reminded of a similar situation mentioned in the book of Acts: *“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.”*¹⁰

Along with our classes, we also had times of fun and recreation—even a “party” or two, which usually consisted of a movie and some sweet treats. We played volleyball and basketball, and I also got to try my hand (or should I say my foot) with a skateboard, which I promptly fell off of, injuring my foot. Each postulant and novice also had an area of responsibility. Mine was to help care for the farm animals which included guinea pigs, chickens, ducks, and even a lamb named “Alleluia.” One of the funniest things I witnessed was the dipping of chickens in medicated water to rid them of any fleas they might have. I was raised in the city, but I soon learned that chickens do not like being in water.



While it was true that there was a bit of an adjustment to be made, such as maintaining silence at certain times throughout the day, relying on the other sisters to notice our needs at meal times rather than being allowed to ask that someone pass us some item of food on the table, and other like things, I thought I was adapting very well and I was quite happy. In fact, I thought the practice of noticing the needs of others and meeting them rather than asking for ourselves was a very good one to learn. Also, it did not bother me to learn that all of our incoming and outgoing mail was read and censored before we received or sent it. Again, I was a bit surprised, but it was not a big deal.

I remember once being in the restroom, just before our period of silence was about to begin, and getting locked in the stall. The door was too low to crawl under, and while I thought

about yelling for help, I did not dare do it during “silence.” Eventually, though, the lock came loose and I was freed from captivity.



Our “Mother of Novices” apparently saw my adaptation in a somewhat different light and began calling me into her office regularly to enquire as to whether or not I was happy. I assured her each time that I was, but by about the third inquiry, I was not quite as happy because of her insistence that I was not, and it began to disturb me that she had this false impression. No matter what I said, she would not budge from her opinion, and shortly after that, just before Christmas, she called me in for the last time and informed me that I was going home. She said that she had already called my dad and asked him to come

and pick me up and that he was waiting outside for me. I was devastated! She told me that I should go home and think it over for a year and that if I still felt the same way in a year, I was welcome to come back. I knew right then and there this was God’s doing, for there simply was no other explanation.

My Dismissal

When someone left, either voluntarily or if they were asked to leave, there was no opportunity to say goodbye to anyone. Postulants just disappeared and no one knew what happened to them. One or two others had apparently been “weeded out” before me. They were just gone one day. Our “Mother” instructed me to enter a little room at the side of the parlor where she said I would find my street clothes. I was to change into them, leave my postulant’s clothing on the chair, and then leave by the opposite door! This, she said, would lead me to the outside where my dad would be waiting to pick me up. It was as if I had done something wrong and was being sent home in disgrace.

I had to fight back the tears all the way home. I felt completely rejected, not by the nuns really, but by God Himself! What could be worse than thinking God had rejected me, especially after I had just given up everything I ever had or hoped to have to serve Him? Dear reader, I hope you will think about that because there are many in “religion” today who think they are giving Him their lives, but who one day will face His rejection. *“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*¹¹

My poor dad did not know what to say to me, so



he did not say much. However, he did offer whatever comfort he could. Even though I am reasonably sure he was relieved that I was coming back home, I am also sure he felt quite sorry for me. Of course, when I entered the convent, I had given away all of my earthly possessions, except those few personal items I was allowed to take with me. A few days after I had come home, I had to borrow a dime so I could buy an ice cream cone. It felt very strange to say the least. Fortunately, though, my mother had packed away some of my clothes (probably “just in case”) so I did have a few things I could wear until I was able to get a job and buy more clothes.

Life on the Outside Once Again

Since it was now midway into the school semester, I would have to wait to start my first year of college, so instead of sitting home and do nothing, I found a job. By the time the next semester started, I had bought a car so I could get back and forth to work. That meant I now had car payments and insurance payments to make, which meant I needed to keep my job to pay for these. Besides, I was now a whole semester behind all my former classmates and that was just a little more humiliation on top of what I had already experienced. At first, I was determined that when the year was up, I was going back to the convent, but this time as a contemplative nun. Contemplatives are nuns who spend even more time in prayer and are “cloistered,” meaning they never leave the convent. But eventually resentment got the best of me, and I started wondering why I would even want to go back after already being rejected once.

So I eventually gave up the idea and started dating someone I had met briefly the summer before I entered the convent. We were married a year later, and because the Catholic Church frowned on any form of birth control other than abstinence, our two sons came within fifteen months of each other. After giving birth to our second son, I decided no pope in some foreign country was going to dictate to me what form of birth control I should use, as I did not relish the idea of having another baby every year. Once I made that decision, it was an easy one to make the ultimate decision, which was to quit going to church altogether. I must say, though, that in this particular respect, I do think the Catholic Church is right, as I believe we should obey God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. *“Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.”*¹²

I continued going to Mass every Sunday and on all the “holy days” for a while, but not daily like I had before. I had wanted my sons to have, what I thought was a Christian upbringing, and the Catholic Church was all I knew. However, I still believed God had rejected me, and so eventually, not wanting to be a hypocrite, I finally just quit going to church altogether. Something was missing, but I did not know what.

My life became a total mess with even a divorce in my marriage after seven years. It was not long after that, in the realization that I was confused about many things that I cried out on my knees to God for wisdom and strength.

A short time after that, a friend suggested I start attending his church, an Assemblies of God, which was right across the street from where I lived. He also recommended that I start reading the Bible. I did both. It was very hard at first to read the Bible, and I had to force myself to do it every day. I still did not understand it, but kept at it, and in time, it did become a little easier.

The Godly Influence of My Grandmother

My paternal grandmother expressed some concern when I told her I was attending a charismatic church, but she did not say too much about it because as she said, she did not want to discourage me. I did not really understand what she meant, but after a few years, I left that church and instead drove an hour every Sunday to Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa for services and every Monday night for Bible study. I was baptized in the ocean at Newport Beach and I really thought I had found my new church home. It seemed like such a beautiful experience. I loved the singing especially, but it is not the singing or a church experience that saves, it is the Lord Jesus Christ, and I still did not have that personal relationship with Him that is so necessary. Eventually, that long two-hour drive became burdensome, so I found a Calvary Chapel closer to home. I was quite happy there and attended for about five years.

Then one day, the pastor made it known that everyone should attend the church closest to his home, and with the formation of a new Calvary Chapel in my own town, this one was no longer the closest. I was also a little disillusioned by the fact that these pastors seemed to be neglecting some of their own “sheep” in favor of their more exciting trips to “minister” in distant lands. Why minister to someone in Chino when you can go to China? Whether I was right with God or not at this point is hard to say. Only God knows for sure, but I tend to think that I probably was not. I still understood nothing of God’s sovereignty and even though I was well into “Churchianity,” I think I was still lacking that personal relationship with Christ. Though I thought He was my Savior, I would have to say He was not yet my Lord, and He is not one’s Savior if He is not also one’s Lord. I still wanted to be in control of my own life and I was not yet willing to submit completely to His rule. I think many in our churches today fall into the same category.

I wanted to read more and more so that I could really understand God’s sovereignty and His grace in salvation. Though I studied and tried very hard to understand different things about the Bible, I was greatly confused on a number of issues. I did not have the grounding I needed, so I was swayed first one way and then the other, depending on the point of view and eloquence of the speaker. The Bible calls it being blown about by every wind of doctrine. *“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;”*¹³

Understanding Finally Comes

I remember once someone equated my beliefs with a particular “system” of theology—one that I had never heard of. I did not know what that system of belief was, so I said, “No, I am a Christian.” But in reality, it meant that I was gaining a very sound grasp upon the truth of God’s word. At that time, I didn’t understand that people argued over how people are saved. It all seemed pretty clear to me, and I thought it should be equally as clear to everyone else too. That part, at least, was easy.

But, other parts were not so easy. Around 1986, I was trying to figure out whether or not a person could lose his salvation. I had been back and forth over it, so when I saw that Arthur Pink had written a book entitled “Eternal Security,” I bought it. As I began reading it, I knew

what he said was the absolute truth, and I never had trouble with that issue again. In his book on “The Sovereignty of God,” Pink wrote, “The doctrine of God’s sovereignty as it is unfolded in the Scriptures affords an exalted view of the Divine perfections. It maintains His creatorial rights. It insists that *‘to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him.’*”¹⁴ It declares that His rights are those of the ‘potter’ who forms and fashions the clay into vessels of whatever type and for whatever use He may please. Its testimony is, *‘Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.’*¹⁵ It argues that none has any right to ‘reply’ against God, and that the only becoming attitude for the creature to take is one of reverent submission before Him. Thus the apprehension of the absolute supremacy of God is of great practical importance, for unless we have a proper regard to His high sovereignty He will never be honored in our thoughts of Him, nor will He have His proper place in our hearts and lives.”

It had taken ten years before I really understood why God had pulled me out of the convent. Had He left me there, I might never have come to a true understanding of the gospel. I might never have pursued reading the Bible on my own, or if I did, I might not have understood it, or there might not have been anyone who could explain it to me. I can also reasonably assume that no one would have ever told me the truth about salvation or grace, because I would have been locked away from the rest of the world. It is even hard to hear the true gospel in many Protestant churches today, and certainly no one will ever hear it in any Catholic church unless God intervenes. Now I know God could have saved me within the confines of the convent had He so chosen, and then I would have left on my own. But the fact is, He is a God of variety and it pleases Him to save His chosen people through different circumstances, in different times of life, and in different ways, though none is saved outside of the Lord Jesus Christ or outside of the hearing of the Gospel. I am just thankful that He did have mercy upon me and did draw me to Himself. There is nothing better than that in all of life. Not one thing.

In addition, I have learned that there are times in our lives when we do not understand, why God does what He does or why He allows certain things to happen. In this case, it was ten years before I finally understood. But I also know that there may be many other times when God does not choose to reveal His reasons for doing things or for allowing certain things to happen. He wants us to trust Him. It took one or two more major lessons of this type before I finally understood not to question these things, but to simply accept them in faith, knowing that “. . . *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*”¹⁶ The promise in Romans 8:28, however, is not for every person, though many frequently quote it in some fashion or another. But notice the qualifier: “*to them that love God*” and “*who are the called according to his purpose.*” “*Many are called but few are chosen.*”¹⁷ No, this promise is only for God’s own dear children! Are you His child? We also have His promise that, “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*”¹⁸

Salvation by the Grace of God Alone!

To this day, I cannot say for a certainty when it was I was made right with God. I sometimes wonder if it was shortly after my divorce when I cried out to God. Or was it later when I came to

an understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation and truly repented of my sins? Or was it even after that when my "head knowledge" started filtering down into my heart and I realized, perhaps for the first time, what it meant to live for Christ rather than for myself, as I had done for so much of my life? I do not know the answer to this. I suspect some people are saved much later than they originally thought, and perhaps I am one of them. But it does not really matter when it happened, because I do know that, at some point in my life, God, in His sovereign grace and tender mercy, did reach down and work a miracle of grace in my heart; and it is by His grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that I am saved. To God be the glory!

I finish this account of my life by quoting again from Arthur Pink as he reaches a conclusion on the truth that God is sovereign in saving us, "If this doctrine humbles us, it results in praise to God. If, in the light of God's sovereignty, we have seen our own worthlessness and helplessness, we shall indeed cry with the Psalmist, '*All my springs are in Thee.*'"¹⁹ If by nature we were 'children of wrath,' and by practice rebels against the Divine government and justly exposed to the 'curse' of the Law, and if God was under no obligation to rescue us from the fiery indignation and yet, notwithstanding, He delivered up His well-beloved Son for us all; then how such grace and love will melt our hearts, how the apprehension of it will cause us to say in adoring gratitude, '*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake!*'"²⁰

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¹ Romans 3:18

² Isaiah 53:6

³ John 7:7

⁴ Proverbs 22:6

⁵ Colossians 3:3

⁶ Proverbs 14:12

⁷ Matthew 15:14

⁸ 2 Timothy 1:9

⁹ Ephesians 2:8, 9

¹⁰ Acts 8:30, 31

¹¹ Matthew 7:22, 23

¹² Psalms 127:3-5

¹³ Ephesians 4:14

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:6

¹⁵ Revelation 4:11

¹⁶ Romans 8:28

¹⁷ Matthew 22:14

¹⁸ John 6:37

¹⁹ Psalm 87:7

²⁰ Psalm 115:1