



## **I Had Never Heard the True Gospel**

### **By Peggy O'Neill**

I served as a sister in a religious order for about fifty years and during all that time, I had never heard the true Gospel. Certain things may be let ride, but when it comes to the Gospel there can be no compromise, because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. A false gospel cannot have that power and any church that preaches a perverted gospel is depriving its members of the foundational and most essential message, the message of salvation.

#### **False Teachers in the Early Church**

In the Bible we read of the churches in Galatia where false teachers were leading people into another gospel. They were going back under law, for as well as believing in Jesus Christ, they had to observe certain religious laws making Christianity a set of rules and laws whereby they had to earn heaven. Galatians Chapter Three tells us that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and that He is the end of the law for righteousness. If we take Jesus plus any religious law as a means of salvation we are fallen from grace. We cannot trust in law and grace at the same time, so trying to combine the two, we put ourselves under law. By adding anything to the finished work of the cross, Christ will profit us nothing. Galatians 3:21 says that if righteousness comes by the law then Christ died in vain. This is the seriousness of being under the law--we have to be our own saviors and the Bible says that no man can be saved by keeping the law. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians used strong words to say that if anyone, even an angel from heaven were to preach another gospel, let him be accursed.

#### **My Attempts to Live by the Law**

Like the Galatians, I was trying to save myself by a combination of law and grace. I was putting my faith in Jesus but also in my own actions, trying to earn heaven and the things of God by doing the best I could instead of receiving salvation as a gift. The Gospel was no longer Good News, for the burden of salvation was on my back. In the end, I could only hope to be saved in spite of all my attendance at Mass, the sacraments, prayers, and other good works. By offering my own righteousness as a means of being accepted before God, I was, according to Galatians 5:3, making myself a debtor to the whole law. I was obligated to meet a standard of perfection that equals that of God. I had never understood how to trust Jesus and Him alone as my Savior. I had not known that it was not by my performance, but by just believing and accepting the perfect price Jesus paid when He shed His blood for me on Calvary that I would be saved. When I heard the true message of the Gospel, the truth set me free. I praise God that I am learning to depend more and more on the Lord Jesus for my needs, both in this life and for eternity.

#### **Famine in Ireland**

A catechism of the Catholic Church gives this teaching, "The Bishops have the mission of preaching the Gospel to every creature so that all may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments." This preaches a gospel of works. By mixing law and grace, the Catholic Church has fallen into the same error as the Galatians. A church that acknowledges much of the truth of the Word of God, but

that misrepresents the Gospel is the kind of church into which I was born in Ireland. I was told it was the one true Church and for over sixty years, I never once doubted or questioned that.

The second of ten children, I had the example of good parents who were faithful members of their Church. Were my family to be judged by the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church, we could all reasonably hope for a place in heaven. But the Bible tells us that we will be judged, not by the teachings of any Church, but by the Word of God. *“The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). In my young days, there was not a single copy of the Bible in our home. Happily, today things in that regard have changed.

Here in Ireland, we still talk about the Great Famine of the 1840's when the potato crop failed and a million people died of starvation, while another million emigrated to America never again to return home. Ireland in the 1990's is a land of abundance, but there is a famine of a different kind, a famine described in the Bible *“Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, That I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the Words of the Lord”* (Amos 8:11). Those days of famine have surely come to Ireland, yet it is encouraging to know that more and more people have been meeting together for some years to study the Bible and feast upon the Word of the Lord.

### **My Mother's Death in Ireland**

In England where I spent most of my religious life, I was an enthusiastic believer in the Charismatic Movement, considered to have been a genuine move of the Holy Spirit. I also attended some Christian meetings with thousands of Christians from many nations. When I got permission from my religious superiors to come home to care for my mother in the last six years of her life, I had the opportunity to listen to Christian radio programs where the Gospel of salvation was regularly preached. When my mother died, aged ninety-five, I did not have an understanding of the Gospel so I was unable to help her have an assurance of her salvation. However, I recall with joy her words to me on the day she died, “I want Jesus to come for me today.” These were precious words. Also during those years at home, I had contact with a nephew of mine, Tom Griffin, who had a godly influence on my life. He had joined a Christian church and he introduced me to J.P. Walsh who was the leader of a local group in weekly Bible study. All this eventually led up to my discovering the unconditional love of God and the liberating message of the Gospel.

### **Christ's Righteousness Available to Me**

**“Righteousness”** was the key word that opened for me the truth of the Gospel. I found the word in Paul's description of the Gospel in Romans 1:16. The Gospel *“...is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth ; ...for in it is the **righteousness of God** revealed.”* The righteousness of God--this is what is required to get to heaven. What God demands is perfection: **nothing less than His own righteousness**. This was something new to me for all I was ever conscious of was **my own righteousness** and how I could save my soul. I could have been compared to those Jews in Romans 10:3, *“For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.”* I was ignorant of God's righteousness. What it takes for salvation is a righteousness that equals that of God and I knew that no one could ever reach that standard. This then is what the Gospel is all about: what God demands, He provides. The Good News is that if we believe in Jesus Christ whose death on the cross, burial and resurrection has paid the price of our sin, we will be saved. The Bible puts it this way, *“Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us that we might be made the **righteousness of God in Him**”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). In exchange for my sins, God will give me the righteousness of Jesus, God's righteousness for my sins! This is the Good News, the Gospel in a nutshell.

### **Salvation by Grace**

God's Word tells us that salvation is by grace alone. I soon found out why salvation is a **gift** from God and cannot be by **works**. Isaiah 64:6 says, *“All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”* when compared with the infinite righteousness of God. All my best efforts, my faithfulness, my good works are nothing but filthy rags when it comes to earning heaven. I could never earn heaven, so Jesus did it for me. I just come to God

empty handed, not with all my “great” keeping of laws, my penance and my holiness. My dependence is totally on Jesus and what He has done for me. Paul, once a religious Jew who had strictly adhered to the law, came to the place where he said he wanted to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. We too must come to that place of dependency, not on ourselves, not on Mary or any Church--all our dependency must be on Christ. We look to Him and Him alone. Even though our good lives will never gain heaven for us, there is a purpose in living an upright life in our day-to-day relationships with our families and others. This, too, is provided for by God’s grace in the direction of His Word and the power of His Spirit given to us the moment we believe. Salvation is on the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ, not on the basis of our conduct. That same faith keeps us trusting in Jesus Christ as we walk daily by His Spirit.

I had never heard the full story of Redemption, how completely Jesus had dealt with sin to save us from hell, *“the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10). Jesus did not partially deal with sin. He did such a complete and finished work that all sin was blotted out and washed away by His precious blood. Sin, past, present and future, even those sins not yet committed were forgiven two thousand years ago when Jesus died on that cross on Calvary. God does not keep a record of the believer’s sins. *“I, even I, am he who blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and I will not remember thy sins”* (Isaiah 43:25). The debt of sin has been completely paid, yet not everyone will be saved. There is one thing that will send people to hell. Jesus Himself spoke about it in John 16:9, *“they believe not on Me”*, a rejection of Jesus and the salvation He gained for us. God does not violate the will of any person, nor is salvation automatic. Man is born condemned, separated from God as a son of Adam, but God’s will is for all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For those who believe in Christ, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1).

### **God’s Justice Satisfied**

**“The jury is still out”** is what a priest recently said in this context. According to Romans Chapter Three, the jury has already pronounced the verdict, “Guilty”. *“There is none righteous, no, not one.”* The religious and the unreligious are all guilty before God. In His justice, God had to impose a penalty for sin, and since man could never pay that penalty, God in His love found a way to do for us what we ourselves could not do. He gave His Son, Jesus, who took all the blame for us and in our place He was condemned to death. He died on the cross. Jesus was forsaken by His Father. He descended into hell and took from Satan the keys of hell and death. The heavenly courts of eternal justice were satisfied and the believer’s debt was fully paid. On the third day Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, Jesus the first born-from the dead, the first born of many brethren. Man must accept Jesus’ sacrifice to be saved and when he does, God accepts him on the basis of His Son’s righteousness.

### **Relationship with God Restored in Christ**

As time went on, I saw that in the Scriptures our relationship with God is based on both God’s **grace** and **faith**. His plan for our salvation is that we should believe in Christ Jesus by grace through faith. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is not a gift we get from our parents or from the church, *“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Rom 10:17). In God’s plan for salvation, faith itself, by which we trust only on Christ and His completed work, is of itself the work of God. This was the message Jesus gave the people in John 6:28-29 when they asked what they should do that they might work the works of God. Jesus said to them, *“This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he [God] has sent”*. I would have said that I had always believed in Jesus, yet now I realize that I had not known the real Jesus, the Jesus revealed in the Scriptures. I had known nothing of the gift of righteousness He had to offer or of the complete forgiveness of sin brought about by His death and resurrection. Titus 1:16 says, *“They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him...”* I was carrying out religious practices that showed that I did not know Him. I thought it was essential for my salvation to attend Mass because I had not fully accepted His propitiatory sacrifice on the Cross. I sought forgiveness for sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not knowing that Jesus had already reconciled

me to God. As well as depending on Jesus, I also depended on Mary , the saints, my penances and good works, my hours of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, rosaries, scapulars, indulgences, purgatory. Paul uses a word to describe the value of anything we try to do to add to the work of Jesus, it is the word “*dung*” (Philippians 3:8). All our good works are displeasing to God if offered as a means of gaining heaven for ourselves or for others, implying that what Jesus did on Calvary was not enough.

### **Repentance from Dead Works**

According to Hebrews 6:1, one of the foundations of the Christian life is repentance or turning away from dead works. By dead works is meant religious practices and good works performed either by oneself or through the ministry of the church so as to obtain salvation. All these works, no matter how righteous, are the filthy rags referred to in Isaiah 64:6. They are what is called religion and religion is man’s counterfeit for Jesus Christ. There is no promise in the Bible that says religious people will go to heaven. On the contrary, Jesus called the most religious people on earth in His time, the Pharisees, to repentance. The Bible tells us that to be declared righteous before God, the first thing we must do is stop working for it. This was very strange to me, who as a Catholic had been led to put so much emphasis on my own performance as well as on the ministry of priests. Once heard, the Word of God must take first place and God’s Word in Romans 4:5 left me in no doubt, “*But to him that **worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his **faith** is counted for righteousness.***”

I had never really believed, as I had never accepted salvation as a gift. By God’s mercy, I was convicted of the sin of not totally trusting in Jesus and His finished work. I repented from dead works and from trusting in my own righteousness and I accepted the finished work of Jesus on the cross. I had now really heard the Word of salvation and with the Word came God’s gift of supernatural faith. As in 2 Corinthians 4, I believed therefore I spoke and committed my life to Jesus Christ trusting in Him as my Savior. At that instant, God imparted to me His righteousness. In my new born-again spirit, I was as righteous as God, not because of any goodness of mine but because of Jesus. What had happened to me is described in 2 Corinthians 5:17. I experienced salvation. I was born again in the way that Jesus said to Nicodemus, “*you must be born again*”. I was baptized with the only baptism that brings salvation, identification with Jesus Christ. For the first time I knew that my name was written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

### **Baptism into Jesus Christ**

What had happened to me is what the Bible calls **baptism into Jesus Christ**. Romans 6:3 , “*As many of us as were **baptized into Jesus Christ** were baptized into His death*”. Galatians 3:27 “*for as many of you as have been **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.*” There was no external ceremony, no priest, no godparents. It was a matter between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and me. I had received the one baptism that is necessary for salvation.

A short time afterwards I was baptized by immersion in the Atlantic Ocean at a place called Banna Strand in my native County Kerry. This baptism in water by immersion is an expression of the inner change that had already taken place in my spirit. It was a public confession of my belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and a showing forth of His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism in water does not make a person a Christian, it shows that he already is a Christian. The Catholic Church has lost this truth of the baptism into Jesus Christ, the baptism that translates us from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. For this reason it can be said that many Catholics are Christian only in name.

### **Catholic Infant Baptism**

Paul in reference to the baptism into Jesus, speaks in Colossians 2:11 of the circumcision of the heart, a circumcision made **without hands**. I was one day old when I was taken to the local Catholic Church to be baptized. The hands of the priest signed me with the sign of the cross, anointed me with oil and chrism and

put salt on my lips. There was a laying on of hands and hands were used to pour water on my head. My baptism, outwardly a beautiful and symbolic ceremony, was in reality nothing but an empty ritual. Baptism in water is a biblical ordinance that Christians obey after believing in Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles 10:44-47, there is an example of Christian baptism for New Testament believers. In verse 47, baptism in water is given only **after** Cornelius and his household were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. In Ireland there was an incident recently where a baby died, days before it was to be baptized. That the baby died without baptism added to the parents grief. The Catholic Church in her liturgy could only invite them to trust in the mercy of God and pray for their child's salvation. However, according to the Word of God, that child went straight to heaven. It is true that everyone is born in original sin (in Adam), but Romans 5:13 tells that "*sin is not imputed where there is no law*". The law does not apply until a child comes to the use of reason or the age of discernment. Paul wrote, "*For I was alive apart from the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*" (Romans 7:9). The false doctrines relating to baptism are a betrayal of the trust of millions of sincere Catholics who are misled as to their true standing before God in an area where their quality of life here on earth and their eternity is at stake. Until about eight years ago, I would have strongly opposed anything said against the Catholic Church, and even as I set about writing this testimony, my intention was to avoid any adverse criticism. But things have not worked out that way and any criticism of mine is only of the system into which I was born.

### **Understanding the Bible**

Some people say that the Bible is hard to understand and this is true if one fails to grasp certain foundational truths. One of those truths is the concept that man is a **spirit** being with a **soul** (mind, will emotions) and he lives in a **body**. In I Thessalonians 5:23 we see how God divides man, "*spirit, soul and body*" and Hebrews 4:12 talks about the Word of God "*piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit*". Catholic doctrine attributes to the soul what the Bible attributes to the spirit making no distinction between the two. Without a knowledge of this distinction, there was much in the Bible that I could not understand. I could not understand Scripture truths like the righteousness of the believer or "as He is, so are we in this world". To live the Christian life it is important to know how our spirit, soul and body function and relate to one another so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the recreated spirit may dominate the body and soul which will not be free from the presence of sin until the believer experiences physical death.

Some time ago, a story was told in our church of a poor man who owned one field. He had barely enough to live on, but had he known, he could have been a wealthy man, for underneath that field was an oil well. This man's story is that of many of us Christians today. Inside us is a spiritual "oil well", and we are not aware of the limitless resources of God within us. It is possible that the early Christians knew and lived by the power of the Holy Spirit that was available in their born-again spirits. With the true Gospel message, they turned the then known world upside down in the first twenty to thirty years of Christianity. In our born-again spirits, God has provided everything we need and His life will be manifested through our lives to the degree that we renew our minds with His Word and use the grace He makes available moment by moment. The Bible tells us in I Corinthians 1:30 that Jesus "*...is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*".

### **My Religious Order**

At seventeen, I left home to enter the Order of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. This is an International Order founded by Fr. Jean Pierre Gailhac at Beziers in the South of France. I spent the first seven years of my religious life in France and then after training as a teacher in England, I devoted thirty-five years to teaching in parish schools governed by the Local Education Authority. Side by side with life as a teacher was my religious life considered by me to be the highest calling. During all my years in the convent, I never had any reason to think otherwise. After the period of six years at home caring for my mother, I would have returned to the convent to work and share with the nuns I respected, loved and knew so well. A younger sister of mine, Carmel, is a member of the order and she is presently teaching African children in Zambia. However, it was not possible for me to return to the convent as I no longer could agree with the teachings and

practices of the Catholic Church. Soon, I no longer viewed the religious life as being the highest calling. Richard Bennett, once a Dominican priest writing in an article, "Is the Religious Form of Life Designed by God?", says that the Bible has ordained only three different institutions: the family, the church and the state. Religious life could not be reconciled with the Word of God.

### **Freed from the Law**

Having been under law for so much of my life, the Epistle to the Galatians is of particular interest to me. In addition to being subject to the Ten Commandments and other church laws, religious life has its own rules, constitutions and vows. The Bible, however, speaks of only one law for New Testament believers, not the law of works, but the law of Jesus Christ, a law written on our hearts. Jesus Himself is the reality of the Mosaic Law which like everything else in the Old Covenant was only a type and shadow of things to come. "The Commandments of Ordinances were nailed to the Cross", and the part that remained was the spirit and intent of the law - that we love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. This law is the very nature of Jesus Himself living today through an individual in the flesh. He is not looking at our outward observances. He wants to find people who yield themselves to Him so completely that He can live His nature in them from the inside out. We have a description of the nature and character of Jesus in Galatians 5:22-23, "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control*". On earth Jesus was a living manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. This is not a list of pleasant qualities that improve our personalities, but the character of Jesus Christ. In our lives it is manifested when by grace through faith we allow His Spirit rather than our sinful natures to be in control. Romans 8:29 says that God has predestined believers to be conformed to the image of His Son. In our lives there can be joy instead of discouragement, peace rather than confusion and strife, the loving, wholesome word instead of the impatient or unkind word.

Instead of subjecting ourselves to the law of Moses, we let Christ live His life in us through His Spirit who enables us in our weakness. This is the law Jesus referred to in Matthew 5, "*that whoever shall do it and teach by example shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*" Religious life with its rules and vows is not God's way as defined in the Scriptures. Religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are not found in Scripture. Jesus directs us in Matthew 5:34-37, "*...Swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool...neither shalt thou swear by thy head...but let your communication be 'Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatever is more than these cometh of evil.'*" What is spoken of in the New Testament is the **priesthood of all believers**. Peter writes that every true believer is a member of a "*royal priesthood*" (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus is our High Priest and believers in Christ are priests with a divine call and purpose to offer up spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifice of a yielded heart, offering praise to God in all things and invited to a ministry of intercession on behalf of others.

### **One Mediator, Jesus Christ**

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to bring people from the Old Covenant way of serving God into the New Covenant realities that Jesus Christ brought into effect. Sad to say, the transition has not yet been made two thousand years later. The Catholic Church still has the law and the priesthood. In her liturgy there is the sacrifice and the altar, priestly vestments, incense, candles, all of which were essential to Jewish religion and worship. These were Old Testament types and shadows of things to come. The Catholic Church has Christianized Judaism and not come into the New Covenant established by the finished work of Jesus on the Cross. For years, at Mass, I heard the words, "This is the blood of the New and Everlasting Covenant." I knew little or nothing about that Covenant. I was operating under an Old Covenant mentality. The Catholic Church ordains priests to perpetrate the Sacrifice of the Cross, claiming that God still needs to be appeased for sin. To quote from a Catholic catechism, "Each sacrifice of the Mass appeases God's **wrath** against sin." Contrary to this, God says in His Word, "*So have I sworn that I would not be **wrath** with you or rebuke you.*" And in Hebrews 8:12, "*I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.*"

A priesthood and sacrifice of atonement to cover for a broken law were imperative under the Mosaic

Law, but in New Testament times, there is no law, no priesthood (apart from the priesthood of believers) and no sacrifice (Jesus Christ paid the sin debt in full). We no longer need priests to stand before God as mediators, nor has any believer more direct access to God than another. We are all invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to come to our Father, standing in the righteousness of His Son which is imputed to all who believe in Him. We can directly worship, find mercy and help in every need. Like so many men and women in religious orders, priests are men whose desire is to love and serve God, but the Roman Catholic priesthood dishonors Jesus Christ and His once-for-all Sacrifice on Calvary. Their role as mediators usurps the present-day ministry in heaven of Jesus Christ, our only Mediator, Advocate and High Priest.

### **Mariolatry**

The same can be said of the place given to Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is given titles that rightly belong to God, even the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She is called Mother of Mercy, the All Holy, Mother of the Living, Seat of Wisdom, Gate of Heaven, Advocate, Mediatrix, Co-Redeemer, the litany goes on and on. Pope Benedict XIII wrote, "The Blood shed for us and those members which He offered to the Father, the wounds He received as the price of our liberty are no other than the flesh and blood of Mary. Thus she with Christ redeemed mankind." Medical science, however, confirms that a child gets its blood from the father. Therefore, the blood of Jesus was the blood of God (Acts 20:28) the precious blood of the Everlasting Covenant. We were redeemed with "*the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Peter 1:19). Pope Paul VI in "The Credo of the People of God" gave Mary her newest title, Mary, Mother of the Church. In John 19:27, the words of Jesus from the cross, "*Behold thy mother!*", are interpreted as a declaration of Mary to be mother over the whole church. It is significant that in John's three epistles there is not even a mention of Mary's name, neither is there a reference to her in any of the other New Testament epistles which were written to the churches for guidance in matters of doctrine, worship, and church discipline. Had John interpreted the words of Jesus from the cross as the Catholic Church has done, he would surely have exhorted people to look upon Mary as their mother to whom they could entrust their cares and petitions.

There is no biblical evidence of anyone praying to Mary or giving her the *hyperdulia* type of veneration recommended by the Catholic Church. The present Pope, John Paul II, speaking of Mary's suffering said, "It was on Calvary that Mary's suffering beside the suffering of Jesus reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view, but which was mysteriously and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world." It is not surprising that a church which emphasizes the necessity of good works for salvation would find in Mary a supreme example of human merit. Notwithstanding her exalted position in Catholicism, Mary was a human being and like any believer, she performed works of righteousness during her lifetime. However, the words of Isaiah 64:6 apply to her, the same as to all mankind, "*All our righteous nesses are as filthy rags.*" Mary's suffering therefore could make no contribution to the redemption of the world. With no support from God's Word, the Catholic Church in numerous papal encyclicals has loaded Mary with every honor, unrestrainedly exalting her power and excellency thereby laying the foundation on which has been built the great edifice of Mariolatry--the idolatrous worship of Mary. We thank God for Mary, a wonderful woman of faith and obedience to God. Elizabeth in her greeting said, "Blessed is she that believed".

For centuries, Satan has been using a counterfeit Mary to deceive millions of devout Catholics. Deception was the device he used in the Garden of Eden when he tempted Eve and it is the device he uses today. The Bible, in 2 Corinthians 11:14, tells us that Satan comes as an angel of light. Examples of this are apparitions at places like Lourdes and Fatima. People are called to pray the rosary, do penance, make reparation to Mary's "Immaculate" heart. Only faith in Jesus Christ can save us, there is nothing we can do apart from Him that has eternal value. These messages are lies of Satan, twisting the truth of the Gospel. The only means of uncovering these deceptions is the Word of God. Jesus Himself dealt with the temptations of Satan in the wilderness by using the words of Scripture (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

### **The Good News**

At one of the last provincial assemblies of the order which I attended while still a religious, I remember a Scripture that was read: “*See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant*” (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah lived to see this prophecy come true. People world-wide as they hear the Gospel and look to the Word of God for truth, are able by the grace of God, to leave behind religious traditions and unbiblical beliefs long held sacred by themselves, their fathers and their forefathers. New wine has to be put into new wineskins. People are leaving denominational churches, each with its own particular religious laws which only serve to divide the Body of Christ, and coming out into fresh ground to live the Christian life as outlined in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.

In Romans we read of Gentiles, sinners who were not seeking after God but who were made righteous by faith, while the religious Jews who were very zealous, doing everything they could, were not made righteous before God. The religious Jews were holy and zealous but misdirected as it says in Romans 10.2, “*They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*” Some people find it hard to accept salvation as a **gift**. “That makes it too easy”, was one comment I heard. And another, “There must be a catch somewhere.” Obviously for some, the Good News is too good to be true. That salvation is unmerited and undeserved is the offence of the Gospel. That is what upset the Jews in Jesus’ day and what upsets religion today. Religious Jews crucified Christ and persecuted the early Church and it is still religious people today who come out against the Gospel. Good people who want to maintain their own goodness are sometimes hard to reach with the true Gospel. For them, the Good News becomes bad news. If God were to ask us what we had done to entitle us to enter heaven, a true Christian would say it was nothing he had done, but that he had put all his trust in Jesus. An axiom to remember is: “Religion is built on what man does for God. Christianity is built on what God has done for man.”

### **The Great Commission**

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples, “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel.” God has given **us** a ministry of reconciliation and we need to make sure that we ourselves have the true message described in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. We are not to be engaged in reconciling people to God either by the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) or by any other action of man. Reconciliation is something that happened at the Cross of Calvary. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 we read that we are to be **ambassadors for Christ**, His personal representatives, pleading with people to be reconciled to God. God is extending the hand of friendship to us. Will you grasp that Hand, will you believe in what God says His Son did for you on Calvary? Will you repent of your dead works and accept God’s gift of Righteousness in order to be saved?

To carry out this ministry, Jesus told His first ambassadors to wait until they would be “endued with power from on high.” Here Jesus was referring to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, He Himself being the Baptizer. His disciples needed the power of the Holy Spirit that would enable them to preach the Gospel. Like them, we all need the special anointing of the Holy Spirit to help us to carry out our ministry, “*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts*” (Zechariah 4:6). The Holy Spirit is now here on this earth convicting the world of sin. The sin He is most concerned with is the refusal to believe in Jesus Christ and His work of salvation. Our ministry is to tell the Good News to everyone we can. The price of redemption for all men has been paid. Forgiveness is available to all who will believe. Peace is possible even in this life. It is the responsibility of every believer as an ambassador for Jesus Christ to make known to the world, the Good News of the true Gospel.

### **The Power of the True Gospel**

Ever since I came to know Jesus, my desire has been to share with others about the salvation we have in Jesus. “*There is none good but **one**, that is God*” (Matthew 19:17). Once we understand this truth, we know we cannot depend on ourselves or any person living or dead. We need Jesus and belief in Him is what God asks of us. My favorite salvation Scripture is what Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus, “*Unless a man is*

*born again he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*” Being born again and believing in Jesus is therefore one and the same. I had often heard the story of Nicodemus but it took over sixty years for me to understand the message. I had followed the traditions and doctrines of men never asking myself what Jesus meant by the term ‘born again’. Jesus referred Nicodemus to the brazen serpent that was lifted up by Moses in the desert, symbolic of Himself Who would be lifted up on the Cross. Believe in Jesus and you will be born again, you will be saved.

The first Christians preached with great power as we are told in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul said that his message was not with wise, persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power so that people’s faith might not be in men but in the power of God. The Gospel is not only about what Jesus did two thousand years ago but about what He is doing today. It is the power of God to those who believe.

### **A Message for the Reader**

In this testimony, I have taken the opportunity to share some of the truths from God’s Word that were unknown to me for years. I wish to conclude by returning to the wonderful message of the true Gospel. It is a simple message, yet one that is hidden from millions of people today. The Gospel is the story of the power of the precious blood of Jesus, shed for you on the cross at Calvary, “The Story of the Great Exchange”, God’s righteousness for our sins! *For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Dear reader, the moment you are convicted of your sin and see that there is no way to save yourself, that salvation is only possible by believing in the finished work of Jesus Christ--His death, burial and resurrection--is the moment of your salvation. You can know for certain that heaven is yours for all eternity. It is the grace of God made available to us as a gift that is received by faith, “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). God is faithful to all who seek Him, “*a broken and a contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise*” (Psalm 51:17). “***Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved***” (Acts 2:21).