

Hoagland, Marjorie
— The foothills of ...
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the foothills of heaven

the story of a conversion

by marjorie hoagland



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**“You’re
just
one
of
those
who
got
knocked
off
a
horse.”**

Gretta Palmer to Marjorie Hoagland

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The Foothills of Heaven

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The Story of a Conversion

by

Marjorie Hoagland

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✠ Most Rev. John F. Noll, D.D.
Archbishop-Bishop of Fort Wayne

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The Foothills of Heaven

FOREWORD

There are those who believe that miracles can and do move mountains today, just as readily as they did 20 centuries ago.

There are those who say they doubt it, or at least who would claim they haven't seen it happen lately.

There is a third group—aged in heart, though sometimes young in years—who are *against* miracles. They do not wish to accept objective evidence; instead, they refuse to see. They distort historical facts with their own bitterness and frustration, and this distortion can never be fully realistic. "Hard-boiled" is not a synonym for realism. It might be synonymous with the phrase, "a mole's-eye view."

This story is for the first and second groups, the essentially open-minded. The problems of today's world are so tremendous that only the open-minded have within themselves the chance for a solution. I appeal to them for a hearing, therefore, as I tell the story of my progress into Catholicism, of my realization of an enormous Truth that increasingly changes the way I live, and move, and have my being. I was a typical person reared within a Protestant culture, educated at a secular university, working successfully in phases of journalism for almost 20 years—and still I had the sensation that I was perpetually climbing a steep, steep mountain, that I almost was being pushed off the rim of the world. This was so until 1951 when Catholicism in its richness and grandeur and truth finally gave a meaning to my life. Because I am typical and in no way extraordinary, perhaps my words will help others who feel they can take what life brings, *provided* it does come to something.

This, then, is a blow-by-blow account of what happened, and how it happened—offered in all humility. . .

Chapter 1

THE PROTESTANT "SOCIAL REGISTER" CHURCH— EN ROUTE HOME

The Protestant Episcopal Church in America, modeled on the Church of England, has from its beginning been the church of wealth, immense social prestige, and power in this country, particularly in the East. Other more democratic organizations such as the Methodists and the Baptists have much larger memberships, and a cursory study of "facts and figures" in relation to the Episcopal Church leads one to suspect that it may be dying out like the dodo. The aristocratic members apparently lack the vigor to reproduce themselves in sufficient numbers. Protestants wander around rather freely among the various church groups, however, and when members of the more vigorous Protestant churches come East, make a success and join the Union League Club, they have a sudden tendency suddenly to become Episcopalians. This has a much-needed "bolstering effect."

I too came to New York, went on the staff of a great advertising agency, and soon was duly received into the Episcopal church. I cannot claim that it meant too much spiritually at the time, but it certainly made me happy otherwise.

There were so many charming surprises. Like the time I visited a wealthy elderly member, who incidentally always used the Social Register as her telephone book. (She *had* a telephone book, but it lived its lowly life behind the bottles in the wine closet.) She was to call a list of members about a committee activity, and as I walked in she was sitting there, glistening with too much jewelry and looking very frustrated. I asked her if she had completed her church phone calls. All but one, it seemed. And what was the matter with that one?

"My dear, she isn't in the *Social Register*!"

Neither was I, but it didn't seem the moment to say it.

For all of that, she was a woman who devoted half her income and nine-tenths of her time to good works, and was a valuable citizen. She just had certain limitations, such as thinking anyone not an Episcopalian was definitely beyond the pale—especially Catholics.

She had an exceedingly large income (all inherited, needless to say), and she was convinced that people who tried to support themselves and their aged parents on thirty-five dollars a week were very well off, "for that class." She never could see that they might have a right to belong to unions, for instance, or try to get higher wages. One time I sat down with her and ran through figures on estimated rent, food costs, clothes, medical expenses, education, etc., and proved—so I thought—that they couldn't possibly make out on such wages. For a minute I thought I had her sold, but she wasn't able to digest the facts mentally and she finally stopped thinking about it altogether. From that time on, however, she took to introducing me to her friends as "Miss Hoagland, a friend of mine—she's a Communist or Socialist, I think!" All said in a very happy voice. I explained a couple of times, in restrained tones, that I was simply a conservative Southern Democrat *with humane tendencies*, but this made no impression. The next time she did it, I was ready. I announced in a Bankhead voice that rattled her imported antique art objects that I certainly was not and never had been and never would be a Communist or Socialist, and if she ever said it again I'd knock her teeth down her throat. She never did it again.

It is amusing that the only time I ever wrote anything for a publication that might be left-wing was at her personal and urgent request.

"The Road to Damascus"

About this time in my ideological trek, having seen first-

hand that the waning Episcopal group held no world-solutions firmly clasped in its chilly hand, I read a book called *The Road to Damascus*, made up of Catholic convert stories by "greats" like Clare Boothe Luce, the late Gretta Palmer and many others. They were powerful and compelling stories. For the first time actually, I began to think of the Catholic Church as perhaps holding all the answers for which I had been searching so long and so unavailingly. The thing that then held me up for a long time was that I made no real effort to investigate. I simply presumed that difficulties existed. While the Catholic Church might be the mother of all Christendom, the largest, and perhaps the greatest of churches, the bulk of whose teachings were true, still I felt there must be other beliefs there which I couldn't possibly accept. And who knew when the Pope might dash off a piece of Dogma, proclaiming the moon was made of green cheese? *Then* I'd be in a mess!

There was the teaching about the Real Presence, for instance. It is odd how much people object to the Real Presence until they love it very much, almost as though they think it something in the class of "too good to be true." I also thought there could not be a mass acceptance of Lourdes, Fatima, etc., unless there was shrewd manipulation of public opinion from the top Church leadership. (This was a hold-over from my university studies in public opinion, in the political science department.) I couldn't believe that these devotions, like the Sacred Heart devotion, were universally accepted *precisely because they were true* and had God's infinite backing. I thought they were skillfully "planted" superstitions circulating among the less erudite. I admitted that many Catholics, including some outstanding converts, were brilliantly educated people, but again (and here my long Protestant training came into play) I thought these top intellectuals were given "sub rosa" leeway to accept what they liked and silently reject the rest . . . so as not to disedify the masses. I was never more wrong!

I investigated other groups and movements. Yet always some vital factor, connected with the absoluteness of Christianity, was missing.

Then it was 1951, and mid-summer. I was returning to a position I had previously held on the publicity staff of a large advertising agency. I was profoundly happy to be returning to this company. Therefore, it was not unhappiness that made me turn to Catholicism. I was never happier nor more filled with a sense of general well-being, but my obligation and wish to find basic truth was as strong as ever. I intended to pursue it.

The First Lead

I got my first lead when I was talking with a man at the agency, a prince of a man, who asked casually, "By the way, Marjorie, what church do you affiliate with?" It was just a friendly question, like others he asked me.

I hesitated a moment, and then said, "Well, Henry, I am rather in 'mid-passage' at the moment. I had thought of looking into Catholicism."

He looked surprised but said nothing. It was much later that I learned he himself was a Catholic.

Later, I began thinking about the question and my "mid-passage" answer. After all, to find Christianity I would have to search Christian sources, seek within a Christian framework: there was no other possibility. And the only great source I hadn't investigated—in fact I hated to think of investigating it—was Catholicism. It was outside my cultural framework; I had few Catholic friends; a change to it would carry certain social penalties. And yet, if it should be the true Church, established by Christ Himself 2,000 years ago, if it had the doctrine and tradition vital to the full Christian life, if by any chance it was the only global Christian society, if Jesus really was present in the Tabernacles of the whole world . . . if by chance the tangent-like Protestant organiza-

tion in its 400 years of existence (preceded by 1,600 years of Catholic loyalty) had lost much that was important and some that was essential, could I escape it? in honesty? I had been told that it was filled with sheer superstitions, but did I *know* they were superstitions? I knew that among my friends a Catholic might lack social acceptability, but was it social acceptability or truth that should be one's criteria? Were its claims valid or not? Had I given it even a vague look-see? In fact, why had I chosen to look practically everywhere else? Could it be because its claims had an enormity, an authority, that struck at a timidity in me which sought something *less* big, *less* radical, *less* demanding?

I had to know! The time had come when I *had* to know . . .

This admission was my first step towards Home.

Chapter 2

SUDDEN SILENCE DESCENDS UPON ME

At this point, mid-summer and early fall of 1951, I began looking for a place to take instructions. (I always asked, "Are you sure this doesn't commit me in any way?" I had a myth well-established in my mind, that the "RC's" were perpetually reaching out and snatching the unwary, the senile and the dying. If only I had known how opposite were the facts!)

At the very outset I thought of trying to enter the classes conducted by Bishop (then Monsignor) Fulton Sheen, the convert-maker extraordinary. Two things prevented it:

a) I heard that he no longer conducted classes personally, but instead the "students" listened to wire recordings made by him. I just couldn't warm up to a wire recording. I tried, but I couldn't. Later, I heard that in actuality the famous prelate came in at the end of each recording for a brief in-person talk, and also that the classes were ably conducted by well-known and adept converts.

b) In all sincerity, I did not wish to make a "production" of my tentative approach to the Church; it wasn't seemly. A parish priest should have adequate factual information, and facts—I told myself—were what I wanted.

And there was the unadmitted thought that as my job was selling people ideas, I didn't want anyone, expert or otherwise, selling me.

It did occur at one point that I might contact Gretta Palmer to ask her counsel. However, she was major league in journalism, and I felt a hesitancy in approaching the sparkling Gretta on so personal a subject, especially since I didn't know how it would turn out. This slap-happy thought delayed by a year my close contact with Gretta Palmer, and how I regret it now that she is gone. For Gretta was someone you could talk to. No matter what your problems or how complicated the situation, you could be sure of a warm response, intelligent help and a faith that was unflinching.

St. Stephen's and Sister Helen

Finally a friend at the agency, a Catholic who had been watching me with perplexity, took me to the church of the parish in which I lived, St. Stephen's on East 29th St. It was a parish which had seen great days, but which is now in the midst of a run-down area.

The Catholic Mass can seem very complicated to an adult beginner; it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. I was especially embarrassed over the fact that I didn't know when to genuflect, or how, and particularly *why*. At the time I was nervously sure everyone in the church was watching me, but a doubt about that has come into my mind since. Then Margaret and I, being unaccustomed to St. Stephen's, sat in the area reserved by common consent for the nuns who teach at the nearby schools, and soon we were totally surrounded by them.

Quite late, a young nun came in and sat by us. She had

been to another service in a nearby church. I had my umbrella and other belongings on the seat beside me, and wasn't aware of her presence until I looked up and saw to my horror that she was virtually pushed off the end of the pew. I grabbed my stuff, at which she suddenly turned and said in a low, resonant voice, "That's all right, dear . . . they don't bother me." I was staggered; she was a nun, and she had spoken, and very like a human, too. And then I noticed the special wonder of her finely-chiseled face and a certain radiance. As a tough ex-reporter, I can take radiance or leave it alone, but at least I recognize it. On her it looked good.

Later Margaret—grabbing the moment before I could stop her—asked the young nun if I might call upon her to get the actual procedural set-up for taking instructions at St. Stephen's. She said yes, and that was that.

A few days later, I went to the convent one night about seven o'clock and asked at the door to speak to the nun we had spoken to. The Sister on duty, who looked surprised but helpfully inclined, disappeared upstairs, and I heard a low-voiced conference going on. Then she came down and asked me to be seated in the "parlor." Suddenly I heard the scamper of feet coming down the stairs; there was a perceptible pause, then the steps continued in a sedate fashion. Sister Helen walked in, holding out her hands, "Ah, at last we've enticed you here!" I heard the Bob Hope show on the radio upstairs and for the first time noticed the charming, austere parlor.

"Why, this seems a normal enough place!" I didn't do a very good job of hiding my amazement.

I still don't know what I had expected, maybe clanking chains in the basement and Witch of Endor screams from the attic. Sister Helen looked discouraged a moment, and then said quietly that she had always heard Protestants had fairly wild ideas of convents but she'd never believed it of them—until now. She informed me that she couldn't give me instructions herself, as she was not authorized to teach doctrine

as some nuns were, but she told me precisely how to get to the rectory and how to ask for the priest on duty. Before I left, she took me to the lovely chapel and had me kneel at a prie-dieu, while she knelt, I observed, humbly on the floor just back of me. As I left, her hand touched my shoulder an instant as she told me she and her school children had been praying for me all week.

"I'll wait right here until I see you ring the bell of the rectory," she said comfortingly. Never say a nun doesn't know human beings! I had a wild desire to run away as I went toward the rectory—but I just couldn't, not with that nun standing there praying for me (and at it a week already!).

Instructions

I suppose I had one of the fastest instructions on record. There were two others in the class with me. They both were getting married to Catholics, and they were willing to accept anything from the Trinity to the Nine First Fridays without a murmur. (The priest did not know of their marriage plans; I heard of them the first night, over coffee.)

Meanwhile, in the midst of instructions, I had decided to make one attempt to see whether high church Episcopalianism (Anglicanism) might not be Catholic enough to satisfy God and mystifying enough not to offend anybody, especially my friends. I made a trip to St. Mary the Virgin in New York, where Episcopal nuns live, and talked about my uncertainty to a lovely, distinguished and very real person, Sister Mary Josephine. She was well along in years. She understood the dilemma; many people from St. Mary the Virgin had gone "*Roman Catholic.*" (She verbally underlined the Roman part.) She maintained that the Anglican communion had true Catholic status and indicated that the whole controversy was a bit silly on both sides. We talked on. Finally she got a key, got down on her knees to open a tiny

shelf under the enormous bookshelves ranging the room and took out three books, two of which she gave to me.

“Read them, and then come back and we’ll discuss them.”

I read them. They convinced me irrevocably that the Church of England and its American child, the Anglican wing of the Episcopal church, could not possibly be valid. I don’t see how anyone could read these books and escape this judgment.

This ended my hope of finding an acceptable bridge, a middle-ground. And to this day, I wonder why the Episcopal nun gave me the books. In fact, I light a special candle for her under the beautiful Sacred Heart shrine at St. Francis of Assisi about once a quarter. I wonder what she would do if she were younger.

Father Golden

The parish priest giving instructions, Father Matthew Golden, began by taking a catechism book and opening it in the middle, which seemed like a generous beginning on his part. “Now, you are all adults. You say you wish to become Catholics, or at least to have instructions in the Faith so that you can decide. There are just a few *major* things we have to discuss.”

We were all charmed with Father Golden, and liked him greatly as a person. We enjoyed chatting with him; he was youthful, intelligent and sincere. But I don’t know how he ever got through the lessons. The pre-marriage candidates made only the most trivial observations—at least, to him—and I sat in silent dignity most of the time.

You see, I had reached a point of at least one decision: I believed that the Catholic Church was the true Church. I knew that its theology was tremendous in scope, its traditions enormous, its history long and imposing. I knew that for 2,000 years it had operated as a world church. I knew that at monasteries and convents circling the globe vast projects

for human betterment had been undertaken—and accomplished. *And* I know I didn't even know how to ask an intelligent question.

Besides this, I was ham-strung by a Protestant concept that I didn't even recognize as such. Protestants are accustomed to wide "theological" divergence among outstanding clergymen; after all, there are about a dozen principal sects and 240 smaller ones. It isn't considered good taste to bring up "controversial" issues.

Wanting to become a Catholic now, upon the basis that intellectually I did recognize at least that it was the true Church and the mother of Christendom, I was determined to do nothing to "throw the priest off" unless he required me to swear the moon was made of green cheese. I knew—and this was vital to me—that I could spend a lifetime studying later and not exhaust the mine. There were scholars with whom to study. But to get in, I thought I had to avoid antagonizing this particular priest so there would be no doubt in his mind as to my acceptability. The trick was to keep real quiet and get accepted, and then to learn.

Father Golden had no way of knowing that when I was absolved, conditionally baptized, and received at Christmas-time, 1951, I was about as truly Catholic as a Moslem.

I had become nervously intent upon being received; I think that secretly I feared God would double cross me and strike me dead before The Day, to my eternal detriment no doubt! I thought that if I could just get in, the answers to my quest would not be far away—as indeed they weren't. It did not occur to me that the priest in his kindly way thought my constant wish to rush things along was the famous zeal of the convert.

The Cenacle of St. Regis

Meanwhile, I called at the convent regularly to talk things over with Sister Helen. She asked me many questions, pene-

trating questions. Undoubtedly she judged much more from my answers than I realized. For one day she appeared and in her grave and kindly way handed me a slip of paper, upon which she had written some magic words. They were: Cenacle of St. Regis, 628 West 140th St.

It was a noted Catholic retreat house for women, she said, the first Catholic retreat house for women established on the North American continent, in fact. The nuns there were brilliantly equipped, specialists in counseling and authorized to teach adults (as well as youngsters).

“They will help you,” she said. “I want you to go there before you are received.”

As a matter of fact I had heard of the Cenacle, its wonderful nuns and its picturesque buildings and its garden, which a New York *Times* editorial described as “virtually the only spot left in Manhattan with true Old World charm.” I had heard of its magnificent library, its great, massive furniture, beautiful tapestries and paintings, all gifts of patrons of earlier days. I had even heard, from a college-educated girl not accustomed to throw praise away, that however specialized you were you could discuss anything with those nuns and find them several steps ahead of you mentally. And that they were shock-proof. That had a good sound to it.

So one Sunday I made the most important phone call of my life. For that call eventually led me home. I phoned the Cenacle, AU 6-3800, and got the Retreat Secretary, Mother Ellen, on the phone. I told her I was shortly to be received into the Church, that I had a few questions about confession, and other matters. Would it be possible for me to come out during the day? “Surely,” she replied in that extra-low voice of hers that you hear so much better than countless louder, strident voices. I explained hastily that I did not have a letter of introduction, that I worked at an ad agency but she couldn’t call there on a Sunday to ask about me, and that I was caught without credentials, as it were. “That

makes no difference at all; will about 5:30 be all right? Benediction will be over then.”

I arrived a few minutes ahead of time and was shown into the library. I had a chance to observe the Cenacle nuns, so direct and real and charming, so natural and yet so truly nun-like. (That’s the highest praise I can give, even today.) They wore the loveliest habits in the world, dark pleated skirts, mauve-colored capes and white fluted caps that showed the sudden childlike loveliness of their faces, whether they were youthful nuns just professed or as old as Sister Ignatius, who was past 80 but still a tiny cannon-ball of energy, French accent and high spirit. They were perfect! I couldn’t see how they came to be in New York in ’51; they belonged in Wonderland.

Mother Ellen

Mother Ellen completed her talk with a retreatant, and then came towards me with the graciousness and charm so characteristic of her. Later I was to realize that she is one of the world’s really beautiful women—and there aren’t too many, actually. There are a lot of “made-up” women, and expensively dressed women, but that’s not the same thing. The beauty expert Antoinette Donnelly once commented upon this in her column in *The New York Daily News*. She contrasted two women she saw walking in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Fifth Avenue in New York. One was wealthy and famous in the international set (Dorothy Thompson once called it “the international white trash”), who spends a fortune annually to appear beautiful. Yet everyone knows that she is, at best, a made-up vacuum. The other was a nun, head slightly bowed, walking with the quietude characterizing nuns in public, completely without make-up of any kind, but shining with an inner radiance that somehow, in New York’s workaday and hard-boiled world, caused heads to turn.

That first day at the Cenacle, I wasn’t even aware of

Mother Ellen's physical beauty. I didn't realize it because her spiritual surety and intellectual keenness came through first. Some of us have to make our minds triumph over ordinary looks. Mother Ellen made her mind and spirit triumph over beauty, an incomparably harder thing.

We went into the only vacant room, the Sacred Heart parlor, for our conference. Mother Ellen stressed that since I was under instructions from a priest, she could give me only counsel which later I must check with Father Golden. She said the Cenacle was authorized to give instructions, in cooperation with priests, but not to anyone already receiving instructions.

That settled, she sat back to listen.

She later said I talked for ten minutes in measured sentences, without once looking at her. I don't doubt it. I was in a terrific sweat about my coming "general confession" because this had to cover a considerable span of years, and I wanted to know precisely what had to be mentioned and how it should be told. Red to the roots of my hair, I told her the problems I had in regard to it. I had to ask somebody, and I'd rather ask a woman first. Somehow I gathered the impression from her that I hadn't invented any sins; I'd merely repeated some that priests and nuns had heard before. They could and should be reported simply and factually, and she was kind enough to suggest specifically how to do this.

I also wanted to know whether the "confession boxes" were soundproofed, and whether she knew where I could find a deaf priest to make the confession to.

At this point Mother Ellen rose hurriedly and said it was time for dinner and she'd take me down to the refectory, which is called Nazareth, where she had reserved a place for me.

Dinner was charming. At least the dining room was perfectly appointed, and the food was good. It was served by nuns and when they tried to serve me, I kept springing

to my feet. There was no conversation at meals, but a nun read to us over a loud-speaker and did it very well, too. I never could figure out how to get the salt without asking for it, so I had one of my saltless meals.

Later Mother and I talked again, and I asked whether I might call again at a time convenient to her. She said yes, and I departed.

The "Oath of Abjuration"

A few nights later, about 9 p.m. after my final instruction from Father Golden, I was on the phone to her again, in utter desperation. He had sprung the "oath of abjuration" on us at the last minute, something about agreeing to hate and despise other sects, and repenting of past heresies. My aunt was a Methodist; I couldn't possibly despise the Methodists. And I'd never consciously been a heretic; I had just progressed slowly into truth. How else would I get there?

Mother Ellen suggested that I come to the Cenacle immediately after work the next day, a Friday (and I was to be received into the Church Saturday afternoon). She promised to look into the matter meanwhile and obtain a copy of the abjuration oath and we could give it some study together.

I left the office early Friday (after all, few people of my age are expecting to get baptized the next day!) and arrived in time for Benediction at 5 p.m. Benediction is no where lovelier than at the St. Regis Cenacle, and it was the first of the classic Church services I really understood. Afterwards, I found that Mother Ellen had indeed found a copy of the oath, but either it was a modified version and a lot of modification seemed to me to be called for or else in her presence my mental emotional DT's had been quieted.

She explained something of the history of the oath, which was used only for adults, and initiated in the "early days" of Christianity when the very lives of fellow-Christians would depend upon the sincerity of the person being received. It

was strong; it was meant to be strong. She also pointed out that she certainly had had no opportunity to realize the very deep affection existing between my aunt and myself, and that the reference to "sects" might be a barrier. In any case, it was not the people we agreed to hate or even the groups as such—only whatever was heretical in their beliefs, and adherence to the true Church demanded that this straight line be laid down.

She neatly disposed of my saying that I could scarcely reject former heresies on my own part because I never consciously had been one, by saying that if I'd never been consciously heretical this part of the oath had no application to me, did it? In other words, I shouldn't mind the phrase, since I'd been so aloof from conscious error.

For the past two years, I've been wondering exactly how she meant that!

The Day

Saturday dawned . . . I had told my aunt who reared me, that I wished to become a Catholic, and she had said simply but firmly, "You do exactly what you feel to be right about religion. I'd never want to interfere with that. If you want to be a Catholic you do exactly that and never be apologetic about it to anyone; be a Catholic *proudly*."

She was 82 years old then and had been raised in a completely Protestant atmosphere. But she had two things: a flexibility of mind that few people acquire at any age, and a great love for me. She had become blind from cataracts, but from that time on she listened to all the Catholic news she could hear on the radio. She developed a tremendous, an overwhelming admiration for Cardinal Spellman and could quote almost verbatim everything the newscasters said about him or that he said in radio addresses. Every week when I got *The Catholic News*, our diocesan newspaper, her first question was, "Where is Cardinal Spellman and what is he doing now? America needs more men like him!"

However, while she knew I was becoming a Catholic, she did not know about the preparation required, nor about the process of reception. Protestants have their memberships transferred rather freely "by letter." She presumed I'd get into the Catholic Church that way, and I just didn't have the nerve to tell her I was going off to be baptized.

Three p. m. approached like a funeral hour—slowly but inevitably.

At the last moment, I dragged in an editor from a metropolitan newspaper to be my sponsor. My initial thought had been to have Mother Ellen, but even I realized that as the Cenacle nuns are semi-cloistered this was out of the question. But I couldn't see why Sister Helen, who would be present anyway, couldn't act in the required capacity. I was all for entering an appeal directly to His Eminence the Cardinal, but poor Father Golden, sweat literally dripping down his brow, said pleadingly, "Now Marjorie, please don't do anything like that. I know that in your job you are accustomed to direct action, but in the Church these things go through channels. I knew you wanted Sister Helen and it was important to you, so I went as far as I could. The answer was 'No.' This is a real challenge to your faith but I'm sure you'll prove your fine metal . . ."

I was furious, but I was hog-tied. It seemed such a slight and reasonable request, and I had made several concessions myself, and I still think, at this writing, that an appeal to His Eminence might have been effective. He is a very great man, who never lets details interfere with major objectives. Besides, he once was short-stop on a baseball team and he collects stamps, and people who do these things usually prove extremely nice in other ways too.

My sponsor, Isabella Beach, arrived in good time. She brought me a corsage, an antique pin of rare beauty, and a Sacred Heart badge. I appreciated the first two; I couldn't figure out what on earth that picture of Christ was doing

with blood dripping off it. (Again, I was to learn!)

As the oldest of the three being received (I couldn't deceive myself that it was on any other basis) I was the first to be sent into the Church for the general confession.

"If I'm not back in an hour, send a Seeing Eye dog," I requested.

Confession

I got into the Church all right—I was steered there by Isabella who then beat a hasty and discreet retreat—but there my luck ended. I couldn't find "the damned boxes." Just as I started to trek across the Church, Sister Helen (kneeling quietly in a front pew) saw me out of the corner of her eye, motioned despairingly, and finally said quite audibly, "In there. . ." I hadn't practised with the box before; born Catholics just never would see anything complicated about the matter. I got the curtain open well enough, but then came my Waterloo. The place for me to kneel seemed "slant-wise" and it was dark in there, so I promptly fell down and said "DAMN!" in a voice ringing from one end of the Church to the other. There were suspicious sounds from the priest, who had been brought in from outside the parish to hear our confessions—Father Golden had seemed to think it wise after I began talking about soundproofed boxes and deaf priests. Then a voice said, "Now, just be calm and we'll work this out all right. What is it you say first?"

"Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. I accuse myself of the following sins. . ."

I was back outside in ten minutes at most; I know, because when I got back with the others Father Golden told me so. He had been sitting there anxiously glancing at his watch since my parting comment.

Later I was conditionally baptized and received. Hitherto, in my newspaper days, I'd never had much sympathy with the characters who claimed in court, "Well, everything went

blank," but from now on I can give first-hand testimony that it can happen. Isabella kept patting me anxiously on the back, and finally literally grasped me firmly by the arm because she thought I was going to fall on my face.

Afterwards, I went by the convent to speak a few moments with Sister Helen, and then I went to a hotel phone to call Mother Ellen. She said in awed tones, "You know, theologically speaking, you are just like a little new-born angel."

I did not feel like a little angel. But I was in. That was the big thing, but it would have been meaningless in its effects on my daily life had it not been for the two years of follow-up teaching I received at the Cenacle.

Chapter 3

A STEP OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Among the nine-tenths of important Catholic doctrine I temporarily by-passed—very silently, of course—prior to my reception into the Church was that pertaining to Our Lady.

I believe I had heard references in a few Protestant sermons, dark references to "the cult of Mary." The preachers warned us that intelligent people keep away from it. No one needed to warn me. Purely biological motherhood wasn't anything I could warm to anyway; I conceived of it as a partially spiritual thing at times, as for instance the wonderful love my aunt had extended to me every day of my life.

Now, I must ask you to be very patient, very open-minded here. There are those to whom the word "mother" is the most wonderful word in the whole world, a word of honor and of joy. There are others to whom the word conveys none of this warmth and joy. It is not the technical definition of the word that differs; that stands, of course. It is the emotional reaction to the word that varies.

Ask the children of divorced parents how they feel about the term. I think the answers might surprise you.

Let me put it this way. There are those who have to have their prejudices against the motherhood concept broken down before they can welcome a universal mother, Our Lady. And I was one of those.

"Our Blessed Mother"

Shortly before being received into the Church, I tentatively said to Sister Helen one Sunday morning as we walked toward her convent after Mass, "There seems to be a lot of belief about the — ah, Virgin Mary." I wasn't hostile exactly; I just wanted her to know there wasn't any use expecting me to go that far.

She looked at me in surprise and said swiftly and firmly, "*Our Blessed Mother.*" She added nothing else; just the title, like an affirmation in itself. The next time I broke reserve enough to say something about not seeing the importance of all this emotional belief about "the Virgin Mary, or Our Lady, as you say." Again she said, "Our Blessed Mother," adding this time only one sentence, "It comes by the gift of faith." She looked very directly and gravely into my eyes as she said it.

When next I was at the Cenacle, I told Mother Ellen what Sister Helen had said, and the odd way she emphasized the phrase "Our Blessed Mother." Mother Ellen knew more of my family background. But she did explain to me about Our Lady and how she led people to her Divine Son.

Frankly, I didn't believe a word of it.

It is strange how long we seek the truth and try by our own individual searching, done in our own chosen way, to find God. Then when the Faith in all its grandeur looms over us, we fight despairingly against not merely major truths but even the details. Do we perhaps prefer our truth, found in our way, to God's vast truth conferred and conveyed in His way?

Looking back on it, I would say I listened to Mother Ellen

politely. *She* claims I listened with no more belligerence than usual.

Then something happened that I cannot explain.

Gretta Palmer explained it laughingly one day by saying to me, "You're just one of those who got knocked off a horse." Or like Saul going his way—and then there was Damascus and he became Paul.

Once more, then, I can only explain what happened as to facts. I had had the explanations about Our Lady; they conveyed nothing, I thought, and I did not believe them. I could not believe that human beings, all human beings, including me, had a great universal mother to help us. I didn't even bother to want such a thing; it was fantastic. But the nuns of the Cenacle, and Sister Helen of the Sisters of Charity, and others as well, prayed for me. They realized by now that a tremendous emotional barricade existed, but you know, barricades don't impress nuns too much.

Nothing more was said to me on the subject.

The Way It Was

Then one day as I was walking along a New York street, all those prayers seemed to take sudden effect. I found myself thinking of Our Lady, no longer as "the Virgin Mary," but as "Mother." And the term carried with it a sense of warmth and love which was completely new to me.

That's the way it was; I make no pretense of being able to explain it. My first faith, totally conferred, came just like that.

After that I passionately loved Our Lady. I did not sensibly love the Trinity—in fact I felt the Trinity owed me a crashing apology and I expected someday to get it—but I did love Our Lady, Mother of God.

Realizing that on this one point my compass was at long last due north, Mother Ellen rejoiced, rejoiced and waited and prayed and taught.

My first Holy Communion was at Christmas Midnight Mass at the Cenacle. At least, everyone kept saying it was my first Holy Communion, but since I'd had what I considered Communion for years in Protestant churches I couldn't see what was so different. Why all this love for "the Blessed Sacrament"? I didn't get it. I was ready to settle for my love for Our Lady, but lately she seemed faintly reproachful when I prayed to her. Not less loving, just a little wistful. It bothered me enormously. It made my heart ache. It haunted me.

When Mother Ellen invited me to spend New Year's Day, 1952 at the lovely Cenacle, I was extremely happy to accept. It was a wonderful day. And when she agreed to give me weekly lessons in doctrine, I was delighted.

And I was taking still another step Home.

Chapter 4

FROM THE SUMMA TO A GRADE-SCHOOL CATECHISM

Mother Ellen, who had an optimistic nature and an exceptionally fine education to boot, began our lessons at a high level. She went right to the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Public Life of Our Lord* by Archbishop Goodier, and the *Spiritual Exercises*, the great manual of St. Ignatius Loyola. There was an imposing list of other books, too.

It took me exactly six cagey weeks, working in slow journalistic fashion, to beat her down to the point where she saw that the catechism prepared for children in the lower grades was more appropriate for me.

It reminds me of a story Gretta Palmer told me, about a man who was a famous editor and fully 50 years old before he began taking instructions. He began studying doctrine with a group of outstanding Order priests, and they felt obligated to see that he fully grasped the vast implications

of Church Dogma, doctrine and tradition before he was received. He had weekly lessons for three years. The *Summa*, Goodier, etc. The actual fact was that he did not have a theological mind; he had a quick, romantic mind, highly-creative, able to write facts so that they read as easily as fiction. The priests quite naturally felt that unless he really understood the doctrine he would not be Catholic in the full, rich sense of the term. Finally a friend of the editor, who had gotten into the Catholic Church by the simple good fortune of being born into it, became impatient. He couldn't understand why Mr. _____ was having so much trouble and spoke to the Archbishop about it. The Archbishop sent for the editor and asked him what had he been studying and what was the trouble.

The editor reeled off a list of books, ending despairingly, "And if you tell me any more to read, Your Eminence, I'm going to lie right down on the floor and cry."

The Archbishop engaged in a couple of minutes of prayerful thought, sent for his secretary and dictated a letter. It read thus: "Please baptize this man immediately. (Signed) _____, Archbishop of _____."

I am not in the major leagues with that editor, but the story consoles me no end.

Lessons at the Cenacle

Usually I went to the Cenacle on Saturdays arriving about 10:30 a.m., and Mother Ellen graciously assigned me a retreatant's room for the day. All the lovely touches that make a retreat house so enormously restful and pleasant were there. The kind and gracious welcome at the door. The airy room overlooking the famous and beautifully-kept Cenacle garden, or a room next to the Chapel where Our Lord abides. Frequently there were a few flowers, the Catholic papers neatly folded on the desk, a book or two. Everything was so perfectly appointed that it was weeks before I realized, with amazement, that the house was not staffed with servants, but that

all the work was done by nuns. (After that, I took to emptying my own ash trays!)

Mother always came to get me at lunch time, and luncheon was a special pleasure as I got into the spirit of the place and saw the joy and help it was to retreatants of all ages who came in swarms. Immediately afterwards we had a short talk during which she suggested a little after-lunch reading and set the time for our lesson, usually 3 o'clock. This gave me time for a brief stop-over in the Chapel, something Mother Ellen strongly advised.

I came to love the Chapel, but then I wasn't sure why. "Chapel spires and church bells" always had touched me very much, even when I was, or seemed to be, a long way off from Our Blessed Lord. I used to drive by a Sacred Heart statue not far from Mt. Kisco, New York. At that time I didn't know it was a Sacred Heart statue and would not have understood the words if I did, but I turned towards it yearningly and called it "The Christ of the outstretched arms."

When we got down to the lessons, Mother Ellen gave a brief over-all plan or outline verbally, and then launched into the *Summa*. After each lesson, she gave me a typed set of notes prepared for me to review at home. She went into "spiration" and one thing and another, and with every wish to learn I parroted appropriate answers from time to time. A very puzzled, almost baffled, look was coming into her face, however; and once or twice, in mid-winter, she was actually sweating when she finished.

She quickly realized she wasn't actually "reaching" me, but she couldn't imagine why not. I was inhibited by the knowledge that I often had tried to find The Way and failed. This time I knew I was on or near the right road at last, and I thought if I tried harder I could figure out what she was talking about.

You see, I did not realize yet that the true Church was Christ's Mystical Body in the world, the best and surest and

quickest means to God. I am afraid that like many people of cosmopolitan education and thinking, and Protestant background, I had the idea: "Now at last I'm in the right Church; let's hop right along with business as usual." God does not reach out to bring converts into the fold to have them continue as headstrong and as unenlightened as before; He intends that their wills shall be conformed to His. He does not conform His will to theirs; that should be very obvious. Any fool would know it—but I didn't.

I was fearfully afraid that Mother Ellen would decide I had an I.Q. too low to grasp the lessons, and I whipped myself into renewed mental effort. But that wasn't the thing.

Came the day when with unusual candor I told her, "You know, Mother, I hear what you say all right, but the words don't seem to convey anything."

"Theology and Sanity"

Mother Ellen knew that spiritual change would have to walk hand-in-hand with new knowledge for me. The trick was to bring it about. She gave me Frank Sheed's *Theology and Sanity* to read.

At long last we'd found a book that really "sent" me, that opened pent-up things, that showed avenues I could understand, that seemed addressed especially and with rare understanding to me individually.

I think I scarcely could have been called "Christian" before I read that book. When I finished it, I had come a long way. A long way towards becoming truly Catholic. And it gave Mother Ellen the clues she needed to help me in a permanent way, a way beginning here and ending in eternity.

(This past summer, I met Mr. Sheed and told him about it. He said that for years through the Catholic Evidence Guild he had conducted street meetings of apostolic character, and he *had* to know people and how to reach them very quickly to do that.)

As I read the book, I marked many parts I liked, and others I put a huge question mark beside.

Mother Ellen noted these parts with particular care, and told me to read on to the end of the book and then we'd discuss the "question marked" parts. Naturally, by that time, with Mother Ellen's careful and by now much more simple teaching continuing, many of the questions had disappeared.

About this time, Mother was giving a factual discussion of penance. I listened carefully, and finally expressed something very deep-seated in my emotions.

"Look, why should I do penance, or in other words make reparation to God? As a matter of fact, I think the Almighty owes me an apology, and I expect to get it someday."

After a stunned moment, Mother's clear laugh rang out, not the strident cover-up laughter of the worldling, but the true laughter of nuns when they rejoice that at last they are able to help someone. It was an unusual viewpoint, not one she'd run into from most born Catholics, but apart from that she recognized it as progress. Now she could get at the complications in my mind and maybe emotions.

Along the By-Paths

I went into detail about the evolutionary theory of human development: the fish stage coming from an early "blob of nothing much," and then the period when with infinite pain sea animals slowly over thousands or millions of years became land animals, and then we came to an ape stage, and finally became what we now call human beings. How, I demanded righteously, could God look us in the face after we'd undergone all that? And besides that (and here I was more to the point personally), human beings are left in great confusion and pain, with nothing but confusion and pain possible with the set-up of life being what it is; no surety of hold on those we love; death a threat at all times and our inevitable end. It was on this latter point of sterile pain

that Mother took vehement exception to my remarks. Human life has a point, and if we follow God's will for us we face a glorious eternity when God will wipe away all tears, and when we will see that those who live in Christ do not know death except as a passing thing, a transition to something higher and better. A life given point by God is gloriously worthwhile and always rich in fulfillment. Even the pain that comes from our own errors and sins can be offered to Him in reparation and so is not sterile, not lost. "I do not weep to see the pain of the world as such, but to see the pain *wasted* by so many," quoted Mother Ellen.

It is possible, you see, for people such as myself to search for God in by-path after by-path, but not be prepared to recognize His authority when at last one locates it. It isn't too easy, even for those who think they seek honestly, to bow low when first they hear, "THUS saith the Lord. . ."

It is not easy for the modern mind, especially a secular one, to accept authority, even God's. Perhaps I should not say "even" but "particularly."

The true Church is the route to God; this is the Divine plan. But it is hard to grasp this fact, and it is harder to go straight through those great avenues of doctrine, tradition and devotions to the Source of all life.

There is the further point, to which I shall not again refer, that children of divorce and rejected children often are especially rebellious against authority. They transfer their temporal confusions, bitterness and anger to God Himself.

But about this time, Mother Ellen said unexpectedly, "I am sure that God especially loves you." It was a new thought, a surprising thought . . . and I did not forget it.

Mother had me continue with *Theology and Sanity*, and then one day she said we'd go through the catechism for a week or for several weeks. It put things plainly, she said, and might clear up some points.

We stayed on the catechism in its classic outlines, but with detailed explanations and side reading she suggested, for about two months. Then I was promoted to the *Summa* again . . . but by then, many things had happened.

Chapter 5

OUR LORD COMES TO TOWN

Mother Ellen once said that Our Lady often leads us to her Divine Son.

Now, I realize these positive things about Christ:

a) He is the world's greatest spiritual hope.

b) He is a teacher-leader of far more than human proportions.

c) He is a symbol to mankind, and yet more than a symbol, for in Himself He is the realization of the symbol. This I believed firmly. And the concept never left my mind.

d) He is the heart of the mystery of the universe. A famous bio-chemist I once interviewed said that to me (not for publication, but as her private belief), and I agreed with her in theory, at least.

And yet, He had never "come clear" to me as a Person, One to whom I could give an all-embracing devotion. A few times, in a transitory way, He had seemed very near so that I almost could reach out and touch Him; that happened once when I was kneeling in the back of Calvary Episcopal Church. But then He quickly eluded me; the moment was gone—the Person was gone. And I was empty as ever.

Therefore, I was at this point. I was in the Church; I had come to know and love Our Lady; the Church doctrines were becoming clearer to me as God's revelations. I was not striving for anything more.

"Forty Hours Devotion"

Then one Sunday at St. Stephen's Church where I was a parishioner, it was announced that the "Forty Hours Devotion" would be held. It meant little to me until the day arrived.

A huge canopy supported on four poles was brought to the front of the Church. The procession began, and I looked up to see Our Lord being carried aloft in the monstrance.

The symbolism of the procession suddenly struck me. This was the Son of God coming down among His people. As in the early days of His public life, He was moving about among weak and sinful people who asked His help. And as the procession with its choir boys, servers, incense and candles passed by me, I realized that the Holy Eucharist was radiating grace and strength to the people in that Church, just as Our Lord had done for the people who lined the roads of Galilee and asked His help.

This was the first real understanding I had of the meaning of the Blessed Sacrament. As my love and understanding of the Mother of God came suddenly, so did my devotion to the Sacrament of Her Son's presence.

I have loved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with a real, vital love ever since that time. I am aware of His presence in every tabernacle. Just going by a Church in a taxi is a joy, for I know I can send special messages of love to Him as I say a brief prayer in His honor.

That is how the Eucharist took on a personal meaning for me. And, like so many things that have happened to me, it was not through anything that I did; it was entirely a grace conferred by God.

By my own searching I seemed unable to find God, but if we want Him, He knows how to find us.

After this my lessons in the *Summa* went much better.

Chapter 6

I FIND ST. MARGARET-MARY AND THE SACRED HEART

One day in a New York Church I saw a statue of Christ "with the heart on the outside." It was a fine, cleanly-done piece of art work, commanding in conception, but definitely not Dali. I stared at it a moment and then asked a Catholic friend with me why that statue had the heart on the outside instead of inside. She looked startled for a moment, and then said it was a "Sacred Heart" statue, used in the great Sacred Heart devotion now world-wide in scope and having millions of adherents. It was one of the central devotions of the Church. I filed this away mentally at the time, as something I'd investigate when I had more time.

Later, in the midst of one of my Cenacle lessons, I abruptly asked Mother Ellen, "Will you please explain that 'Sacred Heart' thing to me and the statue with the heart on the outside?"

She paused perceptibly, as she had a way of doing before explaining something momentous. Then very slowly she told me about a St. Margaret-Mary Alacoque, a humble little French nun of the Visitation Order. She lived in the 17th century. Christ had appeared to her with certain great messages that He wanted transmitted. The main part was that Christ said He loved men very much, and wished they would love Him. He asked that reparation be made by "First Friday Communion" for nine consecutive months, promising many favors in return, including that of final penitence.

That was about all she said. I made no reply, and turned immediately to the remainder of the lesson at hand.

A Search

Two weeks later, in the midst of something else, I interjected, "Would you please explain that St. Margaret-Mary thing to me again? I think I must have misunderstood you."

I had not misunderstood.

Then began a rapid-fire search for material on St. Margaret-Mary and the Sacred Heart. First I found a brief story about her—for children—prepared by Father Gerald Tracy. She was a wonderful young nun who had lived at Paray-le-Monial, a tiny village in France, and had died at 42 after setting forth "Revelations" that in time have had great influence on the devotions of the Church, that have changed the hearts of men as perhaps no message since the deaths of Jesus and his immediate followers. Yet she was always a controversial figure while she lived, and suffered persecution at the hands of other nuns and of priests who drove her into total physical collapse. Before she died, she knew full well that she was entering what she called "the *great* retreat," and she was frankly glad to die, because she felt that she was such "a sink of contradiction" that only after she was personally out of the way could Christ's words to her be believed.

I searched through many libraries. A branch had a book on her listed but it had been lost. At a bookstore, I was able to get the fine modern book—not too accurate on detail but giving a brilliant over-all picture—*Behold This Heart*. There was Yeo's *These Three Hearts*, which didn't satisfy me as well. The Cenacle library had books by Bougand and Father Daniel, but as the English translations were old and the books long out of print, I felt I should leave my right arm as surety for each volume. (The present-day Visitation convents have a special liking for Bougand because he tried very hard to be fair in his judgment of the Saint's several fantastically-hard-to-understand Superiors and her fellow Religious.)

I made a trip to Brooklyn to visit the Visitation convent there. I have nothing against Brooklyn, but being a narrow and confirmed Manhattanite I could get to Nome, Alaska with less difficulty. The nuns there gave me a third class relic of St. Margaret-Mary, silk that had touched her body. The relic was enclosed beneath an "idealized" picture of the

saint. As far as I am concerned, Margaret-Mary needed no idealizing.

Relics

Before this time, I had looked down on relics as something medieval, a carry-over from my Protestantism. Now I came to know what a relic can mean. I loved St. Margaret-Mary and believed that I understood what she was talking about, and I wanted—I so wanted—a first-class relic.

She had died in 1690, and obtaining one seemed improbable. There couldn't be many available, and they would go to ecclesiastics and Churches for special occasions. Not to me.

Yet in less than a year, I had three first-class relics of St. Margaret-Mary, with the proper certification papers without which no relic can be accepted as authentic. It changed my whole view of relics, and in other ways it broadened my life and opened my mind and heart immensely.

The first came when one day, feeling quite hopeless about it, I stopped by St. Francis of Assisi Church (the Franciscan Church on West 31st St.) and asked simply "to see the priest on duty." When he came, I explained that I was a convert and that I had a great liking for St. Margaret-Mary and wanted a first-class relic of her. I had not been successful so far. Without wasting time he asked,

"Would you like me to try to get you one?"

I told him I'd be delighted, but I'd already written to a well-known religious goods store in Rome and commissioned them to locate a relic, but so far they hadn't succeeded. I had done this at the suggestion of a Monsignor at the Chancery, and he had allowed me to use his name in the letter. If that didn't work, what would? Really, I felt I was taking up my time and his on a hopeless quest.

He said, "Let me see what I can do." I left him my card.

That was towards the end of a week. The following Thursday, I received a note from him, asking me to stop by

St. Francis of Assisi Friday anytime after 3 p.m. And adding, "I have your relic for you."

I could scarcely wait through the intervening time. By 2:30 I left the office and rushed by cab to the Church. The priest had gone on duty early and didn't seem surprised to find me waiting on the doorstep.

Fumbling in his pocket to bring out an envelope, he explained. The parish had sent a messenger to Rome by plane the day after my visit to obtain some articles that were needed for a celebration and to attend to other duties. Father obtained permission to add the request for the relic to the list of articles. When he wrote to me he knew the relic was on its way.

And there it was, beautifully mounted, "St. Margaret-Mary Alac."

The certification papers said it was part of her bones.

Now, this had a peculiar significance to me. For you see, centuries ago in the midst of her torments at Paray, she had once begged Christ to allow her to be utterly forgotten and her body scattered as dust to the winds. And in one of His rare refusals of her humble requests, Christ told her that she would suffer much for Him, but what became of her later must be left in His hands because He had purposes of which she did not know.

I kept feeling I wouldn't have gotten this relic of the beloved St. Margaret-Mary Alacoque of the 17th century—here, in 20th century New York—unless this too was one of Christ's mysterious purposes and unless He had allowed it. It was a tiny fragment of the bones of a saint who was loved by Christ for her valiant devotion. I felt humbled in a way I couldn't express; I felt honored beyond all words. That is what a relic can mean, and what this relic meant to me.

Sister Marie Rose Laforest

After that, I began corresponding with Sister Marie Rose Laforest, Superioress at the present-day Visitation Monastery

at Paray-le-Monial. She sent me earth from the famous Garden of the Revelations, photos of the authentic portrait of the Saint, and a wonderfully wrought reliquary with another first-class relic of St. Margaret-Mary. She also sent a thick paperbound "Life of St. Margaret-Mary Alacoque," issued in 1921 and written with scholarly detachment and honesty by an unnamed Religious of the Paray community. These nuns regard it as their greatest privilege to be the world-center of the Sacred Heart devotion.

There is a legend, and it is no more than that, that St. Margaret-Mary will not rest until the whole world is won to the Sacred Heart, until it comes to love Christ passionately and to live as He wishes. While she lived that was not merely her greatest concern: it was her *only* concern.

I thought there might be too much here for a Johnny-Come-Lately to ponder. Perhaps it takes a special dedication to enable an extrovert like myself to grasp what Mother Ellen had been saying all along: live the life first, become truly formed spiritually, and then engage in activity.

Later the good Sister at Paray sent me something else, something gorgeous. It came quite unexpectedly. It was a book, bound in brown leather with two worn metal clasps, published 330 years ago under the authority of Clement VIII. It was a Holy Week book that had been used by the novices who had studied under the Saint. Since she had charge of these books and handed them out, it was almost certain that she had handled it. This Sister Marie Rose Laforest authenticated in a signed letter, adding that the markings in the book just *might* have been made by the Saint.

With reverence I took the book in my hands. I fingered the worn clasps, and wondered if she too had had trouble with one of them. And faintly traced in ink on the back flyleaf, I found a fascinating thing, an almost unbelievable thing. There was a drawing of a heart, very tiny, and further down the page, two hearts. And St. Margaret-Mary had said to

Father Claude de la Colombiere, “. . . These three hearts shall be bound together for all eternity. . .” Had she perhaps traced the hearts as she tried so hard to work out a worthy symbol of the Sacred Heart?

Yet all of this, however interesting, was of little account compared with the sure knowledge given through the Revelations that Christ loves us madly, almost to folly. He would make this earth, as Gretta Palmer has said, “at least the foothills of heaven.” And He would have us part of His heaven.

Chapter 7

GOD'S WONDERS—AND NEW DISCIPLINES

I have learned something new about prayer lately. It is this: we have to become mature enough to accept the full dimensions of our prayers.

There is the story of the girl who realized she had too much pride. She prayed for humility. She looked stunning in black—and the Lord sent her a green coat, and then she was humbled! The answer had come, but not exactly in the way she had expected.

My new knowledge came very simply, as these things are likely to come to us.

Some months ago my gallant and wonderful eighty-three-year-old aunt, who reared me, had a stroke and was hospitalized for some weeks. Her loved voice was slurred now; at times not even I—for all my trying—could make out what she was trying to say because she spoke rapidly and in obvious distress. Soon her head was down, her eyes usually closed; she could respond only slightly, though her responses were always intelligent. She looked and was desperately ill. The doctor would not hazard a guess as to her chances; the nuns thought it “very much touch-and-go.” They all pulled for her. During the first week, before her condition worsened, she had become the hospital's most popular patient.

One charming incident a nun told me about with much glee. She visited my aunt briefly one morning, and said, "I understand your niece is a Catholic, and that you are not. I just wondered what you were?" And my aunt replied stoutly, "I'm a good Methodist. It takes a good Methodist to bring up a good Catholic."

I was frantic with worry. I understood that to most people 83 might seem an appropriate enough age for anyone to die, but my aunt isn't like most people of 83 nor indeed of any age. She is unique, and I hope she lives to be 120.

The Power of Prayer

Mother Ellen was a tower of strength. She prayed hard, and got a lot of other people busy at it too. And, miraculously, my aunt pulled through. She personally believes the prayers of the priests and nuns did it.

When my aunt came home, she was greatly disabled at first, and a registered nurse had to be on duty while I was at work. A nurse-companion is adequate, and even she would not be necessary were my aunt not blind from cataracts. But regardless of who is on duty at the house from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., I am on duty the remaining 16 hours of the day. This has meant a change in my way of living that has to be taken in stride realistically.

It has meant heavy evening and night-time care, though that is decreasing now; coping with a huge back-log of hospital and medical bills and weekly expenses double those I had before; living within a rigid framework whereas I previously had much liberty; gearing myself always to her needs, not mine.

Now, consider. If God graciously answered my prayers for my aunt's recovery, it was inevitable, in view of her age, blindness and partial crippling, that convalescence would be slow. How could it be otherwise?

And how else, could God rid me of excessive self-concern and ego, and tear out the trivial, the preoccupations, the

neurotic tendencies common to us all and certainly to me? How else, and how better? He used my love for my aunt as a lever.

Regardless of how our prayers are answered, and sometimes the answer may be in the negative and entail much grief, there is a litany of thanksgiving used by the nuns of the Cenacle of St. Regis that has helped me, and may be treasured by others. As I write, I can see the Sisters reciting, with bowed heads:

For all Thou hast given
Deo Gratias.

For all Thou hast withheld
Deo Gratias.

For all Thou hast withdrawn
Deo Gratias.

For all Thou hast permitted
Deo Gratias.

For all Thou hast prevented
Deo Gratias.

For all Thou hast forgiven me
Deo Gratias.

For all Thou hast prepared for me
Deo Gratias.

For the death Thou hast chosen for me
Deo Gratias.

For the place Thou art keeping for me in heaven
Deo Gratias.

For having created me to love Thee for eternity
Deo Gratias. Deo Gratias. Deo Gratias.

Chapter 8

THE ARC BECOMES COMPLETE, AND THIS EARTH "THE FOOTHILLS OF HEAVEN"

I have been in the true Church, established by Our Lord 2,000 years ago, only since Christmas, 1951, and yet in that brief time the arc or pattern of living that makes of our lives a veritable City of God on earth has become complete.

Spiritually speaking, I still have a long, long way to go—yet the way ahead is bright with His glory shining as a light to guide my feet. I have much to learn, and much to practice, but I am no longer a wanderer searching aimlessly, without compass or guide. For no matter what comes, I *am* Home, and I shall live as one who has regained the security of home.

Worldly drives of ambition lose importance as we realize that all the heights and depths of our lives are limited, that the only real security is found in a complete dedication to Christ, the Christ Who alone is "the resurrection, and the life."

And the only true "Utopia" is the one existing within Christ's Mystical Body, where at varying levels and with uneven success—but with His help at all times—we strive to follow His way.

Christ and His Church do not demand an impossible perfection before we begin, or as we go along: all of us are sinners, but sinners for whom abundant reparation has been made, to whom abundant grace will be supplied.

On this basis, this earth becomes indeed "the foothills of heaven." And for me, my life-long search for truth, for love—for Christ—has ended. I will have difficulties and problems about my religion; they are a part of life. But basically, I stand with confidence at the foot of the cross, close to the One who is the Author and Subject of our Faith.

Catholics who have non-Catholic friends interested in the Church can help them achieve the spiritual peace of Faith. The publisher recommends the following pamphlets for religious inquirers:

FINDING CHRIST'S CHURCH, by John A. O'Brien, Ph.D. (73 pages, 25c)

FINDING CHRIST, by John A. O'Brien, Ph.D. (32 pages, 10c)

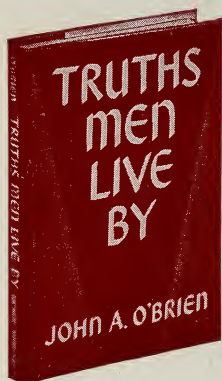
HOW YOU CAN CONVINCe TRUTH SEEKERS, by John A. O'Brien, Ph.D. (24 pages, 10c)

SOLVING MY RELIGIOUS PROBLEM, by Henry C. F. Staunton. (32 pages, 10c)

WHAT IS A CATHOLIC? by John Cogley. (24 pages, 10c)

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