

Convent Life Unveiled

The Testimony of Former Roman Catholic Nun Edith O'Gorman



“Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord. (not the priest or the Virgin Mary).” Psalm 124:7,8.

The first of October, 1862, was my last day at home. The last day spent in the society of my dear parents, my little brothers and sisters, my beloved associates – the last day of happiness for weary, weary years of desolation. I cannot recall that day without the deepest emotion. Oh, why did I first break up the family circle? Why did I impose upon myself such a living death? Why did I not listen to the voice of my heart and of reason? But alas, it is too late now to repine, the fiat hath gone forth and can never be revoked. I must take the final farewell of the home circle. All are there. But in a few moments one will be absent, never again to take her accustomed place among them. I kneel at my father’s knee to receive his blessing ere I leave him forever. Tremblingly and in broken accents he prays to God to bless his child while the hot tears dropping like rain upon my bowed head as I listened to his prayers, convulsed me with an unspeakable grief.

Once again I leaned upon my idolized mother’s breast and listened to the throbbing of that loving and faithful heart bursting with sorrow as she clasped to her embrace, for the last time, her firstborn child. Dear heart where I had so often been pillowed and soothed in childhood and where girlhood’s griefs had so often been assuaged. Shall I never rest there again? Farewell my darling mother! Were I being conveyed from you to be buried beneath the earth I could not be more literally dead than I must henceforth be to you and to the world. Farewell, my little brothers and sisters, I will no longer humor your childish fancies nor lull you to sleep with your accustomed lullabies. Farewell every dear and familiar object, my eyes must rest upon you for the last time. Farewell my beloved associates and bosom friends, we will no longer share each others’ joys and griefs. Farewell to all the loved ones, and oh, forgive me if I ever wilfully occasioned you annoyance or pain. Father, mother, brothers, sisters, forgive all my faults and pray for me. All are in sobs and tears.

I at last tore myself from my mother’s embrace, and the last object my eyes rested upon that never-to-

be-forgotten night was the beautiful loving eyes of my grief-stricken mother looking after me so full of sorrow and tenderness. Ah! Mother, Dear Mother. Better a thousand times for you and for me could you have seen me conveyed to the grave, than to the wrongs and sufferings that awaited me in the living tomb of the convent. The tie is broken. The knot is severed. I am with you no longer. Farewell home, happiness, mother – all of earth, farewell!

On the 2nd October, 1862, at 11 a.m., I beheld for the first time this establishment, this whited sepulchre so fair and beautiful without, but within full of corruption. I was unusually depressed in spirits as I approached that convent prison (the House of Death) in which I was thenceforth to be entombed, and shut out from the beautiful world. The outward aspect of nature seemed to pity me; the heavens were clouded and the wind sighed through the trees with the voice of a human mourner. Had death stripped me of every friend or relative on earth, I could not have felt more bereft, lonely, desolate and grief stricken than I did that gloomy autumn morning, when I stood in the solitude of the convent grounds. My heart and soul with a vague uncertainty concerning the unnatural discipline enforced within its walls. I knew ere I entered that I must leave my own will, judgment, reason, and liberty outside of the convent doors, and subject myself blindly to the guidance of superiors. I was tempted to turn back from the slavery, hardships, deprivations and austerities of that unnatural life to the liberty, love, warmth and protection of my father's home; but I had gone too far, I had put my hands to the plough, and if I should turn back, I would not be fit for the Kingdom of heaven. I approached the main entrance and rang the bell. A sad pensive-looking sister answered my summons at the door, and ushered me into a spacious and elegantly furnished parlor, where I was received by Mother Exavier, who in a most gracious and affectionate manner welcomed me to her "abode of peace" (The House of Death). She expressed herself highly pleased with the refinement of my appearance and manners, telling me that her prayer had been answered in the Lord sending me to her, as she was very much in need of educated and accomplished sisters. She portrayed in the most glowing manner the blessed advantages of my holy vocation which called me away from the noisy, sinful world to the safe and peaceful heaven of a religious life in a convent; assuring me I would receive a hundred fold of heavenly gifts if I would remain faithful to my vocation, and forget my country and my father's house. All those, said she, that enter our holy order must not only consider that they quit father, mother, kindred, friends, and whatsoever they possess in the world, but must believe that Jesus Christ addresses them in these words: "He that hates not father, mother, brothers, sisters, yea and himself, cannot be my disciple."

Oh, blind votaries of a benighted faith! The only sacrifice our merciful Saviour requires is a contrite and humble heart, which His true disciples give Him without severing the golden links wrought by God Himself, which cannot be broken with impunity, nor cast aside, nor torn asunder, without becoming a chain or iron pressing upon the bleeding heart, stifling every pure and spontaneous desire, crushing every lawful and noble affection and leaving the heart and soul a dry, barren desolate waste, incapable of producing aught save a disease and noxious vegetation. Conventualism is a system calculated to destroy the brightest intellect and talent, and root out of the heart every beautiful tender feeling.

One day I was commanded to scrub, with a brush and sand, on my knees, the large study hall. Such work was new to me. Nevertheless I performed my task in the best manner I knew how. It took me a long time to complete it. When my task was nearly finished, the novice mistress appeared and in a furious manner chided me for my laziness, snatched the brush from me with such violence as to tear the skin from the palm of my hand, at the same time throwing a pail of water over the hall, thereby compelling me to rescrub the hall in less time than I had scrubbed it before. The task was rendered next to unbearable by the pain of my hands, which were torn and bleeding. This is a small specimen of the trials which awaited me, it was but the beginning of sorrows. On another occasion I was obliged to wash all the pots and kettles, and scour all the knives and forks in the establishment. My hands, which were very soft and white, began to look soiled and dirty. Having remarked in my simplicity to Sister Margaret, the housekeeper, "Indeed Sister, I am now ashamed of my hands," she sharply returned, "Well then, I'll be after making ye more ashamed of 'em." She called me out into another room where a sister was whitewashing the walls, and commanded me to dip my hands into a pot of hot lime. I hesitated a moment, thinking certainly she could not mean it. "None of yer airs now, but do as I bid thee, or I'll tell the mother on ye." I put my hands down in the hot lime and she held them there some

minutes. For several weeks my hands were in a most pitiable condition. The skin would crack and bleed at every movement, causing me to suffer excruciating pain, and yet I was forced to wash and hang out clothes in the frost and cold of December, the skin from my bleeding hands often peeling off and adhering to the frozen garments.

I was one day appointed to wait on the table in the young ladies' refectory, and while there I conversed a few moments with a young lady from Providence, who recognized me. Sister Cleophas the refectorian, overheard me, and the result was my subjection to a public humiliation before the community, being obliged to throw myself prostrate on the threshold of the community room, to be walked over as a door mat by the other sisters.

Truly, convent life is a hell upon earth. The methods of penance and cruel tortures inflicted within those walls of hell cannot be put in print. The law would not allow it.

(Mrs. O'Gorman told of how, at one time for breaking silence she was forced to dig worms in the back yard of the convent and eat them. At another time she was made to take a dead mouse from a trap and eat it. Another time, she was made to wash the Mother Superior's dirty feet and then drink the water. Priest Walch tried one time to force her to drink intoxicants and rob her of her virtue; she fought the beast off and at last made her escape from this "House of Death and Gate of Hell" to freedom.)

Edith O'Gorman was "consecrated" as a nun in St. Elizabeth's convent, Madison, N.J., October 1862. She was afterwards Superior in St. Joseph's convent, Hudson, N.J. She spent six years in these Romish prisons. She made her escape on January 31, 1868 – "to save my honour, dearer to me than life, without money, and in the nun's dress." She was converted to Christ and baptized in a Baptist church in New York City in 1869. She then began to testify against the nunnery system, giving her first lecture in sight of the convent from which she had escaped. She travelled and lectured in many parts of Europe, America, South Africa and Canada. She lectured in Rome where her husband had once been secretary to the pope of Rome, Leo. She was the instrument in God's hands of rescuing thousands of deceived Roman Catholics, and many girls were saved from that living tomb, the convent. More than one hundred attempts were made on her life by the thugs of Rome. Once, in London, England, a bullet was fired through the coach she was riding in and passed through her bonnet without harming her. She wrote her autobiography, *Convent Life Unveiled*.

The Gospel means the glad tidings, or good news; and truly, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10), the greatest news ever heard on earth: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"! (1 Timothy 1:15). And "He is able to save them to the *uttermost* that come unto God by Him"! (Hebrews 7:25).

All men and women are sinners, and sin is a terrible thing: it is the transgression of the perfect and holy law of God, and it has separated all mankind from God. Those who die in their sins suffer the torments of eternal fire. Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is that strait gate, and narrow way, that leads to life! "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus said; "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

If you, then, are asking, "What must I do to be saved from my sins?" here is the answer: "*Repent*"! (Acts 2:38); and, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31). Forsake your sin, repent of it, turn from it, and believe, with all your heart, in Jesus Christ! To believe in Him is *to cast yourself upon Him, by faith, for salvation*. He is the Son of the living God, holy, harmless, undefiled, sinless, the *only* Lord and Saviour. He died on a cross, He was crucified, not for His own sins - for He had none of His own - but for the sins of His chosen people, those given to Him by His heavenly Father to save, paying the penalty for sin in *their* place, shedding His blood to redeem them. And after dying in their place, the wrath of God being poured out upon Him, having satisfied the justice of God and having put away the sins of those He died for by the sacrifice of Himself, He rose from the

dead, victorious over death, sin, and Satan; and He gives eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. *Eternal life cannot be earned, and it cannot be bought; it is the gift of God through Jesus Christ the Lord.* He alone is the One who can save the soul and set the spiritual captive free! Forsake your sin, forsake the false religion of Rome and all other false religion, turn to the Lord by faith, and be saved!

*Shaun Willcock
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If you have repented of your sins and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, or if you would like to know more about Him, His Gospel, and the true Christian life, please contact us.

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