

# *When My Spirit Failed*

## The Testimony of Former Roman Catholic Nun Carlotta F. Gonzalez



The enchanting city of Guayaquil, nestling on the shores of the mighty Guayas river in Ecuador, South America, is often referred to as the “Pearl of the Pacific”. It was in this picturesque city that I spent the early years of my life. I was born on March 6, 1930, into a happy and deeply religious family. In conformity with honoured custom, it was but normal for my parents to have me baptised and carefully reared in the Roman Catholic faith.

My good parents considered it their sacred duty to entrust my education to the best teachers in town who in turn endeavoured conscientiously to imbue me with a profound respect and love for the Roman Catholic Church.

Recalling those sweet days of happy memory, there comes to my mind the recollection of innocent childhood games when I donned the religious habit of a nun in order to impress my little brothers by imitating Sister Rosaria, who was my teacher in elementary school. I remember how my father treasured the moment when I was able to recite the *Our Father* and *Ave Maria* in Latin. In fatherly pride, he used to make me say these prayers in Latin before neighbours and visiting friends.

At the age of twelve, I received my first holy Communion. At this stage of my life, I already felt a strong desire to search after the things of God. It was for this reason that in all things I sought and willingly subjected myself to the spiritual guidance of a well-known priest, Father Paulinus of the Discalced Carmelite order. I believed that I felt what is commonly known in the Roman Catholic Church as a vocation to the religious life. It therefore seemed a kindly disposition of Divine Providence that my secondary education was to be pursued under the wise direction of the Spanish Sisters of Mercy.

### *Seeking the Higher Things*

I could see no other way to peace and happiness but to serve God in the prayerful quiet and seclusion of a convent. This was entirely in keeping with the proud tradition of my family to serve God by dying to the world.

In February of the year 1947, I disclosed my secret to my beloved father. He rejoiced in my decision to enter a convent and assisted me with prudent counsel.

It was six months later that I entered the convent of the Sisters of Charity as a postulant of their order. The city of Ibarra, in the province of Imbabura, became thus the silent witness of the first difficult struggles I encountered in my preparation for convent life. I was inexperienced and unfamiliar with the rules and practices of a religious community of nuns. As a young girl, ardently dedicated to books and study, I had always been treated with considerate respect and love by my family at home. Now I had to rise at four o'clock in the morning to start a day of hard, strenuous labour.

In physical work as in mental trials I was expected to display stability of character and firmness of resolution in order to prove my love for the Lord and my fitness for religious life. Without hesitation and in a spirit of willing submission I accepted all trials and humiliations to make myself worthy of being admitted to the novitiate, which is considered the first step on the road of religious life. Nothing could disturb my peace of mind during this time of probation.

Sister Savoya, a French nun, had graciously promised that I would be permitted to make my novitiate in Quito, the capital city of my native country Ecuador. My soul rejoiced when, wearing the garb of a sisterhood, I was made a future Bride of Christ to become His own forever after an additional year of probation in the novitiate. The parting words of my dear father were forever present in my mind: "Suffer rather death than betray your vocation". To dedicate my life and love to Christ had indeed become the one great ambition of my life.

### *A "Bride of Christ"*

The time of probation in the novitiate came to an end. Twelve young novices, myself among them were now ready to become actual members of the order of the Sisters of Charity by pronouncing our first vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. I took justifiable pride in the thought that I had been able to prove to my family and friends that my desire to belong to God had been tested and found genuine during the strict year of probation in the novitiate. Words cannot describe the happiness that filled my heart. The white, starched coronet of the Sisters of Charity which enclosed my head, and the blue habit of their order were from now on to be the distinctive mark of my dedication to Christ and to His Church. Beginning on November 4, 1948 I would wear these garments till the day of my death.

The joy of this great and unforgettable hour, however, was marred by my family's inability to be present. I spent the solemn day of my profession as a Sister of Charity alone and apart from my loved ones. My dear father, to whom I had always been attached with deep affection, was on this day of my profession mortally ill at home. I humbly submitted to this sorrow, too, for my sole desire on that beautiful day was to conform myself to God's holy will.

### *On My Way to Calvary*

Now I was no longer Carlotta, but Sister Vicenta. Still young and inexperienced, I bravely undertook the arduous task of making myself insignificant in order to acquire perfect humility, which is considered the basic virtue among Sisters of Charity. The vision of the exalted concept of convent life which had led me into a religious community sustained me in many an ensuing difficulty and disappointment.

But this peaceful and serene period of my life was to come to a sudden end. Human caprice and inconsistency brought about a change.

It was not easy for me to depart from the community where I had been introduced to religious life. But in obedience I had to submit when I received my transfer to our convent in Cuenca, where I arrived on January 6, 1951.

I found life very different in the community of nuns at Cuenca. The superioress, under the cloak of piety and religious fervour, seemed to derive great satisfaction from humiliating and tormenting me wherever an opportunity presented itself. Many times I was on the verge of revealing to her how cruelly she was torturing me, but I chose the way of humility for my Lord's sake, begging again and again His pardon for my wounded pride. I was determined to conquer all bitterness in my heart.

Under the pressure of constant humiliation and inward struggle, life became more complicated for me with each new day. I seemed to lose more and more of my initial zest. Slowly but steadily all my desire to identify myself with my Saviour began to die. My love for heavenly things had burned dangerously low. It was like a cruel awakening from a blessed dream. What was I to do? Return to the world, or live a great lie before God and myself?

I did not have to worry about hurting the pride and feelings of my father. He had died. However, the vengeance of my other relatives, if I should leave the convent, was sure to come. But there was no

longer a Sister Vicenta. The lamp of my love for the religious life had been extinguished by the turbulent storms in my soul.

I felt very strongly that in my sad spiritual condition I had no longer any right to wear the habit of a Sister of Charity. I had glanced behind the scenes. Having discovered so much cruelty, injustice and hypocrisy parading under the name of religion I felt it my duty to act on my convictions. Convent life, which I had once visualised as a haven of peace, had proven to be a battleground where petty jealousies, favouritism, cruelty, and hatred ran amok.

### ***Lost in Darkness***

On May 24, 1957, I mustered all my courage to divest myself once and for all of the religious habit which I had received with such enthusiastic joy. I shed bitter tears when I discarded the beloved religious garb. Death, it seemed to me, would have been easier to endure than to face this harrowing ordeal. I was ignorant of the life that awaited me outside the convent walls. I had no one in God's wide world to whom I could turn for advice and understanding.

When I left the convent I settled in a small mountain village, San Miguel de los Celerados, in the province of Pichincha, Ecuador. Here I devoted all my love to the little children of the village. In the loneliness of this isolated place, I was gradually transformed into a new being. It was here that I had my first real encounter with my Lord, to whom I surrendered with all my heart.

After termination of this appointment on my native soil, I considered it prudent to change to Colombian territory. I accepted the invitation of a friend among the nuns toward whom I had always entertained genuine love and admiration. Graciously, they opened their doors to me, offering me the choice of several positions as a teacher in their institutions.

### ***Transformed According to His Will***

Hundreds of pupils have passed through my classroom, most of them unaware of my having been a nun. Teaching and guiding my students brought me much satisfaction and contentment. Several times I read the Bible from cover to cover but did not allow myself to interpret its passages lest I disobey the precepts of the Roman Catholic Church. In retrospect, just as John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Christ, so the different convents in which I served were steps by which I was to arrive at the full measure of aspirations, the knowledge and love of God.

No longer wearing the religious habit, I could even more objectively appraise the cruelties and injustices inflicted on young innocent girls who had left the world and joined their religious community in the mistaken belief that they were doing the more perfect thing.

It was in El Rosario College in the city of Armenia where, quietly evaluating my experiences of the past, I finally asked myself the pertinent question: what sensible purpose could there possibly be in my continuing to live in convents where all seemed to be ruled and motivated by false pretensions and hatreds?

It entered my mind to go over to the church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and offer my services to them, although they were complete strangers to me. I telephoned their institute that same evening while the nuns were at prayer. My only question, "What is the name of the director?" was answered by a pleasant voice, "Leo Tennis". Immediately I wrote him a card requesting an appointment and was soon granted an interview.

My legs were trembling, and I suffered from a cruel headache as I faced this appointment, but I was determined to find out whether I could be accepted. I returned to the convent, and a few days later I was advised that I had been accepted by their organisation.

I departed from the Roman Catholic College realising the beauty of the Divine hand guiding every human soul who earnestly seeks to submit itself to the will of God.

I had the great privilege of being assigned to the beautiful city of Cali, the queen city of the valley of Colombia, where I lived with Graciela Scudder, an exemplary missionary, who was the instrument our Merciful God used in teaching me the all-important lesson: Do not bow to the yoke of unbelievers.

## ***Rejoicing in the Truth***

Years have passed, love and dedication have given me great reward and happiness. Carlotta was born again on August 5, 1957, in an indescribable meeting with the Lord. My soul rejoiced at having found the truth. Throughout all the days and years of my youth I had been engaged in a restless search for spiritual perfection. Now my soul had finally been blessed with the fullness of peace in my new-found Saviour. The scales had fallen from my eyes and, like Saul of Tarsus, I bowed down to let Jesus assume full possession of all my faculties and life.

After completing my assignment in Cali, I was accepted as a teacher at the Bethel College Institute. What a great privilege to be one of the moulders of young people. In my new work, I have found much joy and satisfaction. Problems, too, have not been wanting, but I have no fear, for trials are but manifestations of God's tender love for us. My heart overflows with gratitude to God for having chosen me as His servant to bring knowledge and enlightenment to souls who are groping in darkness, searching for that peace and security that I found solely in loving surrender to Christ and to His sweet yoke.

“When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.” (Psalm 142:3)

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**Although there are a few expressions above which are not as biblically accurate as they could be, allowances must be made for deficient understanding of the work of grace in the soul. Also, it must be understood that when she applied to work for the Christian and Missionary Alliance it was as a teacher of children; she was not professing to be converted as yet.**

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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  
Bible Based Ministries

*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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