

Mary Rice

Assignment 7

20 October 2025

Question: Describe your family background in regards to cultural influences. Discuss as well as you can both your mother and her family and your father and his family. Include any other families that may have influenced you as well. For each discuss attitudes and views towards religion, family, work, education and wealth. Describe the socioeconomic location of your family and its religious context. Also, how do members of your family tend to relate to each other? Does your family tend to be warm and huggy, or cold and distant? Finally, try to relate your family background to your own set of values and outlooks. What have you retained? What have you rejected?

Note: this assignment is not meant to pry into your personal life. Feel free to omit anything in the written assignment about which you are sensitive. But be sure to think about those things you omit, so that you are aware of their influence on your study of the Bible. This exercise is a self - analysis, it is for your benefit, and not ours.

Please note, I have written more than 3-4 pages because I have a large family and many rich memories. I have written a summary at the end to directly respond to the assignment.

I grew up in a family with ten children, in the following order. I am the seventh.

- Pat, born in 1957, a doctor
- Danny, 1959, an accountant
- Mick, 1960, an electrician
- Gerard, 1961, a telecommunications consultant
- Sean, 1963, a scientist
- Bernadette, 1964, an accountant
- Mary (me), 1965, a charity collector
- Margaret, 1967, a former nurse, deceased
- Paul, 1969, a parks and wildlife ranger
- Kathleen, 1970, a medical secretary to a doctor who is her husband.

There are six boys and four girls. People jokingly say we had no TV in those days, and that's why Mum and Dad had so many!

Mum and Dad were married in 1956. Dad was originally from England and was the only child of Eileen and Jack O'Leary. Eventually, they divorced and both remarried, and my father had two half-brothers, Dennis and Peter. I often say that Dad had one whole brother!. But there was a 20-or-so-year gap between them and Dad. So Jack O'Leary married someone else.

Mum, on the other hand, was from Geelong, Victoria. Her mother, Mary Ryan, and

her father, William Ryan, had three children: Frank, Kathleen and Pauline, who was my mother. Years later, however, after Mum's death, we found out that her mother, Nanny, had two other children, a boy and a girl. Mum used to say, when she was alive, that they were her cousins from one of Nanny's sisters or brothers, but the person couldn't bring them up for some reason. Anyway, we now have contact with some of the grandchildren of that liaison. Pity Mum wasn't around to know the truth!

They did that in those days, hid the truth from many a family member. My mum's father went to the war and married Nanny, who must have had two littlies, one through assumed rape and the other, I am not sure.

My father was a seaman and a worker on the ships. My mother, before she married Dad and had all the kids, was a secretary. They met on one of the occasions when one of Dad's ships berthed in Geelong. He and Mum used to go to dances, as there were plenty in those days.

I have in my possession a lot of Dad's letters he wrote to Grandma when he was young. He went to boarding school. He was too young for the war. He wanted to work at sea. Grandma used to send him money from time to time and visit him. Mum was born in 1929 and Dad in 1932.

Mum's family were Catholic. Dad's were originally, I think, Church of England, but he wasn't very religious at all; neither was Grandma. Dad must have been very lonely growing up. He must have had a very hard life being away from his mother for so long. However, when Mum and Dad got married in 1956, his mum Eileen and her sister-in-law, Kitty Becker, came to live in Australia. (Somewhere down the line she married a Becker!)

Mum and Dad lived in England after they got married. When she was pregnant with Pat, they were on a ship to Australia, so I think they had a wedding in England first, as she had a lot of morning and sea sickness. They made their home in Melbourne.

Dad left the sea when Pat was born and had odd jobs in Melbourne like teaching people to drive, door-to-door sales, and working on the wharf, controlling the wharfies. He later had jobs in Port Pirie and Whyalla. Some of my brothers and sisters were born there. I was born in Adelaide, having so many health problems, but my family lived in Port Pirie then. My family moved to Adelaide in 1969, and Paul and Kathleen were born here.

Growing up Catholic, I grew to love the Lord. But it wasn't until about 1974 that I met a neighbour who told me about Jesus. I was nine. I had to go to a special school, and she used to hear me read each day. She had children of her own, and when we moved out of Henderson Street, Henley Beach, to the Esplanade, Henley Beach, some of my brothers and sisters used to visit her with me, too.

I often think of those days fondly, because now my sister Kathleen, who lives in Queensland with her family, is a Christian too.

We moved to the Esplanade house in 1975, a big house by the beach. The

Henderson Street house was a three-bedroom brick house. Six boys slept in one room, four girls in another, and my parents in the other. Many of us used to end up in my parents' bed at night because of the scary stories Dad used to tell us before bed.

The Esplanade house had many rooms. Mum was fortunate enough to be left money so we could buy it. My sister Bernie and I shared a room, and later Bernie shared with Margaret and I shared with Kathleen.

The neighbour, Heide, who told me about the Lord, told me to read the Bible at night. Bernie didn't like the light on in the middle of the night when I chose to read it, so that's why we changed rooms. I was fourteen.

Fourteen was a turning point in my life. Heide told me all about Jesus, and I wanted to be in her church. We lived across the road from a Catholic church and grew up, first in Henderson Street, going to the "Rock Mass", as they called it, in the city. Sister Janet Mead sang the Lord's Prayer. Then, on the Esplanade, we went to the church across the road.

In the days when Dad married Mum, he had to convert to Catholicism. He drove us all to church in the city every week. Then we all went to the church across the road. I used to go with Mum every morning too, before school, as there was a service every day for those who wanted to go. Our house was near the church, and I would often see the nuns and teachers there before school. I went to a Catholic school like all my siblings. For a short time, I attended a special school.

My father, Michael, was very instrumental at that time in contributing to the Rosary every week. We had the Rosary at our place (even in the Henderson Street home) and certainly in the Esplanade days, too. We would all have our heads down low, and one of my brothers would pull funny faces and make us laugh. Mum was constantly telling him off.

One night during the Rosary, one of my sisters fainted and Mum and Dad rushed her to the hospital. When they came back we were still saying the Rosary. That's how much of a good Catholic family we were!

I remember that because Margaret passed away years later of a brain haemorrhage. Mum and Dad, divorced at the time, flew over to England to be by her side before she died.

Dad was instrumental in setting up the Rosary and which families were to have it that week. He used to deliver the statue of Mary every week to the said family. Many families would come and say the Rosary with us, and sometimes the priest would come, as the presbytery where they lived was just across the road.

One day, one of my sister's friend's family came to say the Rosary with us. Their hair was still wet from showering, as they lived near, and their faces and noses were still red from the steam. Mum, after the Rosary, quickly put on a spread for them, as it was not customary to eat afterwards with visitors, but she felt that this warranted it. We had no money but mum used to book up at the shop.

Years later i did that too, because shop owners trusted us. Like her, I was always purchasing, then paying, always in debt but mum Survived it and so did i!

We often had priests at our place. We lived opposite the beach too, and they would often call in and ask one of us to go for a swim or walk with them at the beach. They also used to come to our house early Sunday mornings and wake us up for church. My brothers played the guitar, so they would often wake them up before the 10:30 Mass had started. The priests were like family to us in those days.

I was an altar server; I would assist the priest during the Mass. My sisters were too. I always had an issue, and still do, with picking my fingers, and one day I got blood all over my altar-server outfit. On one occasion, I had forgotten before the service to prepare the priest's table of holy cups. So, during the service, I made a lot of noise in the vestry looking for the chalice. He told me off for having all eyes on me during the service rather than on him.

In Grade 7, one of my brothers was in Year 11. He talked with a Catholic Brother a lot. That was my first crush. I was fourteen; he was twenty-six. I wanted to marry him one day. But he was to leave for Sydney to study ministry in the Catholic Church to become a priest at a later date. I have since learned, a few years ago, that he left the Catholic Church and is married with two kids; however, at the time of my crush, knowing that his heart was set on Sydney didn't stop my feelings for him. My mother invited him over to tea—at my constant nagging—and I kept on writing his name with Scrabble pieces, "Dennis", on every surface I could find.

My brother Sean spent a lot of time talking with this Brother, as he had very good counselling skills.

The next few years were very tumultuous for our family. However, during the "Dennis era", before his Sydney trip, I got the guilts for spying on him at the beach. My sister Kathleen and I used to get Dad's telescope and look through it towards the beach at him swimming or just walking along, as he used to be there at the same time each day. The day before he was due to leave for Sydney, I knocked on the presbytery door. To my surprise, he opened it, and very nervously I said what I had to say—that I was spying on him because I had a king-size crush on him. He said, "Thank you for being honest," that he didn't know, and that he was flattered. I was on Cloud 9.

That was my first real breakthrough with prayer that I can remember. Before the confrontation, I kept asking God that it would go well. He answered my prayer. The second major breakthrough came a year later when my parents experienced marital problems. I used to cry a lot, and one of my friends shared this Scripture with me: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Even at that young age, God seemed to respond instantly, because after a nightly bout of crying, a new day brought a dry face.

However, because I was shown Scriptures in the Bible by a lady I knew and her sister, who was my age, it didn't sit well with my parents, who were Catholic. They told me not to see this woman anymore because she was of a different Christian

belief, and they told her likewise. Originally, my association with this woman was okay (being at first a neighbour) then, ten years later, it wasn't. Dad, at this stage, was in the process of leaving home, which added to family upheaval. Mum wanted to keep all the Catholic traditions together, while I wanted nothing to do with them, mainly because in the Scriptures it told us not to call anyone "Father" but God, and to not have any idols. I was saying the Rosary and calling the priest "Father"; these two had to stop!

I saw the priest about this and he said 'Father' was a form of respect and Mary well, we pray through her to get to Jesus. I wasn't having a bar of his explains!

At that time too, the priests decided there would be no girls as altar servers, so my Catholic church-going days were limited. I was in high school now, at a Catholic girls' school, and would not attend Mass at school anymore because I thought it was wrong. They weren't giving the honour to God where it was due.

So school wasn't going well for me! I didn't want to take part in assignments that suggested Adam and Eve weren't the first man and woman on earth. I wanted to fast. That brought trouble with my mum and the school, as they stood by and watched as I didn't eat lunch. I wanted to read the Bible during reading period instead of the prescribed Agatha Christie novels on the syllabus. Who would have thought—a Catholic girls' school taking my Bible off me because they didn't want me reading it, and telling my mum to confiscate it if they found one in my bag each day. Agatha Christie certainly wasn't Christian, I thought.

Through all these problems and sufferings I endured, God never left me. I used to talk with one of our religious studies teachers and one of the nuns, and they were helpful. However, because my problems weren't all religious, but probably hormonal too (I was fifteen at the time) and Dad had left, a social worker used to visit me at the school. During this time too, I disobeyed my mother and went to see Heide, my Christian friend.

In walks Adriana, the Catholic social worker. Because our talks were in lesson time and I got to miss maths or science or whatever I had at the time, our chats were always good; I looked forward to them, although it took nine months for me to really look at her without talking with my head down at the floor. I was shy, and having my name called beforehand to go and visit the library didn't help.

However, with patience, Adriana soon had me realising that religion wasn't all black and white as I had envisioned it to be. She challenged me with what I was reading in the Scriptures. Mum banned me from seeing her too, but I used to see Adriana at the school all the time. Heide, my Christian friend, had left with her husband for Darwin, and whatever Adriana said was in.

Adriana wasn't religious. Catholic she was, and she knew some of what was in the Bible, but very little but it seemed like she had all the time in the world for me. Heide had said to me years ago that there was a black cloud hanging over our place, and at the time it seemed that there was. Dad left and was planning to marry again, and

some of my siblings had children while not married. In those days it was still frowned upon; however, not now, more's the pity! At that stage, I still wanted to keep God's law.

Even though Dad wasn't home, we used to visit him regularly. Although not religious now, he tried to get me interested in a Pentecostal church. I didn't go with him often; it was his contribution, he thought, to try and get Heide and her ways out of my head.

Leaving school, I found I couldn't get a job. My disabilities were just too numerous to hold down a nine-to-five job and work within the pressures required at that time.

Although I left school, I still saw Adriana. Heide had been non-existent at this time, and Christianity and Jesus (it pains me now to say it) were somewhat, too. There was a God; I knew that, but the Bible didn't play a big part in my life as it had done. At this stage, boys did! I didn't want to lie on my Social Security form each fortnight and say that I had looked for work when I hadn't, because I couldn't do anything. I applied for many jobs, but alas, to no avail. I wanted babies, like my siblings.

Somehow it didn't occur to me that a baby outside of marriage was just as much a sin as lying on my form to get government payment each fortnight. Some of my family members seemed to do it, and Mum loved them. She didn't ban them from seeing anyone, and she even had some of them live with us in sin, as it were, and Mum loved them. It seemed, after a while, she didn't even bat an eyelid.

I wasn't close with my mother; maybe I would be if I could conceive, I thought. But now it seems that God was wise at that time, in closing my womb, and I'm glad he did!

But with all this trying to fall pregnant, in love, and make someone a good wife, I did marry an Englishman in 1990. I swore I would never marry an Englishman. As much as I loved my father, I just felt one wasn't for me, as the English are peculiar in their ways.

All this time, God was on the back burner of my life. I didn't want the Catholic Church, but I married there, as it was across the road from our family home. Gary his name was and the priest across the road married us. I was sinning, lying, because Gary and I lived together before marriage, then moved back into our respective family homes before the big day. I was certain that once married I would be a good wife, an eventual mother, and live happily ever after. How wrong I was!

I still wanted a baby. The maternal clock had been ticking for years and it wasn't stopping. We were told we had problems. I prayed to God: "Lord, help me." He did—he sent the Jehovah's Witnesses. I say that because I wasn't a churchgoer or a Bible reader anymore, but still felt that I loved God. They helped bring it all back to me.

Previously, growing up, if the Jehovah's Witnesses came to our door, we were to have nothing to do with them. Now it was my door, my rules, and Gary and I couldn't conceive. The landlady didn't want me to do Family Day Care in our unit and I couldn't get a job elsewhere. I needed their help!

I started studying the Scriptures with them. Christmas and birthdays were out the

whole gamut. But Benita, she was lovely to me. Heide wasn't in my life; Adriana was, but no longer a social worker, she was a fashion designer. Another miracle that God provided. I was so mean to Adriana at one stage, and she left my life, although technically speaking she wasn't meant to be in my life as long as she was. I didn't need a social worker anyway, but I'd prayed every night that I'd see her again. God answered. She let me buy clothes from her when her job changed.

Heide, Adriana, now Benita. Benita took me to the Kingdom Hall. There, along with other things, we learnt that Jehovah loves us and has a plan for everlasting life for us on earth not in heaven, as the Catholics believe. I always knew they were wrong. Now I was sure of it.

That sounded good to me! No birthdays and no Christmases, I was mucking around with still, but I was willing to do that, as the Bible talks a lot about pagan beliefs mixed up with so-called Christianity. Benita introduced me to Scripture: "**Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**" (Psalm 139:23–24). Also she introduced me to Philippians. Years before, the Bible was my source of wisdom; now it was all coming back!

I was very anxious about things like whether I would conceive or not and I was forgetting to praise God for the beauty around me. The Scripture "**whatsoever things are lovely**" (Philippians 4:8) played a big part in my outlook towards life. We went on the IVF programme (originally not available to us) but after years of marriage, finally the doors opened. Another miracle!

Because I lived with Gary prior to marriage and had relationships before him, I had to repent of these sins. I did so and was baptised into the Witnesses and did eventually conceive. Alicia was born in 1996.

As much as I loved the Witnesses, my life was a struggle with them. My family and friends weren't what you would call Witness material, and I was told not to associate with some, as "**bad company destroys good habits**" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Besides, if I went the way of "no blood", it worked well for my husband and me, and we had Alicia. She needed to be conceived not in my womb, but first off mixed with my husband's contribution outside my womb in a humidicrib.

We tried four times with IVF. The first three were doing it the doctor's way—using my blood to sustain the embryos in the humidicrib. The last attempt was with my follicular fluid because of **Acts 15:20**, which says blood is sacred and is not to be used outside the body. Jehovah, to me, was a wonderful God and still is to this day. When I was born, many blood transfusions were needed to keep me alive, and my family couldn't understand why I went this way.

During these times of IVF there were many anxious moments, and Jehovah saved my life many times. However, when my child turned six, my feelings changed yet again. My family was important to me; Mum had died of breast cancer, and I was facing problems with my marriage. How could a God who gave me so much not want

me to see some friends I had, or members of my family, because their ways were different from Jehovah's way?

So I prayed, "God, help me," again. I wanted to go back to the beginning to my religious roots in Bible reading, which I was doing plenty of but I wanted to know if Heide, the woman of yesteryear, was still religious (a Christian strict in her beliefs) or was she a Witness like me? Because, knowing her in younger years, all she said to me was that she was a Christian. I wanted to tell her that I found the Lord again too! So I prayed, "Lord, let me find her!"

He did, when Mum died. At her funeral was a neighbour of ours who had kept in contact with Heide all those years. That was an answered prayer like the baby, like "weeping endures for a night", like the peace I feel when I have anxious thoughts. God was still in my life.

Heide told me to pray for a church around the corner. No, she wasn't a Witness, but was still very much a Christian in her Christian fellowship that she was always in. So I did pray for a church around the corner, and one turned up. It was a Saturday. I had left the Witnesses and felt strange, about my friends, about my marriage that I was in, and about my working life.

I went to buy my husband a paper at the service station near where we lived. I crossed the park and heard singing in the hall there. It sounded like hymns, so I thought the next Saturday I'd go and investigate. I did. Hence, the Church of God, 7th Day, Woodville North.

I didn't know about the Sabbath then. But I knew of it because the Witnesses once gave a whole sermon on why we shouldn't celebrate it, citing Scriptures like the one where the Apostle Paul says in **Romans 14:5**, "**One person regards a certain day above others, while someone else considers every day alike.**"

However, as time went on, I began to know about it, but I really mucked around with it too by not trusting God and working on the Sabbath. Then I was in a car accident and had to rely on God. I couldn't work on the Sabbath. Since then, God has always provided—no mucking around as far as work was concerned for me! I say as far as work was concerned because shopping sometimes, for emergencies etc. I have done.

The Sabbath has always meant different things for different people, especially in our congregation. The Scripture that says "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" and the one that says "**do good on the Sabbath**", **that, too, takes on different meanings as to what "doing good" is (Matthew 12:12 and Mark 2:27).**

But for the most part I keep it, as well as eating clean foods and not unclean ones. The Church of God (7th Day) doesn't really have an opinion on birthdays, Father's Day or Mother's Day like the JW's did; therefore, I do celebrate those. Christmas and Easter, for the most part, I do not (although it's still a struggle) because we know that they are pagan.

I find I'm between churches now. For many years I was Church of God (7th Day), and still am to a large extent, but I have moved with some of the congregation to Mt Zion Church of God (7th Day). It was because I felt I wasn't growing emotionally and spiritually.

My daughter Alicia left home at sixteen to live with her father. That was really gut-wrenching. Gary and I had nearly sixteen years of marriage before we were divorced. Alicia felt that my rules about her freedom and who she could hang around with were outdated. I kept on telling her that Mum kept a pretty tight rein on me too, and that she banned me from people, too. Alicia retorted that if it didn't work with me, why would I expect it to work with her? She's a smart cookie!

My father left our home when I was sixteen. Alicia left home when she was sixteen, and her father, Gary, left us when she was just ten. My parents' marriage failed. My marriage failed. But God was always there and still is. My ex-husband wasn't a Christian. He has since married and divorced again and now, according to Alicia, has found the Lord.

One of my brothers' marriages has failed too; one never married; and the rest of my siblings have happy marriages. They have obviously looked at our parents' marriage and thought, That won't happen to us! I, on the other hand, looked at my parents' divorce and their unhappiness for many years and thought, No, I don't want to be unhappy for many years either! God helped me in the time I had with my husband and was there when my husband left. He was there when my daughter left and helped me through the tears.

It's a blessed life being a Christian. I see Alicia from time to time and have endeavoured to bring her up loving the Lord. She was in the Church of God (7th Day) for many years with me (from about 6 years to ten years old) then decided no. "Gary didn't go, so why should I?" was her reply.

The Bible clearly says "**marry only in the Lord**" (1 Corinthians 7:39), which I didn't, but then again, really neither did Mum, but remember, I wanted a baby so badly. I have since repented of that sin and many other things that I have done. Because Christ died and rose for our sins, I am a new creation in Christ. Alicia, on the other hand, will be someday.

The Scriptures say, "**Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it**" (Proverbs 22:6). I still believe that she will come around to follow the Lord like me. I also still believe that "**weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning**" (Psalm 30:5). That Scripture has also shown me that night and day may mean a 24-hour period, and it is true, but it may also mean periods of time, like **John 9:4, which says there will come a time when no one can work. So work while it is still day, because the night will come.**

Over the years, changing churches a few times hasn't altered my belief in Jesus and what He has done for me. What it has done, however, is reinforced my belief in what I have—and what I have is faith in Jesus. I treat nieces and nephews as my own and

have had a wonderful childhood to look back on. He has blessed Mum and Dad with a great house by the beach when our original one was too small. Mum had a faith which she passed on to us, albeit many of my siblings may or may not agree.

I didn't know how much of Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs I still held on to until I became Church of God (7th Day), and I didn't know how many of Church of God (7th Day) beliefs I cherish and how much of what they say is in the Scriptures until I examined it with Church of God Mt Zion. Both churches are Sabbatarians, and both hold true to the Scriptures. However, at the start of the day and at the end of the day, the Scriptures and the love of God are in my heart. May they be in yours too, dear reader.

Summary

I come from a big, mixed-background family of ten children, Mum from Catholic Geelong (the Ryans) and Dad an English only child who was nominally Church of England but not religious. Mum's side was deeply Catholic: daily Mass, Rosary, priests at our table, and the sense that family sticks. There were also old secrets such as hidden adoptions and moralistic stories that shaped our views of truth and mercy. Dad's good education and hard work; he wasn't churchy, but he provided, tried many jobs, and kept us moving when needed. We were working-class to lower-middle: a small brick home, then later a big beach house thanks to an inheritance. Education was Catholic schools (and a stint at special school for me); wealth was modest, but work and sharing were expected.

Our household was noisy and affectionate (crowded rooms, guitars before Mass, plenty of teasing) yet marked by upheaval: Dad leaving, Mum's illness, and later loss and divorce in the wider family. Religion threaded through everything: from strict Catholic practice to my own path through Scripture, Jehovah's Witnesses, and now Sabbath-keeping in the Church of God tradition. From all this I've kept faith in God, prayer, Scripture, the Sabbath, clean living, honesty and care for kin and neighbours. I've let go of what divided us such as calling priests "Father," icons, and some rules that cut me off from family. **My outlook is simple: love God, work hard, tell the truth, and keep a door open for people—even when life is messy.**