HEROES OF FAITH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

VOLUME 1

From Every Nation

Eight Christians from Asia and Africa, from Kiai Sadrach to Janani Luwum

A great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.
Revelation 7:9

WIM KAMPHORST

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From Every Nation. Heroes of faith from around the world, volume 1

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The sources consulted are listed after each chapter. Stories known only from a person's own testimony or from later tradition, or that cannot be verified, are marked as such in the text and in the overview at the end of each chapter.

This book can be read and downloaded free of charge at whisper-magazine.org.

Introduction: from every nation

When people think of the great names of the Christian faith, they often think of Europe and America. Of Luther and Wesley, of Spurgeon and Moody, of missionaries who left for India or Africa with a suitcase and a Bible. Many well-known collections of Christian biographies are mainly about Westerners too. Even the books about missionaries usually tell the story of people who went from the West to the rest of the world.

But the gospel did not stop with the missionaries. It was taken up by people who were born there. A Sikh in the north of India put on a saffron robe and walked into the mountains. A learned woman from a Brahmin family brought starving girls home in bullock carts. A Javanese teacher placed his chair next to that of the missionary, at the same height. A Liberian walked barefoot along the coast, and tens of thousands of people asked to be baptized.

This book is about them.

Why this book

Today most of the world's Christians live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. That is a great change from a hundred years ago. The peo-

ple in this book stand at the beginning of that change. Yet outside their own countries their names are often barely known.

I am Dutch, and there is a Dutch side to this story. Kiai Sadrach clashed with Dutch missionaries on Java. John Sung preached in Batavia and Surabaya, in what was then the Dutch East Indies. In my books about Dutch missionaries I told the story of those who went. Here you see the other side: what happened when people there began to carry the faith themselves, sometimes together with the missionaries, sometimes against them.

How this book was made

As in the other books in this series, facts come first. With many of the people in this book, the stories grew over time. Miracles became bigger, dates shifted, and sometimes an early biographer wrote down more admiration than facts. I have tried to keep apart what is certain, what is known only from someone's own words, and what is uncertain or disputed. After each chapter you will find this in a short overview, with the sources.

That also means I am honest about tensions. With missionaries who thought they knew better. With colonial governments. With rulers who could not bear criticism. And sometimes about the weak spots of the people themselves. They were not saints on a pedestal. They were people who followed God in a world that was often not waiting for them.

This first volume tells the story of eight people from three continents and very different churches: Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and churches they started themselves. The order is that of time.

A great multitude

In the last book of the Bible, John sees a picture of the end. He describes *a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues* (Revelation 7:9). That picture gave this book its name.

The eight people in this book are a small part of that multitude. I hope their stories show you how great that multitude is, and how close it can come.

Kiai Sadrach: the Javanese man who sat down beside the missionary

It is a photograph of two men on two chairs. One is a Dutch missionary, Jakob Wilhelm. The other is a Javanese Christian teacher from the village of Karangjasa, in the south of Central Java. His name is Sadrach. The chairs are the same height. The two men sit side by side.

Around 1885 the photograph appeared in a Dutch missionary magazine. Wilhelm himself had asked Sadrach to sit on a chair of the same height. Among European missionaries it caused an uproar. A missionary who showed a Javanese man as his equal: for many, that went too far.

That chair tells the story of Sadrach in miniature. He was a Javanese man who became a Christian and stayed Javanese. According to the Indonesian theologian Sutarman Partonadi, whose doctoral thesis on him was published as a book in 1990, he brought thousands of Javanese people to the Christian faith. That was more than the Dutch mission had converted in fifty years. And he, of all people, was called a heretic by that same mission.

It began with a poor boy called Radin.

A boy without a surname

He was born around 1835 in a village near Demak, on the north coast of Central Java. His parents were poor farmers. As a child he wandered from place to place. He lived on the kindness of people who gave him food, and he went in search of truth. His name was Radin, a single name, as with many Javanese people.

In those years Java was a colony of the Netherlands. Authority lay with the governor-general in Batavia, today's Jakarta, and with his residents and assistant residents in the regions. Most Javanese were Muslims. Their Islam was blended with older Javanese traditions of mysticism and inner knowledge, which the Javanese call ngelmu. A kiai was an Islamic teacher with authority, someone who gathered students around him.

Radin wanted ngelmu, and as a young man he went from school to school. These Islamic boarding schools are called pesantren, and they were open to everyone, even to a boy with no possessions. There he learned Arabic and the Javanese script, and later he also spoke fluent Dutch. One of his teachers was named Kurmen, also known as Sis Kanoman. From him he learned the secret knowledge of the Javanese. One source, which relies on the work of the French historian Claude Guillot, places him in Jombang, in East Java, between 1851 and 1858. After that he went back to Semarang, the great port city. He lived in the Kauman, the quarter around the great mosque, and added the name Abas to his own. Radin Abas: this was how he showed that he was a serious Muslim.

A Christian village in East Java

At some point in those years Radin Abas came to Mojowarno, a village in East Java that Javanese Christians had built. An Indonesian study relates that during a school vacation he heard the missionary Jellesma there, and that this was his first encounter with the Christian faith. Another article says that he spoke with Jellesma but did not become a Christian at that time. There it rested for a while.

In Semarang he met his old teacher Kurmen again, and Kurmen had meanwhile become a Christian, through Kiai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung. Radin Abas became Tunggul Wulung's student. Tunggul Wulung was a Javanese Christian teacher on the slopes of Muria, a mountain north of Demak. He had founded Christian villages in the forests of that region, with Bondo at their center. Tunggul Wulung was not a missionary from Europe. He was a Javanese man who spoke about Jesus in a Javanese way, a guru ngelmu, a teacher of wisdom. According to the sources, it was this man who persuaded Radin Abas.

What moved a young Muslim teacher to become a Christian? We do not know it from his own lips. As far as is known, Sadrach left no writings describing his conversion. One source says he left behind not a single written document. That makes him hard to know. What we know comes from people who stood beside him or against him.

Baptism in Batavia

In 1865, according to an Indonesian article, Tunggul Wulung brought him to Batavia. There lived Frederik Lodewijk Anthing, a Dutch lawyer and former government official who preached the gospel among the Javanese as a layman. Radin Abas came to live in his house and was treated like a child of the family. He received

instruction from the Reverend E.W. King and from a certain Teffer, and he learned the rules of the faith.

On April 14, 1867, he was baptized in Batavia, in the Portuguese Outer Church, which today is called Gereja Sion. He was about twenty-six. He chose the name Sadrach.

It is a name from the book of Daniel. Shadrach was one of the three young Jews at the court of Babylon who were given a Babylonian name and stayed faithful to their God. When King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw them into the blazing furnace, they said: *If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace* (Daniel 3:17). Why Radin Abas chose this name in particular is explained differently in the sources. One mentions the story of Daniel and the Javanese ngelmu tradition, while another sees in him a man who stood up against a powerful king. He did not tell us himself. In any case, it fits what came afterward.

After his baptism he was questioned by Dutch authorities to test his faith. Anthing sent him out to distribute tracts from house to house, to everyone he met. He visited Javanese nobles and talked with them deep into the night about ngelmu sejati, the true knowledge he had found in the gospel. Many became Christians.

He soon went back to Semarang, and from there to Tunggul Wulung. In Bondo, a village that had been carved out of the wilderness, he became leader of the congregation. He did not stay long. Tensions arose in the village. Sadrach later told that he had heard a voice that told him to leave Bondo. One historian also mentions a second marriage of Tunggul Wulung as a possible cause. He moved on, to the south.

Mrs. Philips in Tuksongo

In 1869 Anthing sent him to Purworejo. In Tuksongo, near that town in the residency of Bagelen, lived Christina Philips-Stevens. She was an Indo-European woman, of mixed Dutch and Javanese descent, who on her own initiative preached the gospel to the Javanese around her. She taught them the basics of the Bible, the Ten Commandments, the Twelve Articles of the faith and the Lord's Prayer. She and her husband had an indigo plantation, and an Indonesian article relates that they took Sadrach into their home as a foster son. He helped with the teaching.

A small scene from that time shows who he already was. The bupati, the Javanese regent of the region, came to visit the Philips couple with his wife. A Javanese person greets such an authority with a bow. Sadrach shook his hand. That was seen as a break with the order of rank.

Sadrach became her student and soon her helper. From around 1870 they traveled the villages together. According to the Dutch researcher Max Rooyackers, the group of Christians around her doubled in about a year. In 1871 sixty-five Javanese were registered. In ten years the Philips couple had converted twenty-nine people. In the three years after that, according to an Indonesian article, six hundred and twelve people were baptized, by the Reverend Trotsenburg de Bruijn.

Around that time Sadrach settled in Karangjasa, about twenty-five kilometers (fifteen miles) south of Purworejo. He left the house of Mrs. Philips, the way a kiai goes his own way, but he kept seeing her as his guardian. That gave him an entry to the colonial administration.

An Indo-European woman with no church ordination and a converted Javanese Muslim stood together at the beginning of a movement.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: *But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise* (1 Corinthians 1:27). In the eyes of the church, these two had no authority at all. Yet in Bagelen it began with them.

A church called a mosque

In 1871 the community in Karangjasa built a church. The building had the shape of a Javanese mosque, and that is also what it was called. A student at Universitas Gadjah Mada describes it as very simple, with a thatched roof, bamboo walls and an earthen floor. According to the same source, the congregation was called together with a kentongan, a hollow wooden or bamboo drum used in Javanese villages, instead of a bell. The leader was called imam. Another study adds that later church buildings were given a roof with three tiers, as an image of the Trinity, and that on the top Sadrach replaced the crescent with a cakra, a Javanese wheel symbol. The confessions of faith were set in Javanese verse, tembang macapat, so that people could sing them.

The growth was great. Between 1870 and 1873 an estimated two and a half thousand Javanese were baptized or joined. Congregations sprang up in Karangjasa, Banjur, Karangpucung, Kedungpring and Karangjambu. Around 1872 there were seven of them.

How did he do it? Sadrach worked the way a kiai worked. He entered into public debate with other teachers, sometimes for days on end. In Javanese circles such a contest of knowledge was normal: whoever overcame the other received his students. The agreement was that whoever lost would become the student of the winner. If

Sadrach lost, he would return to his former teaching. Rooyackers names four traveling teachers whom he defeated in debate in this way. The first to be baptized was a Kiai Ibrahim. After him came a Kiai Kasanmetaram, a well-known name in that region. From then on their students received their teaching from Sadrach.

In Cangkrep, in Bagelen, with the permission of the village head, he called a large gathering and spoke about the gospel. Jesus he called Guru Sejati, the true teacher, Panutan Sejati, the true example, and Ratu Adil, the just king. So it is written in an Indonesian study.

He also provided what a student needs. According to the same study, he spoke four languages: Javanese, Arabic, Malay and Dutch. In 1883 he began lessons in reading and writing, three hours a day. Nine schools came into being. In Karangjasa there were thirty pupils, five of them girls. Poor and abandoned children he took into his own home. Every thirty-five days, on a Selasa Kliwon, a Tuesday in the Javanese calendar, he held a large gathering in Karangjasa. People learned, and money was collected for the poor and for abandoned children. Each family also gave one sen every day. With borrowed money Sadrach bought land for a business where poor people found work, and he gave small loans at low interest, against the moneylenders.

There is a story about land that no one dared to work. In Karangjasa lay fields that were considered angker, inhabited by spirits, and so they lay fallow. Sadrach rented that land and worked it. It went well, and the fields became fruitful. Villagers later asked him for prayer when clearing forest. He treated the sick in the Javanese way, with prayer, flower water and herbs, and people who felt tormented by evil spirits he prayed free. So it is written in the study. That we read it only there says something about the sources and nothing about the people who lived through it.

In 1876 Christina Philips-Stevens, who had been ill for years, died in May, of a lung disease. She had supported Sadrach to the end. Her husband moved to Banyumas. From that moment Sadrach stood alone. Around that time he married and took the name Surapranata. One source explains it as a title: he who dares to make decisions. According to a source from the New Apostolic Church, the Javanese only called him that from 1899 onward. He governed his congregation of more than two and a half thousand people with the authority of a kiai.

Smallpox, and three weeks in a cell

Then the Dutch mission arrived.

In 1882 a missionary named Bieger arrived in Purworejo, from Tegal. He came on behalf of the mission and was expected to lead the Javanese Christians in the area. But those Christians already had a leader. Open conflict followed. According to an Indonesian article, Bieger and a colleague spread gossip about Sadrach's character, which failed because they did not understand the Javanese relationship between teacher and student.

That same year Sadrach was arrested. The charge was that he was obstructing vaccination against smallpox, a campaign of the colonial government. According to the Indonesian theologian Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, the charge came from the head of the local administration, W. Ligtvoet. An Indonesian journalist writes that the missionaries were behind it. Singgih writes that Sadrach had biblical objections to vaccination, and an Indonesian study stresses that this objection was theological and not directed against modern medicine. According to an extensive Indonesian article, a spear and a sword were found during a search of his house, and from this it was concluded that resistance was being prepared.

What happened is certain. Sadrach spent three weeks in the prison of Kutoarjo, twenty-one days. After that he was placed under house arrest for three months, and he had to serve it in the home of Bieger, the missionary with whom he was in conflict. In those weeks he was asked to confess his guilt and to apologize. According to the same article, Bieger meanwhile baptized more than a thousand people in Karangjasa. In the end the governor-general released Sadrach, because the evidence was not convincing. That made him even better known than he already was.

A source from the New Apostolic Church tells about the days of his imprisonment. His followers were asked to renounce their apostle. They answered that they would rather follow him to death than leave their faith. That story comes from within the movement itself.

How would you react if you had to live for three months with the man who wanted to take over your work?

"Pandita mardika"

After Bieger came another missionary, Jakob Wilhelm. He was twenty-eight. He chose a different path. Wilhelm saw Sadrach as his equal and worked together with him. Sadrach himself chose him, over Bieger and another missionary. Wilhelm led the congregation in Karangjasa with Sadrach's support, and he later called the arrest of Sadrach a great mistake.

From those years comes the name the community gave itself: golongane wong Kristen kang mardika, the group of free Christians. Wilhelm called himself pandita mardika, free minister. The word mardika means free. He received no salary from the colonial government. Singgih reads it as a statement about identity: these Christians did not want to be the Christians of the colony. According to another source, they did not recognize the ministers of the Indies

Church, the Protestant state church, because the colonial government paid them. In the surrounding area they were called Kristen Jowo, Javanese Christians, as opposed to the Kristen Londo, the Christians of the Dutch.

And then, around 1885, Sadrach sat down on that chair.

Paul wrote to the Galatians: *for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). Wilhelm showed what that verse says with two chairs. The uproar it caused shows how hard it was to truly live out that sentence.

I have to be honest here about what I do not know. What Wilhelm and Sadrach preached together in those years, how their services sounded, what exactly Sadrach taught his people: on all this I have only read summaries by historians. Partonadi himself, the thesis that knows the most about him, I have not been able to open. Sadrach wrote no letters that have been preserved. His own voice is therefore heard mostly in what he did.

The years with Wilhelm were not quiet. An Indonesian article relates that Muslims set a church on fire, and that the congregation raised three hundred and fifty guilders for a new church in Karangjasa. Sadrach and Wilhelm expanded their work as far as Yogyakarta. Around 1887 they had baptized more than a thousand people, among them R.M. Norotaruno, who received the baptismal name Joseph.

A request for bread and wine

A tension remained. In the Protestant churches only ordained ministers were allowed to baptize and to administer the Lord's Supper, the meal of bread and wine in which Christians remember the death of Jesus. Sadrach had never been ordained. According to the sources, he asked repeatedly whether his congregations might re-

ceive the sacraments from their own leaders. Every time the answer was no. The Netherlands Missionary Society never ordained him as a minister. As a result, the congregations were for a long time unable to celebrate baptism or the Lord's Supper. Sadrach therefore asked his friend Wilhelm to become a minister, and with him that was possible again.

For the mission this was a question of order and pure doctrine. For the Javanese Christians in Bagelen it was a question of whether they were allowed to take part as full members. European missionaries also felt that there was too much that was Javanese and too little that was Christian in Sadrach's congregations. The word that came up often was syncretism: a mixture of religions. It was said that he held sacrificial meals. One source calls that exaggerated: travelers who came from far away were simply given food.

Was that judgment fair? Historians do not agree. Singgih calls Sadrach a pioneer of what he calls the dialogue of life with your neighbor. He reproaches the missionaries for being unable to see the Javanese side of him without finding it suspicious.

The missionaries themselves wrote about him in their letters home as a tireless man. He traveled far, even through the heat, to reach the remote villages. Once he advised Europeans who were traveling through the jungle to take weapons along against snakes and tigers. That shocked them. A Christian teacher, and he spoke of weapons.

December 1891, Purworejo

In 1890 or 1891 the Reverend Frans Lion Cachet traveled to Java. He was a Dutch minister and came as a delegate of the synod to inspect the mission work. One of his tasks was to investigate Sadrach.

In December 1891 he gave his verdict in Purworejo. According to Guillot, he told the missionaries that they had to separate

themselves from Sadrach, because Sadrach would poison their work. A resolution was drawn up stating that Sadrach was a heretical teacher. Wilhelm signed it. The Indonesian historian Tedi Kholiludin writes that he did so reluctantly, and that the resolution was in essence Lion Cachet's. An Indonesian article relates that the government afterward withdrew Sadrach's mission permit.

On March 3, 1892, Wilhelm died.

Lion Cachet wrote a thick book about his journey, *Een jaar op reis in dienst der zending* (A year of travel in the service of the mission), published in 1896. It is available in the Digital Library of Dutch Literature (DBNL). In the chapter on the village of Gintoeng he mentions Karangjasa and, using quotation marks, speaks of "den 'Goesti' dáár", roughly "the 'Goesti' there". Goesti is a Javanese title for a lord or prince. I read it as a mocking reference to Sadrach, but that is my reading.

I find this a hard chapter to write. Lion Cachet traveled for a whole year in the service of the mission. He will have believed he was protecting the church. And he passed judgment on a Javanese brother after one visit, in a language and culture that were not his own. Both things are true.

Jesus said: *Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment* (John 7:24). Lion Cachet judged after one visit. Anyone who judges him now also knows only part of his story.

Choosing in 1893

In 1893 the Christians in Bagelen had to choose: Sadrach or the mission. According to a source from Universitas Gadjah Mada, there were 6,374 members at that time. About one hundred and fifty of them went with the European missionaries. The rest stayed with Sadrach.

He broke with the Europeans and dissolved the organizations he had set up with Wilhelm. From then on he held his gatherings every thirty-five days on Selasa Kliwon. The Javanese Christians had to endure mockery. At the same time, according to an Indonesian journalist, relations with their Muslim neighbors improved, and the followers lived as farmers and villagers.

There were other numbers that circulated about him as well. At one point Partonadi mentions 7,552 followers, against at most two thousand converts made by the mission in fifty years. Guillot gives more than seven thousand for 1898. A church source mentions five thousand or fifteen thousand. At his death there are said to have been twenty thousand. All these figures come from different counts and different years, and they cannot be checked. At the very least they show that it was a matter of thousands.

Apostle for Java

Sadrach had a community, but no church that recognized his leaders. He found one in an unexpected corner.

In Magelang, not far from Purworejo, an Apostolic congregation met under the leadership of Liem Cu Kiem. The Apostolic movement had arisen in Europe in the nineteenth century. It believed that God was once again giving apostles to the church, as in the New Testament. Its work in the Dutch East Indies had begun around 1880. Anthing, the man Sadrach had once assisted, had according to the New Apostolic Church joined it himself and had come to Java as an apostle in 1881. He died two years later.

Sadrach attended services in Magelang. In 1899 he was ordained an apostle in Batavia by the apostle G.J. Hannibals. From then on his followers called him the apostle for Java, in Javanese rasul Jawa. On April 30, 1899, he led the Lord's Supper himself for the first time

in Karangjasa. The congregation then had about seven thousand members. In this way, within his own circle, he received the ordination that the Dutch mission had always refused him.

Whether he fully shared the teaching of that church, or was mainly looking for the room he was not given elsewhere, is a question the sources I read do not answer. The New Apostolic Church still counts him as part of its history.

A grave under three roofs

Sadrach grew old. According to a source from the New Apostolic Church, he may have stepped back in December 1922, though according to others he led services until shortly before his death and held his best gatherings precisely then.

He died in November 1924 in his house in Karangjasa, next to the church that was called a mosque. He was about eighty-nine. According to Guillot's book, he died in his sleep. Most sources give November 14, one source gives the night of November 14 to 15, and the New Apostolic Church gives November 19. According to the English Wikipedia, his family and the regents of Kutoarjo and Kulon Progo, Javanese administrators, attended the funeral. He was buried in Karangjasa, about two kilometers (just over a mile) from his house, in a grave with a triple roof, a cungkup, as the Javanese build for someone they honor.

His adopted son Yotham succeeded him. He did not have his father's presence, writes an Indonesian journalist. In 1933 a large part of the community rejoined the mission. Partonadi speaks at that point of ten to twenty thousand members. The movement later lost influence, as other churches grew and the Gereja Kristen Jawa was founded. A few villages of his followers still exist in Central and East Java.

At the same height

Singgih calls Sadrach's life a tragic story. I understand why. A man who brought thousands of Javanese to Christ was called a heretic by the church of those who baptized him and had to find a place outside it. Later, Europeans admitted that they had not taken him seriously enough.

I also find it a story about patience. Sadrach had been through prison, house arrest with his opponent, the verdict from Purworejo and the break. He went on living in the same village, among the same people, for more than fifty years.

Perhaps you know the feeling of others deciding whether your faith is really genuine. Sadrach did not write a book about it. He left no complaint behind. We have a photograph.

Two men, two chairs. The same height.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth around 1835 near Demak; Islamic schooling in pesantren and the name Radin Abas; the influence of Kiai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung; work for F.L. Anthing and baptism in Batavia on April 14, 1867; collaboration with Christina Philips-Stevens from 1869 and her death in 1876; settling in Karangjasa around 1870-1871; rapid growth and public debates; the arrival of Bieger and the arrest in 1882 (three weeks in a cell in Kutoarjo, then house arrest, release for lack of evidence); collaboration with Jakob Wilhelm and the name "free Christians"; the photograph on equal chairs; Lion Cachet's verdict (December 1891) and the break with the mission; ordination as apostle in 1899 by G.J. Hannibals; death in November 1924; succession by Yotham.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his followers' statement that they would follow him to death (New Apostolic Church); the names of the first kiais to be baptized; details of church customs (kentongan, imam), which come from a single student source; the handwritten book kept by his descendants; the presence of regents at his funeral. From one Indonesian study also come the schools and the lessons of three hours a day, the gathering on Selasa Kliwon, the daily sen, the loans, the fields considered inhabited by spirits, the healings, the three-tiered roofs and the cakra, the confessions of faith in verse and the names Guru Sejati, Panutan Sejati and Ratu Adil. From one Indonesian article come the foster-son relationship with the Philips family, the handshake with the bupati, the voice in Bondo, the search with spear and sword, the apology he had to read out, the fire in a church and the collection of three hundred and fifty guilders, the expansion to Yogyakarta and R.M. Norotaruno. The advice about weapons against snakes and tigers and the tirelessness come from the article of the New Apostolic Church. The death scene (in his sleep) and the distance to the cemetery come from Gangkecil, which relies on Guillot.

Unconfirmed: the exact year of birth (1835, 1837 or 1840); his youth (an abandoned child, or adopted by a rich Muslim family, or cared for by an Islamic teacher); the year he settled in Karangjasa; the date of death (November 14, 15 or 19, 1924) and his age (between 84 and 102 according to one source); the date of the arrest in 1882 (March 2 or 4 in one article) and the length of the detention (twenty-one days against three months in another source); all the numbers of followers, which range from five thousand to twenty thousand (612 baptized in 1871 to 1873 against more than 2,500 members; 7,552 baptized members in May 1933 against ten to twenty thousand in 1933); who was behind the arrest of 1882; the reason he left Bondo; the reason for the choice of the name Sadrach; what

his name Surapranata means and since when he used it; whether Yotham was his son, son-in-law or not related; whether Lion Cachet meant Sadrach by "den 'Goesti' "; the contents of the handwritten book (Gangkecil mentions Sufism, a genealogy and a dialogue between two Javanese saints).

Interpretation: whether Sadrach's congregations were syncretistic or an honest Javanese form of Christian faith is still debated among historians and theologians today. A first source for further research is Sutarman Partonadi's thesis, along with the newspaper archives of Delpher, the Dutch digitized newspaper collection. No letters, sermons or literal sayings of Sadrach himself have been preserved; everything written here about what he said and taught comes from second hand.

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Pandita Ramabai: the scholar who came back with oxcarts

At the end of the nineteenth century, famine swept through India once again. An Indian woman of almost forty went herself to the stricken areas in Central India and Gujarat. She was hard of hearing, a widow and a Christian. She came back with oxcarts full of starving girls, and a few boys as well. She went once more. Again she came back with children.

Historian Robert Frykenberg describes those journeys in the magazine *Christian History*. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia speaks of hundreds of girls and women whom she rescued in the famine years between 1896 and 1900. Neither source gives an exact number, and I am not going to make one up.

The woman's name was Ramabai. When she was twenty, scholars in Calcutta had given her the honorary title Pandita, scholar, for her knowledge of Sanskrit. She had founded a school for young widows and written books that were read in America. The Indian reformers who had first applauded her turned their backs on her. On a bare plain near the village of Kedgaon she built a community that she called Mukti: salvation, freedom. There, in 1905, a revival

began that was written about as far away as America. And there she translated the whole Bible into the language of ordinary women.

It began in a forest in the mountains, with a father who did something he was not allowed to do.

Eighteen thousand verses

Ramabai Dongre was born on April 23, 1858. Her father, Anant Shastri Dongre, had an ashram, a place for study and prayer, on the wooded slopes of the Western Ghats, near Karkal. That is in present-day Karnataka, in the southwest of India. The family belonged to the Chitpavan Brahmins, a high caste from the Marathi-speaking region around Pune. In the house in the forest he received pilgrims and students. Ramabai's mother woke her early in the morning to recite her lessons.

To follow her story you need to know something about caste. Indian society was divided into groups you were born into. Your group determined whom you ate with, whom you married and whom you mixed with. The Brahmins stood at the top. They were the priests and scholars, and they guarded Sanskrit, the sacred language of the ancient Hindu scriptures. Women were not supposed to learn that language.

Anant Shastri paid no attention to that. He taught his wife Lakshmi Sanskrit, and she later passed it on to her youngest daughter. According to Frykenberg, other Brahmins shut him out for it. When the family lost the ashram for financial reasons, they took to the road. They became puranikas: reciters of the Puranas, long religious narratives, at pilgrimage sites all over India. They lived on what their listeners gave.

Ramabai grew up on the road. Several sources mention that she knew eighteen thousand verses of the Bhagavata Purana by heart.

Helen Dyer, the writer who published the first biography of her in 1900, writes that she could do this at the age of twelve, and that she spoke several Indian languages.

The famine of the 1870s

In the 1870s a great famine struck the south of India. The sources do not agree on the exact year. Ramabai herself wrote an account of the misery in 1897. What is certain is that she lost her father, her mother and her sister to it.

What she describes is the story of a family that tried everything. It gave its money to Brahmins, visited temples and holy places, and bathed in sacred rivers and ponds. Her brother fasted for months and ruined his health. When the money ran out, they sold jewelry, clothes, silver and copper cooking pots, and they bought coarse rice, which they ate sparingly. It did not help. Out of shame at their poverty, the family decided to go into the forest and die there. For eleven days they lived on water, leaves and wild dates.

Her father, blind and weakened, wanted to drown himself in a sacred pond. He said goodbye to each child. Ramabai was the youngest and received his words last. She wrote them down later: "I have given you into the hand of our God." In Dyer's book it sounds a little different, namely that she was His and belonged to Him alone. Ramabai did not yet understand him then. Her brother talked their father out of the plan and carried him to a village, to look for work.

There, in an abandoned temple where a young Brahmin gave them food, their father came down with a fever. He asked for sugar and water. There was none. On the third day he died. No one was willing to carry the body. Her brother carried it alone, more than

two miles, to the bank of the river, and the young Brahmin paid for the digging.

Her mother also came down with a fever. In Raichur they stayed for weeks without work and without food. Ramabai went to beg from a Brahmin woman, for a piece of millet bread for her mother. She was so ashamed that tears ran down her face. Her mother died a few days later. Then her sister died too, of hunger. According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, her parents died within about six weeks of each other.

She was a teenager. With her brother she traveled on, as the family had always done, and together they recited the ancient texts. They walked barefoot, slept under trees and bridges and had no blankets. By the river Jhelum they dug pits in the sand to stay warm. Sometimes they ate wild berries. Her brother earned four rupees a month, sometimes less. They lived on soaked grain and salt.

What does a beginning like that do to a person? In her later work Ramabai went looking for women and children who were dying on the streets. I do not want to turn that into psychology. But anyone who reads her story can see that she knew hunger from the inside.

Pandita and Sarasvati

In 1878 Ramabai and her brother arrived in Calcutta, today's Kolkata. It was then the capital of British India. Great Britain governed most of the country, and the colonial administration was based in Calcutta. A new Indian elite that was thinking about reform also lived there.

The city's scholars heard about a young woman who spoke Sanskrit and knew the ancient texts. They had her speak in the senate hall of the university. Afterwards she received two honorary titles: Pandita, scholar, and Sarasvati, after the Hindu goddess of knowledge.

Frykenberg writes that she became famous throughout the country. She kept the title Pandita all her life, even long after she had become a Christian.

In Calcutta she became disillusioned with the ancient texts. According to *Christian History*, she wrote that the texts spoke of women as beings who were bad, worse than demons, and she rebelled against that. In Bengal she also came into contact with Christians for the first time. The Gospel of Luke came into her hands. What she understood of it at the time, we do not know. Later she wrote that she had lost her old faith and was searching for something better with a hungry heart.

A lawyer from a lower caste

In 1880 her brother died as well. When he worried about what would become of her, she told him, according to Dyer, that God would take care of her. That same year Ramabai married Bipin Behari Medhavi, a Bengali lawyer from a lower caste, the Kayasthas. A Brahmin woman and a man of a lower caste could not marry according to Hindu rites. They therefore married under civil law. In those days that was highly unusual.

On April 16, 1881, their daughter Manorama was born. In February 1882, less than two years after the wedding, Bipin died of cholera.

Ramabai was now a widow herself, with a baby. In the India of her day that meant a great deal. Girls were married off young, sometimes as children. If the husband died, Frykenberg writes, what was often left behind was a homeless child widow, with no place in the family and no future.

At the invitation of the reformer M.G. Ranade she moved to Pune, then called Poona. Within a few months she founded the Arya Mahila Samaj, an association that stood up for the education of

women and opposed child marriage. She gave lectures for the women of Poona. Before a British education commission led by William Wilson Hunter she pleaded for the education of girls. Hunter had her statement translated, and in this way she became known in Great Britain.

In Pune she also often talked with Nehemiah Goreh, a Brahmin like her, who had become an Anglican Christian. Anglican means: connected to the Church of England. His writings touched her. She wrote later that his gentle voice had pierced her heart.

A woman at the well

In 1883 Ramabai traveled to England. She wanted to become a doctor. Anglican sisters of the Community of St Mary the Virgin in Wantage, a religious community near Oxford, helped her with the journey and gave her a place to stay. She learned English and taught Sanskrit herself. She did not become a doctor. She was turned down because her hearing was getting steadily worse.

With the sisters she came to know the Christian faith up close. According to an American church commemoration text, she worked in London alongside sisters who cared for women coming out of prostitution. She herself later told that the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John convinced her. There Jesus talks at a well with a Samaritan woman, an outsider with a past. Ramabai wrote (my translation) that after reading it she understood that Christ was truly the divine Savior.

At the end of that chapter the people from that woman's village say to her: *for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.* (John 4:42)

On September 29, 1883, Ramabai and Manorama were baptized in Wantage, in the sisters' chapel. Her baptismal name was Mary

Rama. The news reached India too. On November 4, 1883, the newspaper *The Mahratta* dismissed her conversion as something she had done for money.

"A conscience of my own"

Ramabai was a woman who kept asking questions. She did not simply accept everything the Anglican church taught. For her the Bible stood above church doctrine. She was also critical of British colonial rule. For years that caused tension with the sisters of Wantage.

In a letter of May 12, 1885, to one of them, she wrote (my translation) that she had a conscience, and a mind and judgment of her own. About those same years she says that she would not bind herself to everything that was put before her.

I find this one of the most beautiful sides of her story. Ramabai would not let herself be absorbed. She had become a Christian because she had come to know Christ, and she refused to trade that faith for an English package. Western church leaders found her difficult because of it. Indian critics, on the other hand, found her too Western. She stood in between, her whole life long.

The book of Acts says of the people in Berea: *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so* (Acts 17:11). That is how Ramabai read as well: for her the Bible weighed more than what people said about it.

From 1884 to 1886 she taught Sanskrit at Cheltenham Ladies' College. The principal, Dorothea Beale, became a friend, and later she also supported her work with money.

A school in Bombay, March 1889

In 1886 Ramabai crossed to America. In Philadelphia she saw her cousin Anandibai Joshi graduate, the first Indian woman to earn a medical degree. She stayed for two years. She traveled, spoke in churches and halls, and in 1887, together with Rachel Bodley, wrote *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, about the lives of women in the high castes. One expert calls the book a merciless indictment, written from the inside. Frances Willard became a warm friend.

From December 1887 Ramabai Associations sprang up in the United States, from Boston to San Francisco. They pledged ten years of money for a school for Indian widows. When the association in Boston was founded, Ramabai wept for joy. She said so herself: she wept with gladness.

In March 1889 Ramabai opened the Sharada Sadan in Bombay, now Mumbai: a boarding school for widows and girls from high castes. She began with two pupils. The school was explicitly neutral. Ramabai had promised not to convert the pupils. She dressed and ate as a Hindu, to show that becoming a Christian did not mean denying your own culture. Hindu reformers such as Ranade and the scholar R.G. Bhandarkar sat on the advisory board. Shortly afterwards the school moved to Pune, where in 1892 she bought a large bungalow.

Daily life in the Sadan had its own tenderness. Every evening each girl received a goodnight kiss from her. Girls from seven to twenty lived together there, child widows who had sometimes become widows at six, even at three and a half. A girl from Mangalore had been abused by her in-laws, hung from the roof and shut up with burning peppers. Ramabai won her trust, and the in-laws had to leave.

That same year she spoke in Bombay at the National Social Conference, according to *Christian History* as the first woman to do so. She

told the men (my translation) in the hall: you have never given a woman the chance to make her voice strong!

A few pupils wanted to become Christians. Ramabai sent them to a Christian mission for that. In 1893 she held a day of prayer and Bible study while most of the girls were away on a picnic. About thirty stayed behind. More than twenty said they wanted to seek the truth. When this became known, the advisory board resigned and parents took their daughters away. Soonderbai Powar had to take the blame for the conversions, which she took with humor. The American Ramabai Association had an inquiry carried out and cleared Ramabai of trying to convert. But she had lost the support of the Indian reformers.

I am not going to decide who was right here. The reformers had entrusted her with a neutral school. Ramabai believed that a girl who wanted to follow Jesus should be allowed to. Both sides had something to lose, and both sides lost it.

A burden that fell away

In 1891 something happened inside Ramabai herself. She had already been baptized for eight years when she read the book *From Death unto Life*, by the English preacher Haslam. She later described how a great burden fell away from her as she read. She wrote about her conversion that after years of doubt she found peace when she asked God for forgiveness, and that her burden rolled off her. She also put it this way herself: she had found Christianity, but not yet Christ. Historians speak of a second, evangelical conversion. From that moment she also became an evangelist. She wanted others to come to know Jesus the way she now knew Him.

We know this from her own testimony, the booklet *A Testimony*. Historians accept the year. What happened in her heart, we know only from her.

Did you also sit in church for years before the faith truly became your own? Ramabai was a scholar. She knew the Bible better than most people around her. And she described reading a book by an English preacher as the moment it really began.

Bare, stony, treeless

Near the village of Kedgaon, a few dozen kilometers from Pune, on the railway line, Ramabai bought land. She herself described it (my translation) as bare, stony, treeless and without water.

In 1895, according to Frykenberg, she went into the country on foot disguised as a sannyasini, a wandering Hindu ascetic, to rescue destitute women. Her first attempt to rescue seven women nearly cost her her life. Dyer describes how she traveled as a poor pilgrim to Brindaban, the city where widows were exploited by priests. She wanted to help six or seven women escape. The plan failed. She came back ill and exhausted.

At Easter 1896, in the village of Lanouli, after a gathering at sunrise, she saw, so Dyer tells it, the light of the Sun of Righteousness. She prayed for two hundred and twenty-five spiritual children, while the school numbered forty-nine. The answer she received was a question from Jeremiah: *Is there anything too hard for Me?* (Jeremiah 32:27).

Then came the famine years with which this chapter began. Around 1896 and 1897 famine struck western and central India, and plague broke out in Pune. Ramabai went, with a Bible woman, Gungabai, to the famine areas in Central India. She picked up girls and women in oxcarts and brought them in groups to Pune. She believed that

God had asked her to rescue three hundred girls. One of them, Subhodra, had herself been thrown away as a baby. When Ramabai was allowed to choose a baby, she chose a sick, unattractive one. Love, she said, chooses what no one wants.

The children she brought out of the famine areas, Ramabai took to Kedgaon. At first there were tents and huts of grass. About ten months later, around ninety girls had given themselves to God. They were baptized in the river. In November 1897 came a great baptism service with one hundred and eight women and girls, who were brought to the water by oxcart.

A missionary from Pune, Minnie Abrams, received a vision in the morning, with the command: go to Kedgaon. The new settlement received its name from the word in Isaiah that the walls will be called Salvation and the gates Praise. In December 1897 Ramabai dedicated the whole to God. In January 1898 she went to America, and the girls walked with her to the station to wave her off. In 1898 the American support for the Sharada Sadan came to an end. The work now became openly Christian and was given the name Mukti Mission.

The girls themselves told what was happening. An orphan girl of nine or ten, Anandi, prayed aloud every morning, and asked Jesus for sleep for a girl with a painful hand. That night the girl slept, and she said: I slept all night. Mookkie, a deaf and mute woman, kept attending the services reverently. The other girls said: Mookkie knows God just as well as we do. So wrote Miss Parsons in a report that Dyer included.

Around 1900, according to various sources, roughly fifteen hundred to two thousand people lived there. Those numbers come from the mission itself. Dyer gives nearly seven hundred and fifty girls in the three houses for the summer of 1900: about five hundred and eighty

in Mukti, sixty in Kripa Sadan and a hundred in Sharada Sadan. Up to August 3, 1900, according to her, Ramabai had taken in a total of 1,550. There were schools, a kindergarten, a hospital, looms, a printing press and farmland. A shelter was set up for women coming out of prostitution, Kripa Sadan. Mukti took in girls and women of every caste, including women with disabilities.

Money that came on time

It did not go smoothly. While Ramabai was in America, construction at Mukti came to a halt several times for lack of money. Minnie Abrams had been told never to incur debts. Ramabai was exhausted. After a night of fear she told friends. In Boston the full amount was handed to her. She said: "Thank God and those dear friends!" That night she slept for the first time in weeks.

In America she asked for twenty thousand dollars a year. Earlier she had asked for five thousand, and received six thousand. She proposed a new association, the Faith, Hope and Love Association. There she spoke about the prophetess Anna, who kept working to a great age. That gave her courage to go on. When there were sick people at Mukti, Ramabai and Soonderbai prayed together, and according to Soonderbai the girls' fever was gone the next day.

In Kedgaon she bought a seventeen-acre farm from a liquor seller, so that no tavern could be built there. She started a weekly market. A dairy came, an oil mill with an ox, a weaving shop and a field of red pepper. Eighty to a hundred and twenty workers built Mukti, and in the last hour of the day they heard the gospel.

When famine struck the region again in 1900, she sent workers out to look for girls. One of them, Bhimabai, had earlier been a Hindu fakir. Once no money came in at all. The next day a check for 272 rupees arrived. Ramabai had the girls skip one meal every Sunday

and gave the money to the hungry. She called that God's income tax.

The prophet Isaiah writes: *If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness* (Isaiah 58:10). On the land that Ramabai had called bare and without water, hundreds of children now lived whom she had brought out of the famine areas.

Not everyone saw it that way. The nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak attacked her in his newspaper. He spoke (my translation) of widows who during the famine years had been caught in Ramabai's net. Even today there are Indian writers who see her work as the conversion of vulnerable children. Christians see above all the lives that were saved. Both pictures belong to her history. A child who dies of hunger can no longer choose. And a child who is rescued grows up in the faith of the one who rescued it.

Five hundred and fifty women in prayer

Around 1904, according to an account by the Christian History Institute, Ramabai sent her daughter Manorama and another woman to Australia, where a revival was under way. She hoped they would come back with spiritual power.

In December 1904 she started prayer circles of ten girls each, who prayed for the salvation of people who were Christians in name only. At first there were seventy. In January 1905 Ramabai called on the residents of Mukti to pray for revival: a time in which God brings people to repentance in great numbers. According to the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal church that preserves this history, five hundred and fifty women began to pray together twice a day. Other accounts speak of just over five hundred. Ramabai also asked who was willing to set their studies aside for a while and go and

preach in the villages. Thirty young women came forward. Every day they met to pray for the Holy Spirit.

June 30, 1905

What happened at the end of June we know from accounts by the mission itself and by visitors. On June 29, 1905, early in the morning, a girl saw another girl on fire. She wanted to fetch water to put it out, but then saw that the girl was not burning. A teacher found her praying. That is how the accounts tell it. Whether anyone really saw flames, or described an experience in that way, no one can verify anymore.

The next evening, June 30, Ramabai spoke quietly to the women about John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery. According to one account, about a thousand women began at the same time to confess their sins out loud. Ramabai stopped speaking and let it happen. There was weeping and praying. Some prayed for hours, others made up songs on the spot. A twelve-year-old girl, who normally did not stand out, became strikingly beautiful, according to one account, and laughed continually. Others had visions of Jesus. A visitor, G.H. Lang, later wrote that girls were lost for hours in praise and love for Jesus. One meeting lasted seventeen hours, the next day more than fifteen.

The prophet Zechariah writes: *"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts* (Zechariah 4:6). The woman who had addressed halls and won over committees took a step back that evening.

The revival continued in waves until 1907. Teams of women from Mukti went out to other mission stations, and revivals came there too, among other places in Pune, Dhond, Allahabad and Bangalore. Minnie Abrams, a teacher at Mukti, invited the missionary Al-

bert Norton to attend a prayer group. Norton wrote that a Marathi-speaking woman prayed fluently in English, a language she did not know. He said he was astonished. Other women prayed in languages that no one in Kedgaon understood. According to the Assemblies of God, there was speaking in tongues in 1906.

In this way Mukti became a name in the young Pentecostal movement, the stream that emphasizes baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts such as speaking in tongues. American Pentecostals came to see it. Historian Edith Blumhofer writes that Ramabai valued their support but would not let herself be tied to their doctrine. She herself did not speak in tongues. She said (my translation) that she did not make a special point of the gift of tongues. When the revival died down, Mukti and the Pentecostals went their separate ways. The Mukti Mission still exists, without a Pentecostal identity. A biographer, Nicol MacNicol, wrote that people who had been so moved in those days were still living a quiet, godly life twenty years later.

A Bible for the women of Pune

The Marathi Bibles that already existed were too difficult for many women in the villages. Ramabai wanted a Bible in Marathi as the women around Pune spoke it. She learned Hebrew and Greek, so that she could translate from the original languages. According to one source she began in 1904. The sources speak of roughly twelve to eighteen years of work.

She had help. Her pupils helped, and women from Mukti printed and bound the books. Clementina Butler, an American missionary writer, called it (my translation) the only Bible in the world made entirely by women.

In 1919 Ramabai received the Kaisar-i-Hind Medal from the British government for her social work.

A wooden cross in Kedgaon

Ramabai had hoped that Manorama would take over the work. Manorama had studied in America, had come back and stood beside her mother at Mukti. After hard work for a mission school she died in 1921, according to one source already in 1920.

Ramabai kept working on the Bible. On April 5, 1922, she died at Mukti, sixty-three years old. According to *Christian History*, a few hours earlier she had checked the last proofs of her translation.

Amritlal B. Shah later called her the greatest woman modern India had produced. In 1989 the Indian state issued a postage stamp bearing her portrait. The Church of England commemorates her on April 30.

She died on the land she had once called bare, stony and without water. On her grave stands a wooden cross.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on April 23, 1858, in a Brahmin family near Karkal; instruction in Sanskrit by her father; the family's wandering life; the death of her parents and sister in a famine in the 1870s; the titles Pandita and Sarasvati in Calcutta in 1878; the marriage across the caste boundary with Bipin Behari Medhavi in 1880 and his death from cholera in 1882; the Arya Mahila Samaj; the journey to England in 1883 and the baptism in Wantage in September 1883; deafness as the reason she could not become a doctor; Cheltenham; America from 1886 to 1888; Sharada Sadan in 1889 and the loss of Hindu support after conversions; the care for famine victims and the Mukti Mission in Kedgaon; the be-

ginning of the revival in 1905; the Bible translation from Hebrew and Greek; the Kaisar-i-Hind Medal in 1919; her death at Mukti on April 5, 1922.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the eighteen thousand verses; the role of John 4 in her conversion; the experience of 1891 after reading Haslam; the fire a girl is said to have seen on June 29, 1905, the thousand praying women on June 30 and the speech in unknown languages (accounts by the mission and visitors); the disguise as a sannyasini in 1895 and Manorama's journey to Australia (one source each). From Ramabai's own account of 1897 come the scenes around the death of her father, mother and sister. From Dyer's biography of 1900, which relies on her own statements and those of her coworkers, come her father's words in a different form, Lanouli at Easter 1896, the three hundred girls, Subhodra, Minnie Abrams's vision, the stories of Anandi and Mookkie, the gift in Boston, the liquor seller's farm and the Sunday meal that was skipped. The small story of the twelve-year-old and the meetings of seventeen hours come from the Revival Library (Geoff Waugh) and from G.H. Lang.

Unconfirmed: the exact year of the famine in which her parents died (1874, 1876 or 1876-1878); the year of Manorama's death (1920 or 1921); the start and end year of the Bible translation; all numbers of residents and rescued children, which come from the mission itself. Dyer places the move of the Sharada Sadan to Pune in 1892 with the purchase of a bungalow, while other sources give 1890 or 1891. The journey to Brindaban (Dyer) and the disguise as a sannyasini in 1895 (Frykenberg) seem to be the same event, but that is my reading. Whether Dyer's Gujarat and Brindaban stories and her own essay on the famine of the 1870s are accurate down to the day, I have not been able to check. I have not opened Ramabai's own text *A Testimony* myself.

Interpretation: whether Ramabai rescued children or converted vulnerable children is disputed in India to this day. Both sides of that debate can be found in the sources.

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William Wadé Harris: the barefoot prophet

On July 27, 1913, a man from Cape Palmas, a small port town in southeastern Liberia, set out walking east. He wore no shoes. He had on a white robe with black bands across the chest and a white turban on his head. In his hand he held a long staff with a crossbar, so that it formed a cross. He also carried an English Bible, a gourd rattle and a bowl for baptismal water.

Two women walked with him: Helen Valentine, a widow who had learned to read and write, and Mary Pioka. They sang and kept the beat with gourd rattles, and wherever they went, crowds gathered. The little company crossed the Cavally, the border river, and entered the Ivory Coast, a French colony.

The man was around fifty. His name was William Wadé Harris. A few years earlier he had been in a Liberian prison for treason. A year and a half after this journey, according to estimates by French colonial administrators, some one hundred thousand to one hundred and twenty thousand people had been baptized by him. Historian Elizabeth Isichei wrote in *Christian History* magazine that he was "without a doubt the most successful missionary in West Africa's

history." He was no Western missionary. He was a Grebo from Liberia, and he died poor.

To understand why he walked barefoot, we have to go back to the coast where he grew up.

A Grebo boy in the minister's house

Liberia holds a special place in the history of Africa. From 1822 onward, freed Black Americans came ashore there, with support from the United States. In 1847 they declared independence. Their descendants, the Americo-Liberians, formed the country's upper class. From 1878 their True Whig Party governed, until a military coup in 1980. The peoples who already lived there, such as the Grebo and the Kru, were driven out and ruled by the newcomers. In 1873 the Kru and Grebo even tried to found a Christian state of their own, with the motto "In God We Trust". It did not succeed.

Into that world Harris was born, around 1860, in the village of Half-Graway near Cape Palmas. His Grebo name was Wadé. His father was not a Christian and followed the traditional religion of the Grebo. His mother was a Methodist. Harris later said himself that he had been born a Methodist.

When he was about twelve, an uncle, the Methodist minister John Lowrie, took him to Sinoe, further along the coast. There the boy learned to read and write, in English and in Grebo. He also learned bricklaying. His father later brought him back to Cape Palmas, to the old customs of the people. As a young man he sailed several times as a laborer on ships along the West African coast, as far as Nigeria. Later he humbly called himself a Kru boy.

Around 1881 or 1882 he came to faith in a Methodist service, under the preaching of a Liberian minister named Thompson. He felt called, and for the first time, as he later admitted, he felt truly con-

verted. He was baptized and began to preach as a layman. A few years later he moved to the Episcopal Church, the American branch of the Anglican church. In 1888 he was confirmed by Bishop Samuel Ferguson. Around the same time he married Rose Farr, the daughter of a teacher at the Episcopal boarding school in Half-Graway. The sources differ on the year. They had six children.

A British flag on Puduke Beach

From 1892 Harris worked for the Episcopal mission as an assistant teacher and catechist, someone who gives instruction in the faith. Later he ran a school. He also became a government interpreter for the Grebo. By the end of 1907 he was at once a school principal, a lay reader of his church, an interpreter at the Grebo court and a secretary of his people. He read a great deal, including the pamphlets about the end times by the American Bible teacher Charles Russell. The Liberian thinker Edward Blyden, who urged Africans to go their own way, influenced him too, writes mission historian David Shank.

Harris saw himself as a spokesman for his people. That brought him into conflict with the government in Monrovia. Many Grebo and Kru hoped that Great Britain would take them under its protection. In 1908 Harris lost his job as interpreter and as teacher.

In February 1909, on Puduke Beach, he hauled down the Liberian flag and raised the British Union Jack. He was convicted of treason. The sources differ on the sentence: Shank mentions a fine of five hundred dollars and two years in prison, a later study a suspended sentence. In January 1910 war broke out between the Grebo and the Liberian government. Harris was locked up again, in the prison at Grafton. The Grebo uprising failed.

He was around fifty. He had lost his work, his church had withdrawn his license as a lay preacher, and his people had lost the fight. Everything he had worked for had collapsed within a few years.

Three times water on his head

It happened in that prison. Around June 1910, as Harris later told it, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. It happened three times. According to Isichei, the angel told him that he was not really in prison. He would become a prophet, the prophet of the last days, and Gabriel compared him with Daniel and with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the three men in the fiery furnace. The Spirit came upon him, Harris said, like water on his head, and that too three times. According to Shank, Harris said it felt like ice on his head and over his whole skin.

The instructions were concrete. He was to put off his Western clothes, down to his patent leather shoes, and wear a white robe. He was to drink no more alcohol. He was to go out to preach and to baptize, to the places where the angel would lead him. He later saw his role in the light of Elijah, the prophet who took on the idols of his day. He called himself a black Elijah. He kept hearing the voice of Gabriel as his guide for the rest of his life.

What exactly happened in that cell we know only from Harris himself. He did not write it down. According to Shank, he left no writings apart from a few signed letters. His story reached us through people who spoke with him, among them the Ghanaian lawyer Casely Hayford in 1914 and the Methodist missionary Pierre Benoît in 1926. Historians cannot check the vision. What they can see is what it did to him. The man who came out of prison was not the man who went in.

I notice that with a story like this I quickly want to know whether it was "real". Harris himself never doubted it. He staked the rest of his life on it.

Six shillings

There was a hard part to the vision. According to Shank, Harris was told that his wife would die after she had given him six shillings for his journey. Rose died. Exactly when is uncertain. One study gives May or June 1910, the year of the vision. Isichei writes that Rose assumed her husband had gone mad, and that she fell ill and died.

We know nothing more about her. She had borne him six children. Her husband came out of prison with a story about an angel and wanted to go preaching in a white robe. It is not hard to understand that she was alarmed.

By around 1912 Harris was free. He preached first in Liberia, including in the capital, Monrovia, where he was briefly jailed again. In Liberia it never grew large. On July 27, 1913, he crossed the border.

Across the Cavally River

In 1913 the Ivory Coast was a French colony, and the French Catholic mission had been working there since the 1890s. It had not produced much. In 1911 the Catholic leader, Monsignor Jules Moury, reported that after more than fifteen years of work and eight large mission stations there were about two thousand baptized believers. Most people along the coast lived by their traditional religion, with images and objects meant to give protection. The Europeans called those objects fetishes.

Harris walked along the coast and the lagoons, the area between Grand-Lahou and Bingerville. He spoke English and Grebo, not French and not the languages of the lagoon peoples. He preached

through interpreters, often clerks of European trading houses. The two women sang. He set Christian words to melodies the people knew.

His message was short. There is one God. Burn your fetishes. Keep Sunday as a day of rest. Be baptized. He taught people the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. Whoever gave up their fetishes could be baptized at once. In this he differed from the mission churches, which required months or years of instruction before someone was baptized. Father Hartz in Grand-Bassam once asked him to wait with baptizing until the people had been taught. Harris answered: "God will do that." He baptized with water from his bowl and laid the Bible on people's heads.

One person who was baptized, so the tradition describes it, brought his fetishes along to burn them, knelt and held the cross while the water went over his head. Three times water, the sign of the cross on the forehead, three times the Bible tapped on the head. The Harrist churches do it this way to this day.

In Grand-Bassam and Bingerville the people streamed to him. One of them was a young choir singer from the Ebrié people, Jonas Ahui. In 1914 he was baptized in Bingerville together with his father. We will meet him again at the end of this story.

"Burn the fetishes"

According to oral tradition in the Ivory Coast, in 1913 Harris cried out in the village of Louzoua: "Brûlez les fétiches", burn the fetishes. That is how a choir leader from the neighborhood, Mathieu Sedji, remembered it, and that is how it appears in a 2016 study by Gabriel Leonard Allen. Isichei gives an English version of the same idea: "God has sent me to burn the fetishes." He also called on people to keep Sunday and not to go out to the fields then.

Whole villages did it. The Catholic leader Moury wrote in 1914 of entire peoples destroying their fetishes and asking for baptism. In Jacqueville, as the Catholic Father Moly told it, Harris came to Mass in December 1913 with all his wives, together with nearly the whole population. The church turned out to be too small. Harris decided with the village elders that a larger one was needed.

Stories quickly grew up around the prophet. He was said to have healed the sick and to have had power over the rain. Opponents were said to have gone mad. Hidden images were said to have burst into flame by themselves. A man who lied about a fetish he had hidden was said to have died within a few hours. In the region of Yaou and Bonoua people tell, through Marc Nga, who was there, that Harris challenged the priests of two shrines: that of the spirit of the Yaou forest and that of the serpent of Bonoua. He is said to have overcome them on their own ground, as Elijah did the prophets of Baal. Marc Nga and Jean Ekra of Bonoua were baptized and followed him. In Grand-Bassam, Ernest Foli told that on a Sunday white men had African laborers load a ship, against Harris's warning. He is said to have prayed on that ship, and it burst into flame. Isichei presents such stories explicitly as legends. No one has ever verified them, and that is how I pass them on too.

Harris himself seemed afraid of that veneration. He sometimes broke his own staff, Isichei writes, because he feared people would begin to worship it. When the elders in Kraffy asked him whether he was the great spirit, he answered, according to tradition, that he was a man who came in the name of God, to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When the people of Lystra took Paul and Barnabas for gods, the two tore their clothes and cried out: *Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you* (Acts 14:15). Har-

ris sometimes broke his staff. It was the same answer, in a different language.

Twelve apostles in every village

Harris stayed nowhere for long. What did he leave behind in the villages he passed through? In each new congregation he appointed twelve men as "apostles" to lead the group. He had houses of prayer built. He let village chiefs keep the leadership, so that existing ties stayed intact. And he told the people that Christians with Bibles would come later to teach them further.

According to tradition, he also told them they could pray and sing in their own language, because God would understand them. In Kraffy he is said to have put it in three words: God will understand.

He encouraged people to send their children to school. Old men in the Ivory Coast told later that he had taught them to live in peace. The French lieutenant governor Gabriel Angoulvant wrote in 1915 about the enthusiasm with which children in Jacqueville went to school.

On one point he later clashed with Western missionaries. Harris accepted polygamy, marriage to more than one wife, as a given of African life. He did not condemn it. He himself had several wives, and some of them traveled with him. Mary Pioka bore him a son. In 1926 he admitted to a visitor that he had six wives. Methodist missionaries questioned him sharply about it. He saw it as an imperfect arrangement, and he pointed to Isaiah 4:1.

A lawyer in Axim

In 1914 Harris crossed the border into the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, a British colony. He preached there for about three months, mainly in Apollonia, the coastal region in the far west. A Methodist

minister, Charles Armstrong, found some eight thousand people there in early August 1914 who had been baptized by Harris.

In July 1914, in the small town of Axim, the prophet had a long conversation with Joseph Casely Hayford, a lawyer and one of the best-known African nationalists of the Gold Coast. Hayford was impressed by the humility and spiritual power of the man. He wrote that Harris attached no importance to himself, and that God had made his soul a soul of fire. In 1915 he wrote the first book about him. For historians that book is valuable: it is an account by someone who spoke with Harris himself, in the middle of his greatest year.

There is one more name from that time. In Assinie a woman named Grace Tani joined him. She had been a priestess of the traditional religion. She would later become one of the leaders of the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Ghana. She regarded herself as one of Harris's wives.

In the autumn of 1914 Harris had his base in Kraffy, in the Ivory Coast. Thousands came to him there, quietly, out of fear of the colonial authorities. Meanwhile, the First World War had broken out in Europe.

December 1914

At first the French colonial government had let the prophet be. He called for hard work, and that pleased them. But the larger the movement grew, the more nervous the French became. A mass movement among Africans, led by a man from an English-speaking country, while France was at war: the administration saw that as a danger.

In December 1914 Harris and the women traveling with him were arrested, on the initiative of Lieutenant Governor Angoulvant.

They were locked up and badly beaten. Helen Valentine, the young widow who had set out with him from Cape Palmas a year and a half earlier, died from the effects of those beatings. That is how Shank records it.

In January 1915 Harris was expelled from the country. Another study gives April 1915; here too the sources differ. He was taken hundreds of kilometers, nearly five hundred, to the Liberian border and was not allowed to return to French territory. According to an old account quoted in a theological journal, he was arrested during a baptismal service at Port-Bouët, near present-day Abidjan, and the soldier and the boy who came to take him away had themselves baptized by him. That story appears in only one source and has not been verified.

Afterward the French government banned preaching in languages other than French. Houses of prayer his followers had built went up in flames.

That winter had two sides. In eighteen months Harris had baptized more people than the Catholic mission had in more than fifteen years. He paid for it with his freedom. One of the women who sang with him paid with her life.

Eight times at the border

Harris was back in Liberia. He made at least eight attempts to get back into the Ivory Coast, Isichei writes. Each time he was turned back at the border.

He kept preaching. In 1917, 1919 and 1921 he walked to Sierra Leone. Around 1921 he married Letitia Williams in Freetown. A great movement like the one in the Ivory Coast never came again in Liberia.

Meanwhile, in the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast, something happened that he himself never saw. His converts went to the churches that were already there. Among the Catholics, the number of baptisms rose from eighty in 1914 to some 6,700 a year from 1917 onward. In 1923 the Catholic church in the Ivory Coast had 13,000 members and more than ten thousand people preparing for baptism. In Apollonia, where in 1914 there had not been a single baptized Catholic, there were thousands of members by 1920.

Many villages waited. Harris had said that people with Bibles would come, and he had advised his followers to join the Methodists. In 1924 the English Methodist William Platt arrived in the Ivory Coast. He found villages that had been waiting for him for ten years. Within sixteen months more than 160 chapels had joined the Methodists, with over 32,000 names in the registers. The Methodist church in the Ivory Coast dates its beginning to 1914, the year of Harris.

Ecclesiastes says: *Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days* (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Harris himself did not find it again, because he was not allowed back into the Ivory Coast. But the villages along the lagoons had waited ten years for the people with Bibles he had announced.

There was friction too. The missionaries asked for a fixed contribution of ten percent, while the villagers were poor and also paid taxes to the French. And they disapproved of plural marriage, which Harris had allowed. Not everyone stayed. Some people went their own way.

Begin again

In 1925 Harris had a stroke. He only partly recovered. A year later the Methodist missionary Pierre Benoît visited him. Harris had just

returned from a journey on which he had baptized more than five hundred people. Benoît took back a "testament", a statement from the old prophet that, according to Shank, leaned strongly toward the Methodists and was meant to lead doubters into the Methodist church. According to Isichei, Benoît described Harris as a man who lived in a supernatural world that was more real to him than the visible one.

I find that a moving picture of a sick old man in a poor house. He had nothing left, except the reality he had chosen in 1910.

In December 1928 one more visitor came. It was Jonas Ahui, the choir singer from Petit-Bassam who had been baptized in Bingerville in 1914. He had traveled to Liberia because he was worried. In his region the old religion was coming back, and the British Methodists were active. Harris gave him his blessing, his cross-staff and his Bible, and a letter for Ahui's father, the village chief. In it he had it written that a marriage with more wives was allowed if God's law was kept, and that payment for religious services was disapproved. Whoever says he is for God, Harris said according to Shank, must suffer. He charged Ahui to begin again (my translation).

In April 1929 William Wadé Harris died at Spring Hill in Liberia, somewhere between sixty and seventy years old. He was utterly poor, Shank writes. According to Isichei he died in his daughter's house. The local Episcopal minister led the funeral. Another source gives October 10, 1929, as the date of death, and his gravestone even says 1928. What is certain: he died in Liberia, and outside the villages of the Ivory Coast and Ghana almost nobody knew who he was. In 1968 his grave received a cement stone with the words: "In loving memory of Propha Wadé Harris".

A cross-staff in Petit-Bassam

Ahui did what he had been asked, though it took a while. In 1931 the Harrist Church was founded in the Ivory Coast. In 1936, after an illness that nearly killed him, Ahui began actively leading the work, in defiance of the colonial government. For more than fifty years he was the church's chief preacher, until he died in 1992. The church spread to Liberia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo and Benin. Shank estimated the number of adherents in 1986 at about two hundred thousand, and Isichei arrived at the same figure in 2003. In Ghana his work lived on in the Church of the Twelve Apostles, where Grace Tani played a leading role until her death in 1958. Other prophetic movements in the Ivory Coast saw him as their forerunner, such as the Deima Church, founded in 1942 by Marie Lalou, who called herself his spiritual successor.

Whether he himself wanted to found a church is unclear. He sent people to the Catholics and the Methodists, and so his legacy lies in many churches at once. The mission expert Edwin Smith already called him Africa's most successful evangelist in 1926. Not everything Harris said came true. He expected great world events in which he himself would play a part, and they never came. He was a man with a strong vision and with clear limits.

What would you do with a calling you received in the darkest period of your life, with no one else there to confirm it? Harris took off his shoes for it.

On July 27 the Harrists celebrate to this day the start of that first journey. They celebrate the new life that began, not the death of the prophet. In churches that trace themselves back to him, such as the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Ghana, four signs still stand today: a bowl, a Bible, a gourd and a cross. They are the things a barefoot man carried across the Cavally in July 1913.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth around 1860 to 1865 near Cape Palmas, as a Grebo; upbringing by a Methodist uncle; conversion around 1881-1882; work for the Episcopal mission and as a government interpreter; dismissal in 1908; conviction for raising the British flag (1909) and imprisonment during the Grebo war (1910); departure from Cape Palmas on July 27, 1913, with Helen Valentine and Mary Pioka; white robe, cross-staff, Bible, gourd and baptismal bowl; immediate baptism after the burning of fetishes; twelve apostles per congregation; the conversation with Casely Hayford in Axim (1914); arrest at the end of 1914 and expulsion by the French government; the growth of Catholic and Methodist churches afterward; the arrival of William Platt in 1924; the visit of Jonas Ahui in December 1928; death in poverty in Liberia in 1929.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the vision of Gabriel in prison and what was said there, including the ice on his head (only Harris's own account); the prediction about Rose and the six shillings; the sayings "Brûlez les fétiches" and about praying in one's own language (oral tradition in the Ivory Coast, Mathieu Sedji and others); his answer in Kraffy; his answer to Father Hartz; the conversion of the soldier and the boy at his arrest (one old account); Father Moly's story in Jacqueville; the challenge to the priests at Yaou and Bonoua (Marc Nga) and the burning ship at Grand-Bassam (Ernest Foli), which according to Allen lived on as tradition. The conversation with Hayford comes from Hayford's own book, as Shank and Isichei relate it.

Unconfirmed: the healings, the power over rain, fires and punishments attributed to him (treated by historians as legend); the figure of two hundred thousand baptized mentioned in a later study.

Interpretation: the estimate of 100,000 to 120,000 baptized comes from French colonial administrators and has been adopted by later historians; precise counts do not exist. The sources differ on his year of birth, the year of his marriage, the death of Rose, the date of his expulsion and his date of death (April or October 1929; the gravestone says 1928). The punishment of 1909 (two years in prison or suspended) and the exact day of the flag incident (February 11 or 13) also differ. Harris left no writings of his own; the words in this chapter come from people who heard him or from tradition. I have not opened Hayford's book of 1915 or Harris's letter of 1928 myself.

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Josephine Bakhita: the slave who chose her Master

On November 29, 1889, a decision was made in Venice about a young African woman. It happened at the Institute of the Catechumens, a house of the Canossian Sisters where adults were prepared for baptism. A lady from the Michieli family had come to take her back to Africa. The young woman did not want to go.

She had no papers and no family in Italy. She did not even know how old she was. She had lost her own name. Everyone called her Bakhita, the name slave traders had once given her.

The Patriarch of Venice, the highest churchman in the city, called in the King's Procurator, a public prosecutor of the Kingdom of Italy. According to Sister Maria Carla Frison, who keeps the archive of the Bakhita shrine in Schio, what followed was something like a trial. The outcome was clear. Slavery did not exist in Italy. Bakhita was free and could choose for herself where she would stay.

She chose the house of the sisters and the God she had come to know there. She would become a sister herself, live for more than fifty years in a small Italian town and die there as a woman known

throughout the country. In 2000 the Roman Catholic Church declared her a saint. Today she is regarded as the patron saint of Sudan and of victims of human trafficking.

How did a girl from Darfur end up in a convent in Venice?

A village in Darfur

She was born around 1869 in Darfur, a region in the west of what is now Sudan. She never knew her date of birth. According to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography her village was called Olgossa and her family belonged to the Dargiu people. She had brothers and sisters, six children in all, three boys and three girls. An older sister had already been taken by slave traders. Bakhita was then five or six.

In those years Sudan was under Egyptian rule, which in turn was part of the Ottoman Empire. When the Sudanese meant those rulers, they spoke of the "Turks". In the vast area between Darfur and the Nile, trading in people was an ordinary source of income.

About her early years we know almost nothing except what she later told herself. According to the Canossian archivist she had a twin sister and her childhood was peaceful. The Vatican biography also says something striking about that time. As a child she looked at the sun, the moon and the stars and wondered who the Master of all these beautiful things was. She felt, so the biography says, a great longing to see Him, to know Him and to honor Him. She already experienced God in her heart, without knowing who He was.

The girl who forgot her name

She was still small when two men seized her out in the fields. How old she was differs from source to source. The Vatican, the Dictionary of African Christian Biography and Pope Benedict XVI put it at

about nine. The Canossian Sisters, the archivist in Schio and Pope John Paul II say seven. She herself did not know for sure.

The shock made her forget her name, and the names of her parents. The traders gave her a new one. In Arabic, Bakhita means "the fortunate one".

She was sold and sold again, at the slave markets of El Obeid and Khartoum. How many times, the sources do not agree. Benedict XVI wrote five times. Other sources speak of four sales or of eight owners. According to her own account she once tried to escape, into the forest. There, the archivist relates, she experienced for the first time the guidance of a divine light. She was caught again by deceit.

Scars that remained

She suffered most in the house of a Turkish general. I will not describe it at length. It is enough to know what the sources say together: she was beaten, and her body was cut with knives, and salt was rubbed into the cuts so that the scars would never fade. Vatican News speaks of one hundred and fourteen scars, Benedict XVI of one hundred and forty-four. She carried them for the rest of her life. Children who later listened to her, and who are old now, still remember the scars.

Perhaps you wonder how a child survives something like that. Bakhita never made a hero's tale of it later. She spoke about it calmly, without hatred. I will come back to that.

A consul in Khartoum

In 1882 there was a turning point. In Khartoum she was bought by, or for, the Italian consul Callisto Legnani. The Vatican writes that in his house, for the first time in years, she was not beaten. He treated

her kindly. There was quiet and peace, though the homesickness remained for the family she might have lost for good.

It did not stay peaceful there for long. A revolt had broken out in Sudan, led by a religious leader who called himself the Mahdi, the promised redeemer of Islamic tradition. His followers rose against the Egyptian rulers and their foreign allies. Legnani had to leave the country.

Bakhita asked whether she could come with him. In her own words, as Vatican News quotes them, she dared to ask him to take her with him to Italy (my translation). He said yes. They traveled to the port of Suakin on the Red Sea and from there by ship to Genoa. According to the archivist in Schio this was in 1885. Vatican News gives 1884.

Nanny in Zianigo

In Genoa, Legnani handed her over to a family he was friends with, the Michielis. The Vatican writes that this happened under pressure from Mrs. Michieli. Bakhita was handed over to people she did not know, with the promise of good treatment, and she was uneasy: would she be treated as a slave again? They went to live in Zianigo, a village near Mirano, not far from Venice. There Bakhita became the nanny of their little daughter Alice, whom everyone called Mimmina. Mimmina was born in 1886, and Bakhita cared for her as for a child of her own.

She was still not free. She was property that had changed owners. But here, for the first time, she heard something about the God she had not yet known in Darfur. Illuminato Checchini, the manager of the family's property, felt fatherly toward her and gave her her first crucifix.

Augusto Michieli bought a hotel in Suakin, the port Bakhita had sailed from. The family wanted to go back to Africa. In 1888 Mrs. Michieli went ahead. On the advice of Checchini, Mimmina and Bakhita were placed with the Canossian Sisters in Venice in the meantime.

With the Sisters of Canossa

The Canossian Sisters were a Roman Catholic order of women, founded by Magdalene of Canossa from Verona. Among other things they worked in education and catechesis, teaching the faith. The house in Venice where Bakhita arrived was meant for catechumens: people preparing for baptism.

There she truly heard for the first time who God was. According to the Vatican she recognized in Him Someone she had already sensed, long before she knew His name. She learned the Venetian dialect. Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* that in it she learned to call God by the word *paron*, boss or master. She had had many masters. This Master was different. He loved her. According to the pope, she knew she was "definitively loved".

Do you know God as master? To most people today that word sounds harsh. For someone who had known real masters with whips, it was the very word that made all the difference.

"Body and soul"

In November 1889 Mrs. Michieli came back to collect her daughter and Bakhita. According to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography she was herself Russian Orthodox and did not support Bakhita's wish to be baptized a Roman Catholic. That detail appears only in that source.

Bakhita said no. It was the first time she had done so, and she did it with remarkable determination. She wanted to stay, she wanted to become a Christian. Otherwise, she explained later, she would have lost body and soul. That is how Sister Frison tells it.

The patriarch and the authorities became involved. Whether it can be called a real court case is not clear. The Dictionary of African Christian Biography speaks only of the intervention of the patriarch, Cardinal Domenico Agostini, and representatives of the government. The archivist in Schio speaks of something like a trial. All the sources agree on the outcome. On November 29, 1889, it was established that Bakhita was free.

She was about twenty. She said goodbye to Mimmina, the child she had cared for for years. According to the archivist this cost her a great deal. It was her first choice as a free woman, and it was a choice for God.

A new name on January 9, 1890

On January 9, 1890, she was baptized. On the same day she received confirmation and her first communion, the three sacraments by which an adult is received into the Catholic Church. The Patriarch of Venice himself administered them. According to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography this was Cardinal Domenico Agostini. Her eyes, so the Vatican biography says, shone with joy. She could hardly express her happiness that day, and afterward she often kissed the baptismal font.

She was given three names: Giuseppina, Margherita and Fortunata. The last is the Latin word for fortunate. So the name her kidnappers had given her in mockery took on a new meaning. She kept the name Bakhita.

Later she said of that day: "Here, I became a daughter of God!" The Vatican includes that sentence in her official biography.

I keep coming back to that little sentence. Someone who had been traded as property calls herself a daughter. She had had a father and a mother, but their names had vanished from her memory. Now she had a Father whose name she did know.

Paul wrote to the church in Rome: *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."* (Romans 8:15). For most readers that is a figure of speech. For Bakhita, slavery was a memory with scars.

"Yes, Father"

She stayed a few more years in the house of the catechumens. More and more clearly she felt that she wanted to become a sister herself. In 1893 she began her novitiate, the period of training for new sisters. Before her vows she was examined by Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, who was then Patriarch of Venice. He would later become Pope Pius X.

On December 8, 1896, she took her vows as a Canossian sister. Benedict XVI writes that this took place in Verona. The Master, as she kept calling God with sweet simplicity, had her for good. The Vatican has preserved a prayer she wrote for that day. In it she asked whether she might one day go to her own people to tell them about God's goodness. She mentioned her father and mother, her brothers and her sister, who she believed were still living in slavery. She wanted to reach all poor Africans, so that they too would come to know and love God.

In 1902 she was transferred to Schio, a small town in the province of Vicenza. According to Sister Frison, when she was asked whether she was willing to go, she answered with two words: "Yes, Father."

She would stay in Schio for the rest of her life. There she wore the same habit as the other sisters, and the color of her skin aroused curiosity. Many people wanted to meet her.

Madre Moretta at the door

Her work was simple. She cooked, sewed, embroidered and looked after the sacristy, the room where the things used for Mass are kept. She became best known as the doorkeeper. Anyone who rang at the convent door saw her. She gently laid her hand on the heads of the children from the Canossian schools and stroked them. Her kind voice, with the rhythm and melody of her homeland, comforted the poor and the suffering and encouraged visitors. Her advice was short: be good, love the Lord, pray for those who do not know Him. What a great grace it is, she said, to know God.

Psalm 84 says: *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness* (Psalm 84:10). For years Bakhita was literally a doorkeeper. She had chosen that house herself, on the day she was declared free.

The people of Schio called her Madre Moretta, which you could translate as the little black mother. It was a term of affection, not an insult. A witness said it was her name for them. Children loved to come to her. Some girls once asked her whether she would rather have been born white. She said no. Everything her Lord had done, she considered good, the archivist relates. When she said goodbye, she would say: see you in heaven.

A priest once tried to challenge her. Suppose the Lord does not want you in heaven, he said. Bakhita answered that He could do as He pleased and place her wherever He wished. As long as she was with Him, she was content. He was the Master, and she was His humble creature. She spoke about death with great calm. When

you love someone very much, you long to meet him. Why would she be afraid?

During the First World War, according to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, the convent became a military hospital, and Bakhita helped care for wounded soldiers. From the same Canossian tradition comes a story from a war year that is not known exactly. Because of the color of her skin, men took her for a spy. She stayed calm, took them to her room and showed them the window where, she said, she had received her calling. Her simplicity convinced them, and after that they left her alone. I have found this story only with the Canossian archivist.

When the war was over, the superior of the house, Sister Teresa Martini, was worried about all the difficulties. Bakhita asked her why she was surprised that the Lord gave them worries. If He did not share His suffering with them, whom else could He turn to? They had come to the convent to do His will. She would pray, in all her poverty, that God's will be done.

A story that spread

In 1931 a book about her life appeared, *Storia meravigliosa*, A Wonderful Story. The author was Ida Zanolini, a laywoman connected with the Canossian Sisters. She based the book on what Bakhita had told her herself, and she later testified about it in the canonization process. The book made her known throughout Italy.

According to Benedict XVI she then traveled around Italy to raise awareness and support for the missions, the work of the church in other parts of the world. As she went, she told her story everywhere. Wikipedia gives the years 1935 to 1939 and a training house for missionary sisters in Vimercate, near Milan. I have not found a second source for that.

What did she tell people? A student from Bologna once asked her what she would do if she met her kidnappers. According to a text that the Pontifical Urbaniana University prepared for the Vatican, she said that she would kneel and kiss their hands. Without them she would never have become a Christian, and never a sister. About her years as a slave she said that she did not know the Lord then, and that she had therefore lost a great deal. She could stay on her knees her whole life and still not thank God enough. Asked whether she could forgive the people who had tortured her, she answered: "Why not? poor things! They did not know the Lord." They did it, she said, out of habit and not out of malice.

You do not have to find that easy. I do not find it easy either. She did not excuse the cruelty. She simply saw more in it than cruelty.

On the cross Jesus prayed: *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do* (Luke 23:34). Bakhita said it in her own words: they did not know the Lord. She said it as someone who carried more than a hundred scars.

"As the Master desires"

Her last years were hard. She was ill for a long time and in much pain. Anyone who asked how she was, according to the Vatican, received a short answer, with a smile: "As the Master desires."

At the end the past came back. She asked the nurse for something that was not there. "Please, loosen the chains… they are heavy!" So it reads in a life sketch from Vatican Radio. More than sixty years after she had worn them, she felt them again.

On February 8, 1947, she died in the convent in Schio, with the sisters around her. Vatican News gives pneumonia as the cause. According to the Vatican her last words were a cry to Mary, the mother of Jesus: Our Lady, Our Lady. Her last smile, the sisters say, told of

that meeting. Afterward children and adults came from the town to see her one last time and to touch her hand.

Back to Sudan

Twelve years after her death the inquiry into her life began, the process that precedes canonization in the Catholic Church. On December 1, 1978, the church declared that she had practiced the Christian virtues to a heroic degree. On May 17, 1992, Pope John Paul II beatified her.

A year later the same pope went to Khartoum, the city where Bakhita had been sold as a child. Sudan had by then been at war for years. In his homily on February 10, 1993, he called her a daughter of the country. She had been sold as merchandise, he said, and yet she remained free. "Free with the freedom of the saints." He gave her to the Sudanese as an example and as a patron.

On October 1, 2000, she was canonized in Rome, together with one hundred and twenty martyrs from China, the Spanish founder María Josefa Sancho de Guerra and the American Katharine Drexel. In his homily the pope asked for prayer for Sudan, which had been torn by war for seventeen years.

In 2007 Benedict XVI wrote about her in *Spe Salvi*, his encyclical on hope. Since 2015 her feast day, February 8, has also been the International Day of Prayer against human trafficking. This was decided by two organizations in Rome, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the international union of superiors of women's orders. In Schio more than thirty thousand believers come to the shrine every year, and in Venice a house for the shelter of women is named after her.

The window in Schio

She never went back to Darfur. The prayer of 1896, to be allowed to go to her own people, was not answered the way she asked. She stayed at the door of a convent in Italy, to the end.

I think of the window to which she led the men who wanted to arrest her. She had nothing to hide. She only pointed to the place where her Master had called her. A girl without a name, sold at the market of El Obeid, stood at a window in Schio and knew who she was.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth around 1869 in Darfur; abduction as a child and sale at the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum; severe abuse and lasting scars; purchase by the Italian consul Callisto Legnani (1882) and departure for Italy via Suakin because of the Mahdist revolt; time with the Michieli family in Zianigo as nanny to Alice (Mimmina); placement with the Canossian Sisters in Venice; her refusal to go back and the confirmation of her freedom on November 29, 1889; baptism, confirmation and first communion on January 9, 1890, with the names Giuseppina Margherita Fortunata; novitiate from 1893 and vows on December 8, 1896; Schio from 1902; the book by Ida Zanolini (1931); death on February 8, 1947, in Schio; beatification on May 17, 1992, and canonization on October 1, 2000.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the twin sister and the childhood in Olgossa; the questions about the sun, the moon and the stars; the escape attempt and the light in the forest; that she already sensed God as a child; her words about forgiveness, about her baptism and about losing body and soul; the words to the priest about heaven, to the superior Teresa Martini and to the student from

Bologna; her prayer of December 8, 1896; the story of the spying suspicion and the window; the help given to wounded soldiers in the First World War; her words about the chains and her last words. These stories come from the Canossian tradition, from the Vatican biography and from the text of the Pontifical Urbaniana University; she did not write her own book, it was recorded by Zanolini. I have not opened Zanolini's book itself.

Unconfirmed: that Mrs. Michieli was Russian Orthodox (one source); the exact years of her travels for the missions and the stay in Vimercate (Wikipedia only); the following figures, on which the sources disagree: her age at the abduction (seven or nine), the age of her sister (five or six), the number of scars (114 or 144), the number of sales, and the year of arrival in Italy (1884 or 1885). Whether the proceedings of 1889 were a real court case is not clear. The Dictionary of African Christian Biography names Port Sudan as the harbor; that did not yet exist, and the Vatican and the archivist name Suakin.

Interpretation: some sources write that the later Pope Pius X baptized her. That cannot be right: Giuseppe Sarto did not become Patriarch of Venice until 1893. He did examine her before her vows.

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Gil Sun-ju: the man who prayed before daybreak

On March 1, 1919, twenty-nine men met in a restaurant in Seoul called Taehwagwan. They read out a declaration in which Korea called itself independent of Japan. Thirty-three names stood beneath that declaration. Sixteen of them were Christians. One of the names belonged to a Presbyterian minister from Pyongyang, a man of around fifty with poor eyesight. He was not there that day. Like three other Christian signatories, he was absent from Taehwagwan, according to an overview by the Korean historian Lee Man-yeol.

His name was there, though. And for that he went to prison.

That man was Gil Sun-ju. In English books he is usually called Kil Sŏn-ju. In 1907 he was one of the first seven Koreans ordained as Presbyterian ministers. That same year he stood in the middle of the Pyongyang revival, where one missionary called him the most gifted preacher of the Korean Presbyterian church. He started prayer meetings in the early morning, a practice that continues in Korean churches to this day. An article in Christian History calls him the father of the Korean church.

His search for God began in the mountains, along a very different road.

Three years in the mountains

Gil Sun-ju was born in 1869 in Anju, in South Pyongan Province. That town now lies in North Korea. His father was called Gil Bong-sun. According to the Korean Wikipedia, he married young, at around the age of eleven, as was customary in his region.

In those years Korea was a kingdom that had long closed itself off from the outside world. The country was governed according to the ideas of Confucius: order, duty, reverence for parents and ancestors. Alongside Confucianism lived Buddhism, Taoism and the old folk religion with its spirits and shamans. There were hardly any Christians. The first Protestant missionaries did not arrive until the 1880s.

The young Gil was a strong man. According to the Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, from the age of nineteen he trained his body with strength exercises. When he was twenty-five, a friend told him about seondo, a Taoist path to a long, strong and even immortal life. Gil went into the mountains and practiced there for three years. He sought strength, a long life, and perhaps even the eternal.

What he was looking for, he did not find.

He had put years into it, and it did not bring him what he had hoped for. He was strong already.

A book, a flute and a voice

The friend who had once pointed him to the mountains, Kim Jong-seop, had meanwhile become a Christian. Through him Gil came into contact with Christian books in Chinese, the language in which educated Koreans read at the time. One book in particular made an

impression: The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, the story of a pilgrim who sets out with a burden on his back toward the heavenly city. According to the Christian History Almanac, the American missionary Samuel Moffett had recommended the book to him.

You can picture the man. He reads, and a pilgrim with a burden on his back walks right into his own life. In Soo Kim, professor of church history, describes how Gil later told of this: he soaked his table with tears as he thought of his evil ways.

Then came the night of his prayer. While Gil was praying, he heard the sound of a flute and a voice calling his name. He prayed (my translation): "My beloved God, forgive my great sins and save me."

That is how Gil told it himself, and that is how it has been passed on in Korea. No one else was there. In 1897, when he was about twenty-eight, he was baptized, according to the Korean Wikipedia by the American missionary Graham Lee.

Jesus said: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28). Gil had trained for three years in the mountains to become strong. The book that touched him was about a pilgrim with a burden on his back, and his prayer was a plea for forgiveness. The answer came from Someone other than himself.

An elder in Jangdaehyeon

Gil did not stay in the back row for long. In 1898 he became the leader of a congregation. In 1901 he became an elder of the Jangdaehyeon Church in Pyongyang, the city's large Presbyterian church, later also called the Central Church. A year later Moffett appointed him as a helper, a kind of assistant preacher, for the provinces of Pyongan and Hwanghae.

That fitted what Moffett had in mind. He wanted Koreans themselves to lead the Korean church, not outsiders. Men like Gil made that possible. Because of this, the church looked less like a Western, colonial movement to many Koreans.

In the same years Gil worked for his country. With the later nationalist Ahn Chang-ho he founded a Pyongyang branch of the Independence Club, a movement that wanted to renew Korea and keep it free from foreign domination. For him, faith and homeland were intertwined from the start.

I find that striking. Many Koreans at the time saw Christianity as something that belonged to foreigners. Gil showed that a Korean could become a Christian without ceasing to be Korean.

In 1903 he began studying at the Presbyterian seminary in Pyongyang, the training school for ministers that the American missionaries had set up.

To understand what happened next, you need to know how things stood with Korea at the time. In 1905 Japan won a war against Russia and then took over most of the Korean government. In 1907 the Korean king was forced to abdicate and the Korean army was disbanded. Three years later, in 1910, Japan annexed Korea completely.

They were years of humiliation and anger. According to In Soo Kim, many disillusioned Koreans sought refuge in the church in that period. There they found a community that brought them together, and later also a strength that would feed the independence movement of 1919.

In the accounts of the revival you read that in January 1907 the American missionary William Blair preached about the hatred of Koreans toward the Japanese. He called on the men to let that ha-

tred go. For a people that had just lost its freedom, that was not an easy message.

Before daybreak

Around this time Gil started something for which he is still known in Korea. He met with other believers in the church to pray before daybreak. In Korean this is called saebyeok gido, early morning prayer. The church historian In Soo Kim described in his dissertation how this initiative of Gil's found a lasting place. An article in the journal Acta Koreana calls him one of its founders, along with the Bible conferences in which church members studied the Bible for days on end.

The article in Acta Koreana draws a connection with his years in the mountains: the zeal of seondo found a new direction in his prayer. The practice remained. The goal had changed.

When do you pray? Gil chose the hour when it was quiet and the day had not yet begun.

The Gospel says of Jesus: *Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed* (Mark 1:35). So Gil did not invent anything new. He did what was already written in the Gospel, and he did it together with others.

According to a biography written by his son Gil Jin-gyeong in 1980, something else happened in September 1906. Gil had heard about revivals in Wales and India. That month the American minister Howard Agnew Johnston asked who wanted to receive the Holy Spirit fully in order to lead the Korean church. Gil, then a student and elder, raised his hand and came forward. In December of that year he was one of the main speakers at a Bible conference in Hwanghae. He agreed with the missionaries to prepare the great

winter conference of January together. So it stands in an article by Bonjour Bay, who took the story over from the family.

So Gil helped prepare the January conference, with prayer, before the first man in Pyongyang fell to his knees. Bay writes that the fire for people had burned in his heart since he had heard of the revivals in Wales and India. Johnston prayed for him, so the family tells it, and promised that a great revival would come.

The Spirit has come

In January 1907 the Presbyterian churches in Pyongyang held their annual Bible conference for men. About fifteen hundred men gathered, writes the Korean theologian Young-Hoon Lee.

The missionary William Hunt was there, and wrote about it in March 1907 in the mission journal Korea Mission Field. He describes Sunday, January 6, in the Central Church. It was a meeting for men. Whoever wished could stay afterward for a prayer service. Two or three earnest prayers were spoken. Then the Spirit came over the room. Strong men pleaded, several at once, for forgiveness and confessed their sins in deep distress. After half an hour it grew quieter.

Then Elder Gil stood up. He asked the congregation to raise a song of praise and said, twice: the Spirit has come.

Hunt writes that from that day on he saw new signs again and again. Public confessions drew a groan of sympathy from the whole congregation. Those who confessed privately had tears in their eyes. Sometimes what had been taken was given back. The prayer meetings were full. In the missionaries' homes, servants confessed what they had kept hidden, and in the boys' schools old feuds gave way to confession and prayer for one another.

Three days later, on January 9, Gil preached, so Bonjour Bay writes, about opening your heart to the Holy Spirit. After that the congregation began to pray aloud. Gil also led the early prayer meetings of the conference, before the day began.

On Monday evening, January 14, writes Young-Hoon Lee, the missionary Graham Lee led the meeting. After a short sermon he called for prayer and said that whoever wished could pray aloud. Then the whole room began to pray at once, like a clap of thunder. Blair, who was there, wrote that one man after another stood up, confessed his sin, wept and beat the floor with his fists. The prayer and the weeping lasted until about two in the morning. The next evening, Blair wrote, every sin a person can commit was confessed in public. The historian Thomas Kidd describes, based on eyewitnesses, how in those days men confessed their sins in public and fell to the ground. One missionary wrote that the prayer sounded like the sound of many waters.

William Blair, the missionary who had preached on Saturday about the church as one body, describes in his booklet *The Korea Pentecost* how flat the Sunday evening before had been. The room was full, but the prayers sounded dutiful, and Blair went home feeling that the devil had won. On Monday the missionaries prayed together at noon, and they felt God's nearness as they entered the church that evening. A sense of expectation lay over the whole conference, and someone like Gil, who had helped prepare it, knew it well.

On Monday evening a Korean named Kang confessed his hatred toward an elder of the Central Church, Kim. Kim said nothing. The next day several missionaries prayed for him at noon. That evening Kim came forward and confessed his hatred toward Kang, and toward Blair himself, whom he knew by his Korean name, Pang Moksa. Blair had hurt him, he said, at a school sports day. He asked Blair for forgiveness and for prayer.

Blair writes that he was taken by surprise. He began to pray, said "Apa-ge, Apa-ge," Father, Father, and could not go on. Then he fell on his knees beside the man and prayed with him, weeping. He describes how the Spirit came like an avalanche: hundreds of men lay on the floor or stood with their arms raised. The missionaries consulted, afraid that the intensity might rob some of their reason. They did not step in. They walked among the people and told them that God forgives sin.

Gil Sun-ju played a key role in those days. He confessed his own sins in public, and many followed his example. What exactly Gil confessed has not been handed down in the sources I could read. That a leader who led the whole conference laid his own guilt on the table is, in any case, what the sources tell.

James wrote: *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed* (James 5:16). What stands out in Pyongyang is that a leader confessed his own sins himself, for everyone to hear, and that others then followed.

In March 1907 the missionary E. F. Hall wrote to his mission board that Gil had received the baptism in the Spirit during the revival. Not everyone in Korea accepts that interpretation. The Korean historian Park Yong-gyu has disputed it. On one thing the sources agree: after January 1907 Gil carried the revival across the country as a minister. Young-Hoon Lee writes that he led revival meetings and Bible classes everywhere.

A loan to Seoul

The news from Pyongyang traveled fast to the capital. A missionary in Seoul, Charles Clark, wrote a letter on March 1, 1907, about what had happened there. In December, he writes, the Spirit moved the Korean believers in Seoul to send to Pyongyang and ask whether

they might borrow Elder Gil. Gil sent word back that they should pray harder. On February 16 he arrived.

Clark tells how a possessed man disturbed a Sunday meeting. Gil spoke to him, and the man fell silent.

Another report in Korea Mission Field describes what else happened in Seoul. The writer calls Gil a diligent student of the Bible and the most gifted preacher of the Korean Presbyterian church. He had received the baptism in the Spirit in the Pyongyang meetings and went to Seoul to preach. His preaching was powerful and his prayers touched people deeply. Often the congregation sat in tears. Even church leaders confessed serious sins. Stolen money and goods were returned and wrongs were made right. Some fell to the ground and cried out for mercy.

One man who had caused great trouble in the congregation was overwhelmed by his guilt. After a day of agony he said: "There is no peace." The next day he testified that he had peace with God. In the church, the reporter writes, calm returned. Gil held the same meetings in other churches, and the ministers and workers of the city joined in. The writer compares what happened with the results of the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield.

In April 1907, after the Bible class in Pyongyang, the missionary Swallen wrote that some, such as Elder Gil, had been wonderfully used by the Lord, in Pyongyang and in Seoul.

It cost him dearly. According to a common overview, the meetings in Pyongyang faded in the spring of 1907, possibly because Gil was exhausted.

One of the first seven

On June 20, 1907, Gil graduated from the seminary. He belonged to the first class, seven men. On September 17, 1907, they were ordained in Pyongyang during the first meeting of the Korean presbytery. So the Presbyterian church in Korea received its first ministers of its own. Gil became minister of the Jangdaehyeon Church.

He was an innovator. In his church a curtain hung that separated the men from the women. Gil had it taken down. He brought Korean court music into the worship service and formed choirs. According to In Soo Kim, he gave evening classes in hangul, the Korean alphabet, in his church until the Japanese authorities forbade it. His love of Korean music led to a revision of the hymnal, with five hymns set to Korean melodies.

In 1910, at the meeting of the presbytery, he proposed a campaign that came to be called "A Million Souls": a great evangelism plan for all of Korea. When the Presbyterian church held its first General Assembly in 1912, Gil became vice-moderator, writes Britannica.

A father at a grave

After the annexation of 1910, Japanese rule grew harsher. In 1911 a major case began against Korean nationalists and Christians, who were accused of a conspiracy against Japanese rule. It became known as the Case of the 105. The Encyclopedia of Korean Culture writes that Gil also suffered under this case.

In 1917 he lost his eldest son, Gil Jin-hyeong. According to the Korean Wikipedia, this son had been a member of a secret nationalist society and had been imprisoned in the case of 1911.

I pause here for a moment. A father buries his son, under a regime that silences his people. What Gil said about it, we do not know. No

letter or sermon about it has been preserved that I have been able to find. Two years later he put his name to the declaration.

Thirty-three names

In the months before March 1919, Seonu Hyeok, a Korean from abroad, came north to consult with Christian leaders. Among others he spoke with Lee Seung-hun, Yang Jeon-baek and Gil Sun-ju, writes Lee Man-yeol. From those conversations grew, in part, what later became the March First Movement: a peaceful protest in which people all over Korea took to the streets and cried out that Korea must be free.

Gil was one of the thirty-three signatories. Britannica calls him one of the first two names on the declaration. According to In Soo Kim, he handed out flags, spoke of Christianity as a Korean faith and urged nonviolence.

So on March 1 itself he was not in Seoul. The Korean Wikipedia mentions that by then he already had serious problems with his eyes. Like almost all the signatories, he was arrested. He was held for nearly two years and, according to the Korean Wikipedia, was afterward acquitted, the only one of the arrested signatories to be.

The movement was crushed. Yet something did change. According to In Soo Kim, from that time on many Koreans no longer saw Christianity as a faith imposed on them by a foreign power. Christians had stood at the front.

The book of Revelation

After his release Gil traveled the country again. He led revival services and Bible conferences, also in North Gando, the area in Manchuria where many Koreans lived. His preaching gained a new emphasis. Britannica writes that after prison he preached mainly

about the end times, with emphasis on the book of Revelation. In Korea it is told that he read that book hundreds of times in his cell.

The last book of the Bible ends with a promise of Jesus and a prayer of the church: *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20). For a people under foreign rule, that promise had a sound all its own.

Theologians view this period differently. According to the article in Acta Koreana, his emphasis on repentance and the authority of the Bible, together with his later expectation of the millennial kingdom, grew into a conservative, fundamentalist theology that is still strong in Korea. The Korean researcher Bae Deok-man sees him as the one who spread this way of thinking about the end times among Korean Presbyterians. English-language overviews report that he stepped down as senior pastor of Jangdaehyeon in 1926.

He also wrote. Early on *Haetaron* and *Mansa seongchwi* appeared. After his death a book about the end times, *Malsehak*, and a collection of sermons were published.

Large numbers circulate about his ministry: seventeen or twenty thousand sermons, hundreds of thousands of listeners, tens of thousands of converts. They come from later overviews and contradict each other. No one has been able to count them. What you can say is this: he preached until he could hardly see.

In the pulpit in Gangseo

In his last years Gil could see almost nothing. He kept preaching. In November 1935 he led a Bible conference in a church in Gangseo, in South Pyongan. There he suffered a stroke. According to the Christian History Almanac, he collapsed in the pulpit while preaching to thousands of people, and was pronounced dead within a few hours.

He was sixty-six. Most sources give the date as November 26; the Almanac holds to November 25.

Ten years later Korea was free. The country was divided in two. Pyongyang, the city that missionaries once called the Jerusalem of the East, became the capital of North Korea.

In 2009 the South Korean government posthumously awarded Gil Sun-ju an honor for his role in the struggle for independence.

If you walk past a church in Seoul or Busan early in the morning today, there may be a light on. Inside sit people praying before the day begins. Most of them may not know his name. They have the hour from him.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in 1869 in Anju; years of Taoist or other religious practice before his conversion; baptism in 1897; elder of the Jangdaehyeon Church (1901); study at the seminary in Pyongyang from 1903; ordination in 1907 as one of the first seven Korean Presbyterian ministers; his leading role in the revival of January 1907 and his public confession of sin; his initiative for early morning prayer; signing of the 1919 declaration of independence and imprisonment; absence from the reading at Taehwagwan; later preaching about the end times; death in November 1935; honor in 2009.

From eyewitness accounts of 1907: Sunday, January 6, in the Central Church, with Elder Gil standing up and saying that the Spirit has come (William Hunt, Korea Mission Field, March 1907); Gil's journey to Seoul at the request of the Korean believers there and his arrival on February 16 (letter from Charles Clark, March 1, 1907); the reports of his preaching in Seoul (Korea Mission Field, 1907)

and the words of Swallen (April 1907). These reports were written by missionaries, who experienced the revival from the inside.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the tears on his table, the flute and the voice at his conversion, and his prayer for forgiveness; raising his hand at Howard Agnew Johnston's question in 1906 (from the biography by his son); the Spirit baptism in 1907 (letter from one missionary, disputed by others); the marriage at around age eleven (Korean Wikipedia only); the baptism by Graham Lee (likewise); that Moffett recommended Bunyan's book to him (Christian History Almanac); the stories about the number of sermons, listeners and converts.

Unconfirmed: the rope story (Gil has a rope tied around his waist, runs to the missionary McCune and cries out that sin holds us fast; the rope breaks and many repent): found only in a forum copy of a Korean newspaper article that cites the biography by his son, without any other source, and therefore not included in the story; that Gil confessed his hatred toward Blair (in Blair's own account it is Elder Kim who does this, in Bay an elder not named, so they may have been mixed up); what exactly he confessed in January 1907 and on which day (the Korean Wikipedia gives January 6); the starting year of early morning prayer (one source gives the autumn of 1906, another 1909); whether he already answered Johnston in 1906; the acquittal in 1920, which I could not check in a court source; the length of his imprisonment (two years according to the Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, one year and seven months according to the Korean Wikipedia); the connection between the death of his eldest son and the case of 1911; that he read Revelation hundreds of times in prison; his stepping down in 1926; the exact date of death (November 25 or 26). On his religious path before his conversion the sources differ: Christian History calls him a Taoist and Confucianist, Britannica speaks of Zen Buddhism, Korean sources say seondo.

Interpretation: church historians differ on whether his influence on Korean theology, especially his expectation of the end times, was healthy. That he introduced the early morning prayer meetings and led the way in confession of sin in January 1907 is not in dispute.

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Sundar Singh: the sadhu in the yellow robe

In April 1929 an Indian preacher wrote letters to his friends. One of them was the Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom. The message was short: he was going on one more preaching journey, to Tibet. He was thirty-nine and his health was poor. He set out from Subathu, a small town in the hills of North India. On April 18, 1929, he was seen for the last time near Kalka, a little town at the foot of the road to Simla. After that, no one ever heard from him again.

No more letters came, no word from a monastery, and there was no grave. In 1932 the government of British India declared him presumed dead.

The man's name was Sundar Singh. He was born a Sikh and became a Christian. For years he walked barefoot across India in the saffron-yellow robe of a sadhu, a wandering holy man. In the 1920s he spoke in Great Britain, America, Australia, Switzerland and Sweden. Admirers called him a living apostle and a saint. A few years later others called him a fantasist. Both pictures already lived side by side during his lifetime.

Many miracle stories circulate about Sundar Singh. Most of them come from his own telling, and even in his own day there was a

fierce fight over whether they were true. I tell them the way he told them, and where the doubt touches the story itself, I say so in a single sentence. The rest you will find at the end.

It begins in a village in the Punjab.

A son of the sardar

Sundar Singh was born on September 3, 1889, in Rampur, near Doraha, in the district of Ludhiana. That is in the Punjab, the land of the five rivers in the northwest of India, then a British colony. The Punjab is the heart of Sikhism, a religion that arose in the fifteenth century and confesses one God. Sikh men wear their hair uncut as a sign of their faith.

His father, Sher Singh, was a wealthy man, the head of the village, with the rank of sardar. Sundar was the youngest of three sons. The family was Sikh, but also lived with Hindu customs.

His mother left the strongest mark on his childhood. She was deeply devout and took him to see sadhus, the men who left everything behind to seek God. She hoped her youngest son would one day become like them. At home he learned the Bhagavad Gita, a beloved Hindu sacred book. According to his later biographers he knew it by heart at the age of seven.

To learn English, his mother also sent him to a school run by the American Presbyterians in Ludhiana, the Ewing Christian High School. The New Testament was read there. Sundar wanted nothing to do with it.

A Bible in the fire

He was about fourteen when his mother died. The boy fell into a deep crisis. He was angry, at God and at the Christians. He mocked

their faith and in public burned a Bible, page by page, while friends looked on.

He found no rest, not in his own religion and not in the other books he read. What happened then, he told himself, and so it stands in the first accounts of his life. One night in December 1904 he decided to throw himself in front of the train, the express from Ludhiana, if God did not show Himself to him. He prayed: if there is a God, let Him show Himself to me tonight.

Toward dawn he saw a light, and in the light a figure with pierced hands. A voice asked him how long he would go on denying Him. I died for you, said the voice, I gave My life for you. Sundar was sure. The restlessness was gone, and a peace remained.

I believe God can seek people out like that. What Sundar saw, I cannot prove to you, and neither could he. What is certain is what happened afterward.

Sent away from his father's house

Sundar told his father what he had seen and that he wanted to follow Jesus. He cut off his hair. For a Sikh that was a public sign: he no longer belonged. His father gave a farewell meal, as for a dead man, and put him out of the house. In the Punjab many converts came from the lowest castes. That a son of the sardar became a Christian humiliated the family.

Later accounts of his life tell that someone in the family then tried to poison him and that he survived. That is how he told it himself.

A psalm of David says: *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me* (Psalm 27:10). Sundar had lost his mother to death, and his father had put him out of the house. What he still had was the faith for which he had lost that home.

In 1904 he went to a Christian boarding school of the Presbyterian mission in Ludhiana. Later he worked among leprosy patients in a Christian home in Sabathu, also spelled Subathu, in the hills near Simla. Simla, now Shimla, was the summer capital of British India. On September 3, 1905, the day he turned sixteen, he was baptized in Simla, in St. Thomas' Church, an Anglican church, by an Anglican missionary.

A Christian in the robe of a sadhu

A year later, in October 1906, Sundar made the decision that would shape his life. He put on a saffron-yellow robe and a saffron-yellow turban. He became a sadhu. A Christian sadhu.

Everyone in India knew that figure. A sadhu owns nothing, travels from village to village and lives on what people give him. Sundar carried only a New Testament. He did not marry and he walked barefoot. That is how he would put it himself: like Jesus, he wanted no house and no possessions. He wanted to make Christianity Indian, writes his biographer. The Swiss historian Philippe Bornet places him among the attempts of that time to free Christianity from its colonial packaging.

He liked to tell a story from the train. A Brahmin refused to drink water from the white cup that was offered to him, for he did not want to break his caste. Sundar drank from his own copper cup. His lesson, so he told it, was that Indians need the water of life, but not in a European cup.

In one village, so it is told, nine Hindus got ready for baptism. They said they had known everything about Christ for twenty years, from the European missionaries, but that they only believed it when they saw it in someone. Indian admirers exclaimed: how much he looks like Christ.

That did not happen without resistance. Presbyterian missionaries in the Punjab objected to his mixing faith in Christ with the way of life of Hindu ascetics. They saw syncretism in it, the blending of religions. Sundar saw it differently. He stayed with Jesus and he stayed in his robe.

How would you react if someone in your church brought the gospel in a form that at first reminded you of another religion?

In those same years Samuel Stokes, who had come to India in 1904, was working in the leprosy colony at Subathu. Encouraged by the Archbishop of Canterbury, he started a small brotherhood modeled on Francis of Assisi. The SOAS archive in London writes that Sundar was briefly involved in a brotherhood of that kind.

To the forbidden land

Sundar traveled through the Punjab, through Kashmir, through the border region with Afghanistan and through Baluchistan, which is now in Pakistan. He later said that he was arrested there and pelted with stones. In 1908, so he said, he went into Tibet for the first time.

Tibet at that time was a closed country in the Himalayas, led by Buddhist lamas. Foreigners and missionaries could hardly get in. That is why the stories about Sundar call it forbidden Tibet.

His best-known stories date from the years that followed. In one of them a lama had him thrown into a dry well, because he was preaching heresy. He stayed there three days. Then the lid opened, an unknown man lowered a rope, healed his wounded arm and was gone. Sundar called him an angel. Others wondered whether it was Christ Himself. In another story he was taken prisoner in 1914 in Ilam, in Nepal, stripped and covered with leeches. His friend A.J. Appasamy, later a bishop in South India, included stories like these in his biography.

Here I have to be honest. All these stories come from Sundar himself. There are no other witnesses, and the British bishop Stephen Neill thought he had never been in Tibet, although Sundar himself believed he had. Where he actually was in those summers, you will find at the end.

In December 1909, on the advice of the Anglican bishop Lefroy, Sundar began training at St. John's Divinity School in Lahore, now a city in Pakistan. He lasted about eight months. In July 1910 he left.

His biographers put the cause down to conditions the bishop set. He would have to lay aside his robe and would no longer be allowed to preach outside his own parish without permission. That could not be reconciled with what he saw as his calling. In 1911, according to tradition, he handed back his preacher's license. From then on he belonged to no denomination at all.

I recognize something in that choice, and I also have questions about it. Following a calling outside any church can bring freedom. It can also make you lonely, and vulnerable, because no one can correct you anymore.

The hermit of Kailash

From about 1910 to 1916 he went out into the mountains from Kotgarh, a place in the hills above Simla. He wrote about his journeys in a Christian paper, the Nur Afshan, in Urdu, the language of many Indian Christians in the north. Those pieces became the basis for the first books about him. Alfred Zahir published one in 1916, the missionary Rebecca Parker another in 1918.

His most disputed story dates from 1912. High in the Himalayas he is said to have found, in a cave, a Christian hermit who was called the Maharishi of Kailash. This man was supposedly about three hundred years old. Sundar said he stayed with him for weeks.

There is no account from anyone else. Later Sundar also spoke of a secret movement of Christian sannyasis, ascetics who believed in Jesus in hiding. Biehl found no trace of it at all.

In his book At the Master's Feet, translated from Urdu in 1922, Sundar describes two visions in a forest. He was praying alone on a rock when a poor man came to him. Sundar said he had nothing but a blanket and pointed him to the village. The man flashed forth like lightning, blessed him and disappeared. Sundar writes: *At once I knew that my dear Saviour stood before me.* He had prayed for help, and the Master had come to bless him, not to beg.

In the second vision a tempter came in the guise of a devout servant of God, who urged him to become a leader of the Hindus or the Muslims. Sundar rejected him sharply and prayed for a heart filled with God alone. Then Christ appeared in light and came into his heart. He called that the place where heaven begins.

His books are short, devotional writings about prayer and life with Jesus. Prayer is not begging for earthly things, he writes: it is an attempt to grasp God Himself, and a breathing in of the Holy Spirit, from whom spiritual life comes.

From Rangoon to Oxford

From 1918 on, Sundar was invited to speak outside North India. That year he traveled through South India and through Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka. In 1918 and 1919 came Burma (now Myanmar), Malaya (now Malaysia) and Singapore, China and Japan. All those years he wrote letters to Rebecca Parker, whom he saw as his adoptive mother. His letters from 1918 to 1929 are still kept in the archive of the London Missionary Society, now at SOAS in London.

In 1920 he came to Great Britain. He spoke in churches and halls there, and in Oxford he met the theologian B.H. Streeter. Then he traveled on to the United States and Australia. In 1921 Streeter, together with Appasamy, wrote the book The Sadhu, which presented him as a living mystic. On a journey through Europe in 1920, according to Christian History, he was hailed as a living apostle and saint. An Oxford scholar said that through him they understood Francis and Paul better.

The historian Sumita Mukherjee studied how the British press received him. In her view he also drew people through his appearance and his background. He fit the Western image of the wise man from the East, even though he was a Christian. Those who admired him sometimes looked more at an image than at the man.

When Samuel had to anoint a king, God said to him: *for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7). That was true of Sundar's admirers, and later of his critics as well. Both often saw mainly a robe, a turban and a story.

In 1922 he came back to Europe and visited Palestine. His tour of Switzerland produced many publications, and according to Bornet the organizers were overwhelmed by his appearances. From April 21 to 23, 1922, he was in Uppsala with Archbishop Söderblom, who interpreted for him when he preached in the cathedral. In a letter to Rebecca Parker, Sundar called him a very nice man. Söderblom took him to the grave of Swedenborg in the cathedral, and Sundar said he regretted not having been able to study more of Swedenborg's reports about the other world. In the botanical garden he visibly enjoyed nature. In 1923 Söderblom wrote a book about him and called him in it the Indian apostle of the Master, a visionary around whom remarkable things happen.

Apostle or impostor?

From about 1924 the mood turned. In Germany and Switzerland a fierce debate broke out that became known as the Sadhustreit, the dispute over the sadhu. According to Biehl it involved thousands of pages of testimonies, letters and other material.

On one side stood, among others, some Jesuits. One of them was the Belgian Jesuit Henri Hosten, who worked in Calcutta and Darjeeling and openly turned against Sundar. The other main figure was Oskar Pfister, a Swiss pastor and a student of Freud's psychoanalysis. In 1926 he published Die Legende Sundar Singhs. In it, in Sharpe's rendering, he spoke of "a morbid confusion between fact and fancy." Later he accused Sundar of deliberate untruths about his own life.

On the other side stood the German scholar of religion Friedrich Heiler from Marburg. In 1924 he had described Sundar as a saint like those of the early church. In 1925 he collected documents in a book with the telling title Apostel oder Betrüger?, apostle or impostor? Söderblom, too, took Sundar's side.

In between were milder voices. His friend C.F. Andrews thought the visions came largely from his imagination, and noticed that Sundar later no longer spoke about them. The Swede Tor Andrae thought he was certainly no fraud, but that he experienced reality differently than Westerners did. Sundar himself said, according to Sharpe, that a revelation in ecstasy weighed more heavily with him than the tradition of the church: he went straight to God.

Sharpe, who as a historian of religion wrote a great deal about Sundar, came to a cautious judgment. Sundar's mystical experiences cannot be verified. In his last book, The Riddle of Sadhu Sundar Singh, which appeared in 2004 after Sharpe's death, he showed how Western Christians had each made their own Sundar. For one group

he was a fiery evangelist who died in Tibet. For another, an ideal mystic.

I am not going to give a final verdict here. I cannot. What I do see is this: a man who in his stories sometimes made himself bigger than the facts. And a man who, all the while, for years, poor and with no church behind him, kept on telling people about Jesus.

Paul wrote: *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face* (1 Corinthians 13:12). Sharpe gave his last book about Sundar the title The Riddle. Much about Sundar remains a riddle.

A tired body and the road past Kalka

After 1922 Sundar never went back to the West. He was often ill. He wrote books, usually in Urdu first: Reality and Religion, The Search after Reality, Meditations on Various Aspects of the Spiritual Life, Visions of the Spiritual World and With and Without Christ. Eight books in all, two of which appeared only after his death.

His thinking changed too. According to Sharpe he became fascinated by the writings of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. On November 13, 1928, he asked Söderblom for advice about a book on his conversations with Swedenborg, whom he said he often saw in visions. No answer is known. In 1925 he wrote that a divine spark in the soul cannot be destroyed, and that we therefore need not despair of any sinner, and in 1929 he said that punishment after this life would not be eternal. Many of his evangelical admirers struggled with that.

In 1923 he made his last regular summer journey to what he called Tibet. He came back exhausted. By 1928, according to Sharpe, his health was already poor.

Then, in April 1929, he wrote those last letters. Friends advised him against it. He set out from Subathu, where as a young convert he had cared for leprosy patients. On April 18, 1929, he was seen near Kalka. What happened after that, no one knows. Perhaps he succumbed in the snow or from exhaustion, perhaps he had an accident in the mountains. Some admirers thought he died a martyr in Tibet. There is no evidence at all for that.

According to Sharpe, Sundar thereby disappeared into the glittering darkness of legend. A life that was already full of stories ended without a grave and without a witness.

A child looking for its mother

Sundar Singh founded no church and left no movement behind. He lost his inheritance, his family and, in part of the world, his good name. Sharpe judged that no other Indian Christian had had such an influence, in India and in the West. As recently as 2007 a new collection of his words appeared, Wisdom of the Sadhu.

Perhaps you find the stories about the well and the hermit hard to believe. People who knew him closely had their doubts too. You do not have to believe them to see what is in his books: a man who put prayer above everything and wanted to show his fellow Indians Jesus in a form that was Indian.

He loved to tell parables. In one of them a child is looking for its mother, who has hidden herself, in a garden full of mangoes and flowers. A servant offers it all kinds of things, but the child wants nothing. It cries: "No! I want my mother." When she shows herself, the garden is a paradise.

He was fourteen when he lost his own mother. After that he searched for God. First by the railway line at night, later on the paths of the Himalayas, in a yellow robe, barefoot.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on September 3, 1889, in the Punjab into a Sikh family; the influence of his mother and her death when he was about fourteen; the school of the Presbyterian mission in Ludhiana; his break with his family; his baptism in Simla on September 3, 1905; his life as a Christian sadhu from about 1906; the short training in Lahore (1909-1910); the articles in the Urdu paper and the books by Zahir (1916) and Parker (1918); the journeys through Asia (1918-1919) and to the West (1920 and 1922), including the visit to Söderblom in April 1922 (Sharpe); his eight books; the Sadhustreit from 1924 on, with Pfister, Hosten and Heiler; his departure in April 1929 and his disappearance.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the vision of Jesus in December 1904 (or 1903) and the plan to throw himself in front of the train (Sharpe: the story rests on his own retellings and the first books); the details of the Bible burning; the poisoning by his family; the Gita at age seven; the farewell meal (Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia); the train story with the copper cup, the nine Hindus and the remarks of admirers (Dictionary and Christian History); the two visions in the forest (At the Master's Feet); his first journeys to Afghanistan and Baluchistan; the reason for his departure from Lahore (according to his biographers); the handing back of his preacher's license in 1911; making Christianity Indian as his conscious goal (so his biographers say); his remark about revelation in ecstasy (Sharpe). The words of his prayer and of the voice in the vision come from the life story at CCEL and from the Dictionary, and are retold from them.

Unconfirmed or disputed: his journeys in Tibet (disputed as early as the 1920s; Neill thought he had never been there, Biehl wrote in 2003 that research concluded the journeys did not take place as told;

where he was in those summers, we do not know exactly, and the SOAS archive speaks of journeys and preaching in the mountain regions); the rescue from the dry well; the imprisonment in Ilam (1914); the Maharishi of Kailash (1912); the secret movement of Christian sannyasis; the precise connection with the brotherhood of Samuel Stokes (the link is not explicit in my sources); the exact date of the vision (December 18, 1904, according to Mahendra, December 1903, according to CCEL); the place of his birth (Rampur, one source says Ramnagar); the exact date of his disappearance (most sources say April, one source June 1929); the cause and place of his death.

Interpretation: whether Sundar Singh deliberately exaggerated, sincerely believed what he told, or really experienced supernatural things has never been cleared up. Even in his own day some saw an apostle and others an impostor. Historians today, such as Sharpe and Bornet, mainly show how his admirers and opponents each made their own picture of him.

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John Sung: the doctor who threw his diplomas into the sea

On February 17, 1927, a Chinese student was admitted to Bloomingdale Hospital, a psychiatric institution in White Plains, north of New York City. He was twenty-five. A psychiatrist had examined him, but the doctors were not sure what name to give his condition. His file contains phrases such as paranoid condition and paranoid dementia praecox, the old term for what would later be called schizophrenia. Union Theological Seminary, the school of theology where he had just begun his studies, paid more than seven hundred dollars from an emergency fund for his stay.

A year earlier that student had earned a doctorate in chemistry. His name was Song Shangjie. In America they called him John Sung.

Anyone who saw him in White Plains then would not have believed what became of him. In the twelve years that followed he traveled through China and Southeast Asia, as far as Batavia, Surabaya and Ambon. Historian Daryl Ireland of Boston University writes that in those years he traveled farther, spoke more often and brought more Chinese people to faith than anyone else. His story is also one of the most reworked stories in the history of the Chinese church.

He himself, his missionary friends and his later biographers told it again and again, each in their own way. Since researchers have read his files and diaries, we know more, and sometimes something different.

It began in a parsonage in Fujian.

A boy from Hinghwa

Song Shangjie was born on September 27, 1901, in the village of Hong Chek, near the city of Hinghwa in the Chinese coastal province of Fujian. Today the city is called Putian. He was the sixth child and the fourth son of Sung Xue Lian, a pastor in the Methodist church. At birth he was given the name Zhu En.

China was still ruled by an emperor then. Western mission societies, among them the American Methodists, had founded churches and schools in the coastal provinces. The Song family belonged to that small Christian minority. The Putian dialect was hardly understood outside the region. That would cause him trouble later on.

In 1909, in his father's church, the boy lived through a revival that became known as the Hinghwa Pentecost. It began on Good Friday, with a sermon by the preacher Lim Hongban. He was seven at the time. It touched him, but he was not yet born again. Even as a young boy he wanted to become a pastor, just like his father.

Five and a half years in America

In 1920 he left for the United States. He studied chemistry at Ohio Wesleyan University, a Methodist university, and earned his bachelor's degree in three years. There he became friends with Rollin H. Walker, a Bible teacher. Then he moved on to Ohio State University. In 1924 he earned his master's degree, and in 1926 his doctorate in chemistry.

They were impressive years, and he later liked to talk about them himself. The doctorate is certain: Yale Divinity School, which holds his papers, mentions the Ohio State doctorate from 1926.

Then he chose theology. In 1926 he enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Union was known as a liberal, modernist school. That would matter later in the struggle over his story.

Room 405

What happened inside him in the winter of 1926 to 1927 comes down to us in two versions.

The first is Sung's own. He told how in those weeks he had attended evangelistic meetings, and that he had heard a young evangelist there whom his fellow students found too simple. His conscience spoke. On February 10, 1927, he said, he heard a voice telling him his sins were forgiven. Later he called that day his spiritual birthday. In his own words (my translation), Jesus found him in room 405 of an atheist seminary.

The second version comes from the archives. In 2010 Daryl Ireland tracked down Sung's student file at Union. He also read the diaries Sung kept all his life, some six thousand pages. Out of those sources comes a young man who was seriously ill. He saw visions. He spoke of himself as the prophet of a new age. He believed he could read secret messages in the crossword puzzles of The New York Times. Ireland describes him as a gifted student living with schizophrenia.

Both stories can be true at the same time. A person can meet God and be ill too. What is certain is that Union's leadership was worried. Rollin Walker, his old teacher from Ohio, forwarded a letter from Sung to the seminary. A week after February 10, Sung was admitted.

One hundred ninety-three days

He stayed at Bloomingdale until August 30, 1927, about six and a half months. In Christian tradition the number one hundred ninety-three days has stuck, and it matches the dates in the hospital file.

Sung himself later saw those months as a great misunderstanding. He said they locked him up because he believed too fervently. He told how in there he read the Bible through forty times.

How he got out is told in different ways. A friend, Dr. William Walker, took up his cause. After that he was discharged because Union could no longer pay for his care. He was released into the care of a family named Fowler. Henry Sloane Coffin, the president of Union, refused to let him return. Sung went home.

I find this the hardest part of his story, and also one of the most honest. How would you look at a preacher you knew had spent half a year in a psychiatric institution? Many Christians have preferred to leave that part of his life out. It was about a broken man who went home and had to find his way there.

Over the rail

In the autumn of 1927 he sailed back to China. On that voyage came the story he is best known for. This is how he told it himself later: before the ship reached the Chinese coast, he threw his awards and diplomas overboard. He kept only his doctoral diploma, to give to his father. His savings he gave to his father, his books and clothes to his brother. From then on he wanted to be nothing but a preacher.

The image has stayed with people: a man who let the titles he had worked years for sink into the Pacific Ocean.

Paul wrote about his own background and titles: *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ* (Philippians 3:7). Sung chose the gospel over his titles. In 1928 he was an evangelist.

In December 1927 he married Yu Jin Hua, who was also called Jean. Their parents had arranged the marriage years earlier. He began teaching chemistry and Bible at his old high school in Putian, the Methodist Guthrie Memorial High School. That lasted about a year. In 1928 the Methodist conference of Hinghwa appointed him an evangelist.

A letter from W.B. Cole

In February 1928 W.B. Cole, an American Methodist missionary in Hinghwa, wrote a letter about the young evangelist. It was the first missionary report on what had happened in New York. According to Ireland, his conversations with Cole helped Sung to center his life on Christ again. But Cole also had an aim of his own. He was a fundamentalist and wanted to show how blind Union's liberal theology was. His letter suggested that the seminary had wrongly declared Sung insane.

Union answered with its own version: Sung had already been ill when he came in. So the life of a Chinese student became a stake in an American battle between modernists and fundamentalists. Sung himself told his story in 1933 in the booklet My Testimony, which he dictated to Wang Minxue.

I do not write this to make Sung smaller. Everyone tells their life with a purpose. The question is what remains when you peel away the layers. With Sung, a great deal remains.

Eleven hundred ninety-nine services

In the first years he preached mainly in Fujian. In Xiamen and Fuzhou he spoke English with an interpreter, because his dialect was not understood there. According to Ireland, in the villages he preached about a supernatural God who intervenes in the ordinary world, and he held his message up to the light of both the spiritual life and science.

In 1931 he spoke in Shanghai at a revival meeting of the National Christian Council of China. After that he joined the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band, an evangelistic team of the Bethel Mission in Shanghai. That mission was founded by the American missionary Jennie Hughes and the Chinese doctor Shi Meiyu, who was called Mary Stone in English. The team was led by Andrew Gih. In two years Sung held 1,199 revival services with them, Ireland counts. They traveled from Inner Mongolia in the north to Guangxi in the south.

His services were hot and noisy, writes Ireland. There was singing and confessing, laughing and groaning. He could turn a chapter the room shouted out to him into a sermon on the spot. In 1931 in Shanghai he laid the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 alongside the first seven chapters of John, the phases of church history and his own road with God. He pressed hard on sin. He asked whether anyone had sinned, even in thought, and went through thirty or forty sins in a single sermon, while people raised their hands and wept.

At the end he invited people to come forward. At the front, pastor and layperson, man, woman and child stood side by side and confessed their failures aloud, mostly in tears. He pointed out the faults of church leaders in public. Some hated him for it, but many others bowed down and changed.

In December 1931 he also began to pray for the sick. Ireland sees his faith healing as a third way he offered Chinese people, alongside traditional Chinese medicine and Western hospitals. On a single day he prayed for more than seventeen hundred people, one by one. He never separated healing from salvation: Jesus saves the whole person. The Singapore Free Press later called him prophet, preacher and miracle worker. Strikingly, he himself was never healed of the ailment he had brought back from America.

In 1933 it came to a break. After conflicts with his teammates, Gih among them, and with the two women who led the mission, he had to leave. From 1934 he worked independently, and from then on in Mandarin.

The Lord saves women too

His preaching drew many women. In the cities they worked in department stores, banks and schools and had free time. He said they could use it better than on films and picnics, and he called on them to form evangelistic teams. Each team had a leader, a secretary and a treasurer, and every member was an evangelist. They pooled money for tracts and bus tickets. The Lord saves men, he said, and He saves women too. He called that true equality of man and woman.

Many women saw in this the way to a new life. They took up his call and formed their own teams. Everywhere he went, he set up such teams, and through his work several Bible schools came into being.

In May 1938 Bishop John Gowdy ordained him an elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Xinghua. He remained a Methodist, even long after he had gone his own way.

"Come home"

From late 1935 he also traveled south. The countries south of China were home to large Chinese communities. The first trip lasted two months and took him to Singapore, Malacca and the Dutch East Indies. When he boarded in Singapore in October 1935, about seven hundred people stood weeping on the quay. Up to 1940 he made five such trips, almost two years in all. He went to Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma (now Myanmar), Taiwan and Indonesia.

For a Dutch reader, that last country is special. Indonesia was then the Dutch East Indies, a colony of the Netherlands. Most of its inhabitants were Muslim. Many Chinese lived there, among them the peranakan: Chinese whose families had lived there for generations and who spoke Malay instead of Chinese. They formed the core of the Chinese churches on Java.

Historian Barbara Watson Andaya of the University of Hawai'i has researched Sung's trips to the Indies, using Dutch newspapers as a source. The first time he came to Java it was at the invitation of the Pentecostal community in Soerabaja (now Surabaya). In Batavia, today's Jakarta, a special Chinese committee was formed to invite him. He had to wait six months for his visa for Batavia. When he was finally there, the Chinese church on the Prinsenlaan turned out to be too small. The services moved to the much larger Portuguese Buitenkerk, the Outer Church, where worship was normally held in Malay. That church, built in 1695, still stands and is now called Gereja Sion.

The Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad wrote about it in November 1938 and February 1939, and Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië in August 1939. According to Andaya, the Dutch-language newspapers were unanimously positive. They spoke of a great suc-

cess and an astonishing number of visitors. The colonial government saw no danger in him. Some Dutch missionaries compared his campaigns to the great revival in Wales.

In 1939 Cornelia Baarbé sat in one of his services in Soerabaja. She was a Dutch missionary who worked among the Chinese on Java. She came with doubts and went home an admirer. In 1949 she published her account in the mission magazine Lichtstralen op den akker der wereld. She described how, with a few lines and strokes, he drew the lost sheep on a blackboard: the Lord among the sinners, the grumbling Pharisees, a shepherd and a conceited sheep. During his sermon on the crucifixion, she wrote, it was as if she could hear the hammer blows and see the nails driven in. On Java he kept singing a Malay song whose title means "Come home." About every five minutes he started it up again. In Rangoon people wept at that song.

He preached with means that everyone understood. For pride he drew a big head, for laziness a big belly, and for human powerlessness thin twigs of arms and legs. A listener walked around with a box full of stones, each one a sin, until he walked bent under the weight. Hundreds of people confessed and wept. He threw an old cloth covered with written-out sins at the cross and put a new garment in its place. He held up a dead flashlight, stuffed with paper full of sins, and brought it back to life with batteries. He imitated dandies, boys with cigarettes, girls on high heels and hypocritical believers, and the room shook with laughter.

Jesus told of a son who came home. His father saw him from far off, was moved with compassion, ran to him and kissed him (Luke 15:20). Sung himself had traveled a long road home, from room 405 and Bloomingdale to his parents' house in Hinghwa.

He preached in long white Chinese robes, while most Chinese pastors wore Western suits. When someone asked him about Gandhi, he answered that China did not need Gandhi's teaching. Andaya sees in these choices a man who deliberately presented his message as Chinese.

"Your hearts are so hard!"

On Ambon, in the Moluccas, things went differently. Ever since the days of the Dutch East India Company, Ambon had been a stronghold of the Reformed church. There is an account of this visit from 1940 in The Australian Evangel, an Australian Pentecostal magazine.

According to that account, a Reformed minister threatened to forbid his members to attend the meetings if the sermons did not please him. Sung received threatening letters. The Pentecostal missionaries advised him against using the island's largest Protestant church as a venue, fearing that poor Chinese would not feel at home there. Then another minister paid for a large tabernacle made of atap, dried palm leaves. He borrowed a piano, a blackboard and chairs to go with it.

Three days after arriving, Sung sat down in the middle of a service. He said to those present: "Your hearts are so hard!" He threatened to leave for Makassar.

He stayed. The room came alive, and at his last meeting there were, according to the Pentecostal magazine, about four thousand people.

Sung himself said that of all the places in the Indies, Ambon was the hardest. Even a man with a great name could get frustrated and say so. In Saigon he is said to have spat in his interpreter's face during a little play about an arrest in the Gospels, and in Siam a congregation decided he was no longer allowed to preach.

His call for "all Java for Jesus" was not fulfilled, Andaya writes dryly. But his written-out sermons and songbooks kept circulating, and lay preachers used them for years.

A camp bed in December

Sung was already ill in those years. In America he had developed fistulas, inflammations that would not heal and caused him great pain. He often preached three times a day, two to three hours each time. Sometimes he had to preach sitting or lying down. He held retreats on the whole Bible lasting from ten days to a month. In 1936, according to his own notes, he went through the whole Bible in one month with about two thousand people.

Meanwhile, in 1937, war with Japan broke out, and the work in China became more and more difficult. That was one of the reasons he went south so often, and he spoke of a revival that would travel from India to Africa and then to the West.

In December 1939 he preached for the last time, in Indonesia. He was lying on a camp bed. It was his last sermon. After that he went back to China.

Six thousand pages

He spent his last years in Xiangshan, the Fragrant Hills near Peking. He underwent several operations. His wife and children came over from Shanghai. In 1941 his youngest son, Joshua, died. Sung spent most of his time in bed. Ireland writes that there he learned the quiet ministry of prayer. A short sentence is attributed to him: "Without great tribulation, there is no great illumination."

That sentence resembles what Paul and Barnabas told the young churches: that through many tribulations we must enter the king-

dom of God (Acts 14:22). Sung said it not from a pulpit but from a sickbed.

On August 18, 1944, he died in a small house outside Peking. He was forty-two. The Chinese preacher Wang Mingdao led his funeral. He left behind his wife and children.

He also left behind his diaries. Every evening he wrote down how many people had come and how many had come to faith. They also contain sermons, prayers and lists of people he prayed for. He examined himself constantly and repented anew every day. A daughter published edited versions of the diaries. His daughter Levi kept the papers, and after her death they went to the library of Yale Divinity School. In 2016 Ireland was the first researcher to use the unedited diaries.

How many people came to faith through him, nobody knows. Estimates range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia calls his own counts reliable on the whole, and also notes that Sung admitted he sometimes exaggerated in his sermons.

Perhaps that is why I enjoyed writing this chapter. John Sung was not a saint without cracks. He was ill, sometimes unreasonable, sometimes a man who made his own story more beautiful. And in the Chinese churches of Asia his sermons and songbooks passed from hand to hand for a long time.

In the library at Yale now lie the notebooks in which he wrote down his day, evening after evening. Between the numbers of those who came are his prayers.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on September 27, 1901, near Hinghwa (Putian), Fujian, as the son of a Methodist pastor; studies in the US from 1920 and a doctorate in chemistry from Ohio State in 1926; enrollment at Union Theological Seminary in 1926; admission to Bloomingdale Hospital from February 17 to August 30, 1927 (hospital and seminary archives, via Ireland); return to China in 1927 and marriage to Yu Jin Hua; evangelist of the Methodist conference from 1928; Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band 1931 to 1933 and the break that followed; trips to Southeast Asia 1935 to 1939/1940, including the Dutch East Indies (Soerabaja, Batavia, Ambon), with reports in Dutch East Indies newspapers of 1938 and 1939; services in the Portuguese Outer Church in Batavia; ordination as elder in 1938; illness and bedridden final years; death on August 18, 1944, near Peking; diaries now at Yale Divinity Library.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the voice on February 10, 1927, and the statement about room 405; that he heard a young evangelist (Doyle, Christian History 2008); that his admission was a misunderstanding about his conversion; reading through the Bible forty times in the institution; throwing his diplomas overboard; the figure of two thousand participants in 1936 (his own diary); the description of the services in Soerabaja (eyewitness account by Cornelia Baarbé, published in 1949); the little plays and objects in his sermons and the farewell scene in Singapore (Andaya, via biographers and newspapers); the course of events on Ambon and the figure of four thousand (the Pentecostal magazine The Australian Evangel, 1940); the numbers in his diaries.

Unconfirmed or disputed: whether the doctoral diploma was for his father or his mother (one source says father, the other mother); exactly how he was released from Bloomingdale (the Biographical

Dictionary names the efforts of William Walker, Ireland says Union could no longer pay for his care; he was not discharged cured); the cause of death (Yale names tuberculosis, Ireland and the Biographical Dictionary point to the fistulas); the exact number of children (reference works differ); the number of people who came to faith through him; which cities in the Indies he visited in which year; the exact date of the Hinghwa Pentecost (Good Friday 1909 according to the English Wikipedia). Ireland shows that in his booklet of 1933 Sung moved a vision by a week, to the day of his admission, and that recent research found errors in his own account of his academic results.

Interpretation: historian Daryl Ireland, on the basis of archives and diaries, reads the American years as a period of serious mental illness, after which Sung and missionary W.B. Cole together turned it into a conversion story. Sung himself saw it as his new birth. The two readings do not exclude each other; whether God called him in those months is a question of faith.

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Janani Luwum: the shepherd who stood firm

On Wednesday, February 16, 1977, the archbishop of Uganda stood in Kampala between soldiers and a large crowd. In the hall of the conference center, old Chinese weapons lay on display, and everyone understood what that meant. "Confessions" were read out that day. In them he was named as someone who had smuggled weapons for a coup against President Idi Amin. He was not allowed to answer. According to a report from the Anglican news service, he only shook his head. Soldiers shouted that he should be killed.

Next to him stood Festo Kivengere, bishop of Kigezi in the south-west of the country. To him Janani Luwum whispered a few words that have since been repeated in churches all over the world: "They are going to kill me. I am not afraid."

The other bishops were allowed to leave. Luwum was called back. Kivengere waited outside, until guards sent him away at gunpoint. According to his own book, the bishops drove away at five past five, without him. None of them saw the archbishop alive again.

A day later the radio said he had died in a car accident. That was not true. He had been shot.

In Uganda, Janani Luwum became the first martyr of his church's second century. His country now remembers him every year with a national holiday. In London his statue stands above the West Door of Westminster Abbey. He was a herd boy from the north, a teacher who only truly came to faith at twenty-six, and an archbishop who stood firm when standing firm became dangerous.

His story begins with the cattle, in a village close to the border with what is now South Sudan.

A boy with the herd in Mucwini

Janani Luwum was born in Mucwini, a village in East Acholi, in the north of Uganda. It lies in the present-day district of Kitgum. Most sources give 1922 as his year of birth.

Uganda was a British protectorate at the time, a territory under British rule, and it would remain so until 1962. The Acholi are a people in the north of the country. Christianity was still young there. The first missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, an English Anglican mission organization, had arrived in the south of Uganda in 1877. The north followed later.

Luwum's father was called Eliya Okello. He was one of the first Christians in the region and later became a catechist, a layman who teaches the faith in a village and helps lead the church. The family was poor. As a boy, Janani herded the family's cattle, the cows, goats and sheep. He did not go to school until he was about ten.

He learned quickly. After Gulu High School he went to Boroboro Teacher Training College near Lira. According to the Daily Monitor, he completed that training in 1941 and became a teacher at the primary school in Puranga.

A churchgoer who did not yet believe

Luwum grew up in the church. He knew the hymns and the prayers. His later secretary Margaret Ford, who wrote the first biography of him in 1978, was honest about it. In those years, in her words, he was not yet a converted Christian. His faith was a habit.

A person can sit in a pew for years without it ever reaching their heart.

On January 6, 1948, that changed. An Acholi couple came to his village to preach, Yusto and Josephine Otunno, so the Daily Monitor tells it. They belonged to the East African Revival, a movement that had been spreading through Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania since the 1930s. The people touched by it called themselves balokole: the saved ones. They usually stayed members of their own church, often the Anglican one. They put the emphasis on openly confessing sin, on a personal encounter with Jesus and on bearing witness where everyone could hear.

That day Luwum confessed his sins and gave his life to Jesus. According to Ford, he wept before God and people. The date appears in Ugandan, British and church sources. He was twenty-six.

A teacher who disturbed the peace

What came next was typical of the balokole. Luwum started preaching at once. He warned people against drink and tobacco. The local authorities did not like that. According to Westminster Abbey, the authorities saw his preaching as a disturbance of public order.

The Daily Monitor goes on. According to that newspaper, he was arrested with eight others and held in Kitgum. For two days they were given no food. Luwum is said to have told his guards that he loved them. It fits who he later became.

The Christian History Institute tells that as a young believer he preached from a tree to fellow students, and that he sometimes spoke in tongues there.

His life turned around. In January 1949 he left for the theological school in Buwalasi, in the east of Uganda. At home he left behind his wife Mary, with a young daughter.

A bicycle and twenty-four congregations

In 1950 he came back as a catechist and was attached to St. Philip's Church in Gulu. In 1953 he went to Buwalasi again, this time to train for the ministry. On December 21, 1955, he was ordained deacon, and a year later priest. An Anglican priest is what in a Dutch church would be called a dominee, a minister or pastor.

He was put in charge of a vast area. According to the Episcopal Church in the United States, it covered twenty-four congregations. The Christian History Institute writes that he served a poor rural area some forty miles wide by bicycle. Much of his time went into settling quarrels between groups and tribes.

He could have gone another way as well. According to the same source, he could have been given a leading role in his tribe. He chose the church.

Luwum was twice given the chance to study in England. First a year at St Augustine's College in Canterbury. According to the Daily Monitor, he returned in 1959, to the parish of Palwo near Lira. In 1962 he became vice principal of the school in Buwalasi where he had studied himself. After that he studied at the London College of Divinity. In 1965 he became principal of Buwalasi.

These were the years in which Uganda became independent. In 1962 the British left. In September 1966 Luwum became provincial

secretary of the Church of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga-Zaire. Boga lies in the east of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was a church that stretched across four countries.

In 1968, according to the Daily Monitor, he attended the Lambeth Conference, the gathering of Anglican bishops from all over the world held every ten years, as an adviser.

Bishop in a stadium

On January 25, 1969, Janani Luwum was consecrated in Gulu as bishop of the new diocese of Northern Uganda. The service was held in the open air, in Pece Stadium. Among the guests were President Milton Obote and the army commander Idi Amin. Two years later the one would drive out the other.

As bishop, Luwum worked for leprosy patients in Gulu. He brought a German group to his diocese to train farmers in agriculture, so that the church would also have its own income. He was a practical man. He preached, and he also looked at the harvest. Fellow bishops remembered him as a cheerful man. One of them thought at their first meeting in 1960: this must be a jolly man. For weeks on end he traveled deep into the villages to visit people and preach, and his congregation gave more than any other in the diocese. A colleague wrote in his memoirs that he suffered when his people suffered, and told how Luwum once told the story of a tortured Christian and wept so hard that everyone wept with him. His house was so small that visitors often knocked at his neighbors' doors first, because they did not take it for the house of an archbishop.

On January 25, 1971, Idi Amin seized power in a coup. The German group left. Luwum kept preaching and traveled around to his clergy to encourage them.

A country under the shadow of Amin

Under Idi Amin, Uganda lived in fear. Thousands of people were picked up, beaten, held without trial or killed. The violence fell especially on the Acholi and the Langi, the peoples from the north where Luwum himself came from. In 1972 Amin expelled the Asian population from the country.

Amin came from a largely Muslim people. Even so, it is too simple to call the conflict that followed a struggle between Islam and Christianity. After the raid on Luwum's house, Catholic and Protestant bishops protested together with Muslim imams. Luwum himself brought religious leaders together, Christians and Muslims, to talk about human rights.

In May 1974 he was elected archbishop. On June 9, 1974, he was enthroned, succeeding Erica Sabiti. He was the third archbishop of the province and the second African in that position. Amin did not come to the enthronement. Earlier that year Luwum had told his son that the bishops wanted him as archbishop, and that the work would be hard, especially because of the government.

"I am prepared to die in the army of Jesus"

As archbishop, Luwum wanted to reform his church. He warned it not to conform to what he called the powers of darkness. Westminster Abbey preserves one sentence of his that sets the tone: "I am prepared to die in the army of Jesus."

He was not a man of grand gestures. The Ugandan historians Tom Tuma and Phares Mutibwa described him as a gentle, peaceful and humble man. He often went himself to the State Research Bureau, Amin's notorious secret police, to get prisoners released. People stood in line at his door for help with relatives who were missing or locked up. He turned down offers to flee the country, including

one from the British high commissioner. About his own safety he said: "I face daily being picked up by the soldiers." He would keep on preaching.

Not everyone agreed with his approach. According to the Christian History Institute, some grumbled that he cooperated too much with Amin. Luwum answered that he was not taking the government's side. On the contrary, he was telling the president what the church disapproved of. That is how narrow the road is for a church leader under a dictator. Whoever talks is called an accomplice. So is whoever keeps silent.

I find that a question you cannot quickly brush aside. What would you do, if the only door to the prisoners led through the palace of their tormentor?

A Christmas sermon taken off the air

In August 1976 soldiers stormed Makerere University in Kampala. Luwum chaired the group of Christian leaders who then wrote a memorandum of protest against murder and rape carried out with the knowledge of the government.

At Christmas 1976 he preached on the radio. According to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, he spoke about the victory of Christians through suffering. The broadcast was cut off before he had finished.

Words of his from that time have been preserved in several church sources: "While the opportunity is there, I preach the gospel with all my might, and my conscience is clear before God." He added that he did not know how long he would occupy his chair. He lived as though there would be no tomorrow.

In John's Gospel Jesus says: *I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work* (John 9:4). Luwum did not know how much time he had left, and he preached as long as he could.

Meanwhile his church was preparing a great celebration. In June 1877 the first missionaries of the Church Missionary Society had arrived in Uganda. On June 30, 1977, the Church of Uganda was to celebrate its centenary.

Saturday, February 5, 1977

On February 5, 1977, soldiers raided the archbishop's house in the middle of the night. They said they were looking for weapons. According to the Christian History Institute, they held a gun to his ribs. A Ugandan platform tells that shortly before, a badly wounded man had come to the door for help. They found nothing.

Luwum complained to the president not about the search itself, but about the way it was done: in the middle of the night and with a gun pointed at him.

Three days later, on February 8, almost all the Anglican bishops of Uganda wrote a joint letter to the president. They protested against the raid. They wrote about killings, about people who disappeared, about security services abusing their power. The Dictionary of African Christian Biography calls it the first time the church had addressed the military regime so openly. The bishops also asked for a meeting. On February 12 Luwum delivered the protest.

On February 11, Kivengere tells in his book, Luwum stood in his house before the bishops. He had a text from Mark 6 with him, about the storm on the lake. There are storms and waves, he said, and danger, but I see the way clearly.

On February 14 Amin received him in Entebbe, together with his wife. Amin was cheerful, Kivengere writes, and photographs were taken to refute rumors of an arrest. Luwum denied any involvement in a plot. He was advised to stick to his church work from then on. Later he said he was left with a bad feeling about what he had heard from Amin there. A fellow bishop said later that Luwum had the feeling they had wanted to kill him, and that he still did not want to flee.

"I see God's hand in this"

Two days later, on February 16, the church leaders were summoned to Kampala. There was a large gathering, with soldiers and onlookers. Three men read out confessions in which they named Luwum as a key figure in a plot to smuggle weapons into the country. His family has always denied that accusation. Amin asked the crowd what should be done with the traitors. Soldiers shouted that they should be killed. Kivengere compares that afternoon with the day of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Then Luwum spoke to Kivengere the words that stand at the beginning of this chapter. Other last words have also been handed down. According to the Anglican news service, he said to the bishops as he was led away: "Do not be afraid. I see God's hand in this." The Christian History Institute gives a similar sentence. Perhaps he said both, to different people.

That day two cabinet ministers were also arrested: Erinayo Wilson Oryema and Charles Oboth Ofumbi. They too were Christians. The three were taken to the State Research Bureau. A fellow prisoner tells in his book that Luwum spoke a prayer there before he was taken away. Later the other prisoners heard two shots.

The next morning Radio Uganda reported that the three men had died. They had supposedly tried to overpower the driver of the car they were in, after which the car crashed. No one was allowed to see the bodies.

The story did not hold up. Henry Kyemba, Minister of Health under Amin, wrote in his book *A State of Blood* that the archbishop had been shot. Eyewitnesses said the same. According to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, it happened on Amin's orders. No court has ever established that.

Jesus said: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep* (John 10:11). As a boy Luwum herded cattle in Mucwini. As archbishop he went to the State Research Bureau himself to get prisoners released. He stayed with his people, even when it cost him his life.

A service without a coffin

The church wanted to bury him in Kampala. That was not allowed. The body was not released for a funeral. According to the African platform This is Africa, about four and a half thousand people still came to the cathedral on Namirembe Hill, for a service without a body. According to the Christian History Institute, the preacher was Erica Sabiti, the man Luwum had succeeded as archbishop, and the mourning crowds celebrated the certainty of the resurrection.

His body was taken north, to Mucwini, the village where he was born. According to This is Africa, it arrived there on February 19. He was buried at St. Paul's Church in Mucwini. The Anglican news service writes that Amin's soldiers buried him there.

He left behind his wife Mary Lawinyo and, according to most sources, nine children. Mary died in 2019, at the age of ninety-

three. One of his children remembers that he was not afraid and that he stood up for what is right.

Festo Kivengere expected to be next. He fled the country with his family, partly on foot. Within a year he wrote a book titled *I Love Idi Amin*. In it he asked how, after everything Amin had done, he could do anything less than love him. He wrote that the Holy Spirit showed him that his bitterness brought only spiritual loss, and that he asked for grace to love Amin. It is the voice of the same revival that had touched Luwum in 1948.

Paul wrote: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:21). Kivengere had fled from the same man who had his archbishop killed. Yet he wrote about loving him.

On March 30, 1977, a memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey in London. In Uganda the church did celebrate its centenary in June, led by Luwum's successor Silvanus Wani. According to the minister Geoffrey Byarugaba, it felt more like mourning than celebration. His own church declared Luwum the first martyr of its second century.

In 1979 Tanzanian troops drove out Amin's regime. Amin fled abroad. He was never brought to trial.

I think of the village where Luwum began. As a young man he preached there against drink, and was arrested for it. Almost thirty years later he contradicted a president, and was killed for it. Between those two moments lies a life of cycling, teaching, mediating and visiting. What made the difference between the churchgoer before 1948 and the man in Kampala? He never explained it in grand terms himself. He preached while the opportunity was there.

A statue above the West Door

In July 1998, ten statues of Christian martyrs of the twentieth century were unveiled above the West Door of Westminster Abbey. The statue of Janani Luwum was made by the sculptor Corin Johnson.

In Uganda, February 16 has been a national holiday since 2015. For the first major commemoration that year, John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, was invited to Mucwini to preach. The grave by the church has become a place of pilgrimage.

In Mucwini, by a village church in the north, lies the man who herded cattle there as a boy. In London he stands in stone above the West Door of Westminster Abbey, facing the street.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Mucwini, Acholi; education in Gulu and Boroboro; conversion on January 6, 1948, in the East African Revival; study in Buwalasi from 1949; ordination as deacon on December 21, 1955, and as priest in 1956; study in Canterbury and London; principal of Buwalasi; provincial secretary in September 1966; bishop of Northern Uganda on January 25, 1969; archbishop in 1974; Christmas sermon cut off in 1976; raid on his house on February 5, 1977; the bishops' letter of protest in February 1977; public accusation and arrest on February 16, 1977, together with the ministers Oryema and Oboth Ofumbi; the words to Kivengere; the false statement about a car accident; his death by gunfire; burial in Mucwini; memorial service in Westminster Abbey on March 30, 1977; statue above the West Door since July 1998.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: that he was not yet converted before 1948 and that he wept at his conversion (his biographer Margaret Ford); the names of the preachers Yusto and Josephine Otunno and the name of his father (only the Daily Mon-

itor); the arrest with eight others in Kitgum and his words to the guards (only the Daily Monitor); the preaching from a tree, the speaking in tongues and the bicycle journeys (only the Christian History Institute); the gun to his ribs; the conversation with Amin on February 14 (one source: Kivengere's book, via a German translation that I read); the words about the storm on February 11 (likewise, and freely retold); the last prayer in the State Research Bureau and the two shots (the book of a fellow prisoner, via the Daily Monitor); the wounded man at the door during the raid (This is Africa); colleagues' memories of his humor and his weeping (Daily Monitor, 2018). Kivengere's words about bitterness come from his own book, as Christian History renders them.

Unconfirmed or disputed: his year of birth (1922 or 1924); the exact date of his death (February 16 or 17, 1977: Uganda keeps February 16, the day of his arrest; the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the United States remember him on February 17, the day his death was announced); the place of the gathering on February 16 (a conference center according to Kivengere and the Monitor, a stadium according to Christian History); the date of the protest letter (February 8 according to the news service, February 5 according to another source); the precise last words to the bishops; when his body was given to the family (February 19 according to This is Africa, only weeks later according to the American source); the number of children (most sources say nine, one says five); who gave the order for the killing (a testimony from 1988 names two soldiers; no court has established it). The accusation of arms smuggling was never proven and is rejected by his family and his church.

Interpretation: the criticism that he stood too close to Amin comes from one source and shows how narrow the road was for church leaders under his regime.

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19. Wikipedia, "Janani Luwum" (starting point)

Afterword

A Javanese teacher on a chair of equal height. A woman with bullock carts in the famine years. A prophet with bare feet. A slave who received her freedom in Venice. An elder who prayed before it was light. A sadhu who walked into the mountains and did not come back. A doctor who threw his diplomas into the sea. An archbishop who stood his ground.

They did not know each other. They spoke different languages, belonged to different churches and lived in different times. What they shared was that they did not see the faith as something that belonged to foreigners. They made it their own, in their own language and in their own country, and they often paid a price for it.

With some of them we know less than we would like. Sometimes the sources are scarce, sometimes later admirers made the story more beautiful than it was. I have tried to be honest about that. What remains is still enough to make you quiet.

The second volume tells the story of eight others, from a freed slave who became a bishop to an evangelist from Argentina.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. (Revelation 7:9)