HEROES OF FAITH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

VOLUME 2

From Every Nation

Eight Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America, from Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Luis Palau

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

WIM KAMPHORST

HEROES OF FAITH FROM AROUND THE WORLD · VOLUME 2

From Every Nation

Eight Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America, from Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Luis Palau

WIM KAMPHORST

Contents

Introduction: the multitude grows **2**

Samuel Ajayi Crowther: the boy from the slave ship who became a bishop **4**

Toyohiko Kagawa: the student who moved into the slums on Christmas Eve **24**

Ju Ki-cheol: the pastor who would not bow **41**

Watchman Nee: the night watchman of Shanghai **57**

Bakht Singh: the Sikh who tore up the Bible **74**

Festo Kivengere: the bishop who loved Idi Amin **92**

Óscar Romero: the bishop who spoke the names on Sunday **109**

Luis Palau: the bank clerk who preached to Latin America **126**

Afterword **141**

From Every Nation. Heroes of faith from around the world, volume 2

© 2026 Wim Kamphorst
Stichting (F)Luister Nederland

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or made public without prior written permission from the author.

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: the multitude grows

The first volume of this book told the story of eight people from Asia and Africa. A Javanese teacher, an Indian scholar, a prophet from Liberia, a slave from Sudan, a Korean elder, a sadhu, a Chinese evangelist and an archbishop from Uganda. In this second volume eight more follow, and they come from even more countries.

A boy who was taken off a slave ship and became the first African bishop of his church. A Japanese student who went to live in a slum on Christmas Eve. A Korean pastor who refused to bow at a Japanese shrine. A Chinese writer whose books are read all over the world, while he himself spent twenty years in prison. A Sikh who tore up the Bible and then preached all over India. A bishop from Uganda who wrote a book called *I Love Idi Amin*. An archbishop in El Salvador who read out the names of the dead on Sunday. And a bank clerk from Argentina who would preach to millions.

The same approach

In this volume too, facts come first. After each chapter you will find what is certain, what is known only from someone's own words or from later tradition, and what is uncertain or disputed. The sources are listed.

With some of the people in this volume the story is sensitive. Christians still disagree about Watchman Nee today. Óscar Romero lived in a civil war in which both sides had blood on their hands. Toyohiko Kagawa wrote and said things that also hurt his admirers. I have tried to show those things honestly, without taking sides and without leaving them out. People who follow God remain people.

The eight people in this volume belong to very different churches: Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, evangelical, and congregations they started themselves. Again, the order is that of time.

Of all nations

John saw *a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues* (Revelation 7:9). It is good to remember that this multitude does not begin with us. When these people lived, many in Europe and America looked down on them, also in the church. Now we read their stories. Perhaps we learn more from them than we expected.

Samuel Ajayi Crowther: the boy from the slave ship who became a bishop

On August 21, 1846, in Abeokuta, in the west of present-day Nigeria, an older woman came to the missionaries with one of her sons. She was looking for her other child. She had not seen him for about twenty-five years. When she lost him, he was a boy of around thirteen. Now he was an Anglican minister with an English name.

In his journal he wrote down what happened. On the page for that day, the Bible calendar he used gave a verse about God as a helper of the fatherless (Psalm 10:14). He wrote that he felt that verse deeply that day. His mother came, and when she saw him, she trembled and could not believe her eyes. She trembled as she held his hand, he noted, and I give his words here in my own rendering. A crowd stood around them. They did not say much. They sat quietly side by side, the tears running down her thin cheeks, and they looked at each other.

The man's name was Samuel Ajayi Crowther. As a child he had been captured and sold, and a British warship had set him free. He became the first African bishop of the Anglican Church in modern times. He translated large parts of the Bible into Yoruba, his mother

tongue, and year after year he traveled up the Niger River to plant new congregations. At the end of his life, young European missionaries took his work out of his hands. The British historian Andrew Walls called him probably the best-known African Christian of the nineteenth century.

The woman in Abeokuta was called Afala. A few years later she would be baptized, taking the name Hannah. To understand why that reunion meant so much, we have to go back to a town called Osogun, and to a morning when everyone was still going about their work.

The morning Osogun burned

Ajayi was born around 1807 in Osogun, in Yorubaland, near present-day Ado-Awaye in the Nigerian state of Oyo. His father was a farmer and weaver. His mother was Afala. Nobody knows the exact year of his birth, because his people kept no birth registers. Andrew Walls settles on about 1807, other sources give 1809 or 1810.

The Yoruba were a large people with their own kingdoms, cities and markets. In those years the mighty empire of Oyo was falling apart. War was being waged all over the land, and war meant captives. Whoever was captured could be sold. On the coast European traders stood ready, mostly Portuguese, to buy people for the plantations on the other side of the ocean.

Around 1821 the violence of war reached Osogun. We know this from Crowther's own pen. In 1837 he wrote a long letter from Freetown to Williams Jowett, the secretary of the Church Missionary Society. In it he tells about that day. It was a calm morning, and the people were going about their work. Around nine o'clock a rumor spread that enemies were approaching. The town had a wooden

fence, but the men were taken by surprise and thrown into confusion. After three or four hours Osogun fell. According to Walls, the attackers were Fulani and Muslims from Oyo.

Women ran through thorn bushes that tore the loads from their heads. Those who were captured got a rope around the neck and were led away, tied together the way you tie goats. Ajayi was taken captive with his mother, with two sisters, one of them only ten months old, and with a cousin. He had lost his bow in the bushes and had only his arrows left. He saw his father for the last time when he came from the fighting and gave them a sign to flee. Later Ajayi heard that he had fallen in a later battle.

The town was set on fire. In his letter Crowther says farewell to the place he calls the playground of his childhood. He had thought he would die there and be buried there. Among the people he caught one more glimpse of his grandmother, and then she was gone from his sight. Anyone who could not keep up was threatened with death. In another passage he calls it a most sorrowful scene imaginable.

Sold six times

After a march of about thirty kilometers (about nineteen miles), the captives reached Iseyin, where the first night of captivity fell. There they were divided up. Within a short time Ajayi was passed from hand to hand, and a Nigerian biography tells that somewhere along the way he was traded for a horse. That deal fell through. He ended up in Dada, where he found his mother and his little sister again. They were allowed to stay together for about three months. He never saw his little sister again.

Then, while running an errand, he was seized once more and taken to the market of Ijaye. A Muslim woman bought him and took him

toward the coast, where the Portuguese were buying. On the way he fell ill. In his letter Crowther writes that he thought of taking his own life. His first biographer, Jesse Page, tells that the boy tried to strangle himself with his belt, and that his courage failed him as he held the noose.

He changed owners six times. On the road along Ijebu he was traded for tobacco and liquor. At the market of Ikosi he was put in a canoe at night. In Lagos, on the coast, he arrived around four o'clock in the morning. There two cousins of his came to see him. He was sold to Portuguese traders, who kept him in chains for about four months. Page writes that the buyer looked him over the way you look over a horse.

A ship that never arrived

In April 1822 the Portuguese ship lay ready to sail. About one hundred and eighty-seven people were on board. It never arrived.

Great Britain was fighting the slave trade with warships off the African coast. Two of them hunted the slave ship: the Myrmidon, under Captain Henry Leeke, and the Iphigenia. According to Crowther's letter, it happened on April 7, 1822. The British sailors came aboard and brought the prisoners out. Page tells, without naming a source, that the freed people thought the pig hanging in the rigging was a human body, and they took the cannonballs for the heads of their companions.

Of the ships carrying the freed people, one ran aground on a sandbank, after which everyone on board was rescued, and another was lost in a storm. According to Page, one hundred and two people died there. Crowther and five other boys stayed together on the Myrmidon, so that they would not be torn apart again. The sailors gave them clothes. When the Portuguese owner was

brought aboard in chains, Crowther struck him on the head. In his letter he himself calls that bad and unkind.

On June 17, 1822, the ships arrived in Freetown, the capital of the British colony of Sierra Leone. There the navy put the freed people ashore. The Church Missionary Society, the CMS, a mission society of the Church of England, had schools there. Ajayi ended up with Thomas Davey in Bathurst. He was thirteen or fourteen. He did not know whether his mother was still alive.

They told the boys they were free, and according to Crowther they soon believed it. A few days later they had to testify against their former owner in Freetown. They refused, until they were forced with the lash. That evening Crowther went back to Bathurst. He calls that a relief.

A new name, an open heart

About the years that followed he writes with a warmth you rarely find in the rest of his letters. Within six months he was reading the New Testament. Page tells that after his first day at school little Ajayi bought an alphabet card for half a penny, just for himself, and that he became a monitor with a small monthly wage. In his letter Crowther writes that the Lord opened his heart. He learned to see himself as a sinner seeking forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

In the end he considered the day of his capture a blessed one, even though he grieved for his father, mother, sister and other family. He wrote about the goodness of Providence toward him, and about his wish to serve Christ. Serving, he called perfect freedom. The word comes from a man who had lain in chains as a boy.

On December 11, 1825, John Raban, a CMS missionary, baptized him. He was given the name Samuel Crowther, after an English clergyman who was involved with the society. He learned quickly.

Raban used him as a language helper and between 1828 and 1830 published three small books on Yoruba. It was the beginning of a life's work, though no one knew it yet.

In 1827 the CMS opened a training institution in Freetown, later known as Fourah Bay College. Crowther was one of its first students. According to Rochester Cathedral, he started there on Christmas Day 1827. Two years later, on September 21, 1829, he married Asano. She too had been freed from a slave ship. At her baptism she was given the name Susan Thompson. They stayed married for about fifty years and had six children. Crowther became a schoolteacher, and later a tutor at the school where he himself had sat in the benches. Page writes that he had a gift for languages and a good hand in dealing with chiefs.

Malaria on the river

In 1841 a large expedition set out from England for the Niger, the river that flows right through present-day Nigeria. The plan came from Thomas Fowell Buxton, a British politician who fought against slavery. He believed that Christianity and honest trade together could replace the slave trade. The CMS sent two men along: the German missionary J.F. Schön and Samuel Crowther.

In Sierra Leone Crowther left behind his wife, who was about to give birth, and four children. Page tells that he wept quietly as he packed his chests, before the ship left on July 1. Later he said that he considered Sierra Leone the happiest time of his life, because there he had come to know Christ.

The journey became a disaster. Most of the Europeans caught malaria, and about forty of them died. On the river Crowther met a Yoruba boy of about thirteen who had almost lost his own language. Crowther survived the illness and, together with Schön,

cared for the sick and the dying. The leaders of the CMS saw the difference. Anyone who wanted to bring the gospel into the interior of West Africa would need Africans.

Crowther was sent to London for training. On June 11, 1843, the Bishop of London ordained him a deacon, and on October 1 of the same year a priest. With that ordination, Walls writes, Sierra Leone's own African ministry began. That same year his Yoruba vocabulary was published. Christian History writes that he soon began leading the liturgy in Yoruba. Probably it was the first time such a service was held in an African language.

Home in Abeokuta

In 1846 Crowther went to Abeokuta with the English missionary Henry Townsend. Abeokuta was the city of the Egba, the Yoruba group to which Crowther himself belonged. It was founded by refugees from the Fulani wars and lies beneath a great rock, Olumo. Its name means: under the stone. They arrived on August 3. Three weeks later his mother stood in front of him.

His two sisters, the two girls who had been captured together with him, turned out to be living in a village nearby, with their mother, with children of their own. His brother had come along with his mother. Crowther writes that she called him by his childhood name, the name his grandmother used to use. His grandmother had meanwhile died in slavery. He describes the reunion without big words: they could not say much. The affection, he writes, had almost been put out by the years of oppression. Now they looked at each other.

According to Walls, his mother and one of his sisters were among the first to be baptized in Abeokuta. Another source says that happened in 1848. Her son was the one who told her the gospel.

What moves me about that journal entry is how bare it is. No prayer, no explanation. A mother who trembles and a son who lets her hold his hand. I think Crowther knew there were no words for what had happened in those twenty-five years. He closed the day with a sentence about God, who had turned their sorrow into joy.

The story is like that of Joseph, who was sold as a slave by his brothers. Years later he said to them: *But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good* (Genesis 50:20). That does not make the evil any smaller. In Abeokuta a mother heard the gospel from the son who had once been torn away from her.

Have you ever seen someone again whom you had already given up? Then perhaps you know something of what happened that day in Abeokuta.

The Lord's Prayer at Windsor

In 1851 Crowther traveled to London to speak up for Abeokuta. He talked with government ministers, among them Lord Palmerston, and was received by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. A Nigerian biography tells that he explained to them with maps what West Africa looked like, especially Abeokuta and Sierra Leone, and that at the queen's request he prayed the Lord's Prayer in Yoruba. Henry Venn, the secretary of the CMS, was convinced that Crowther's visit had set the British government in motion.

Venn became the most important ally of his life. He had a clear goal. Mission churches had to stand on their own feet as soon as possible: govern themselves, support themselves and carry the gospel further themselves. After that, the missionary was supposed to leave. For Venn, Crowther was the proof that it could be done.

Meanwhile Crowther kept working on his translation. In 1852 a Yoruba grammar appeared, along with translations of Luke, Acts,

James and 1 Peter. He worked together with an African colleague, Thomas King. Walls points to a choice that was ahead of its time. Yoruba is a tonal language: the same word means something different when you say it higher or lower. Crowther wanted the translation to mark those tones. His approach became a model for later Bible translations in Africa.

In 1862 his house burned down. Eleven years of notes on Yoruba proverbs and part of his translated manuscripts went up in flames. He started again.

An Arabic Bible in Gbebe

In 1854 Crowther went up the Niger again, with an expedition paid for by the British shipowner McGregor Laird. This time the crew used quinine against malaria, and according to Christian History no one died. Crowther had himself suggested towing fuel in canoes behind the ship, to limit the fever. On the way he spoke with the new king of Aboh, Tshukuma, who told him that his words were too good to be true. On that journey he wrote in his journal how the Fulani tricked the people of the village of Pandu into their hands and made the survivors slaves. It was what he had gone through himself as a boy.

In 1857 the next journey followed, on the ship Dayspring. Venn gave Crowther a commission: a mission along the Niger, carried entirely by Africans. Most of the helpers came from Sierra Leone.

In Onitsha, in the land of the Igbo, King Akazua received them. He put the plan before his counselors and his people, and the group was given land to build on. One day Simon Jonas, one of Crowther's helpers, heard that a slave woman was going to be killed to honor a dead relative. The group spoke to the chief about it in the square. He said he had not known it was wrong, and proposed an ox in

place of the woman. Crowther refused to buy the woman. He said, so the report has it, that they were not slave traders. The woman was released. The African minister J.C. Taylor stayed behind to begin the mission.

Farther upstream, in Gbebe, Crowther sat in the front hall of the Galadima, one of the leaders of the town, where people gathered. He taught from an Igbo primer and read John 3 aloud in Hausa. The Galadima could read Arabic and asked whether he could learn Hausa in Roman letters. Crowther gave him an Arabic Bible. The man was so moved that he almost threw dust on his forehead, the gesture with which Muslims honor someone. An interpreter stopped him. In his journal Crowther prayed that the Lord would bless this small and feeble beginning. Soon afterward the Dayspring struck a rock near Rabba and sank. While a heavy storm broke, the group built a tent of mats to save what could be saved. When they went on overland, a man in a crowd of warriors called out to them in English: *Good morning, sir!* It was Henry George, a former Sunday school pupil from Abeokuta who had ended up in the army of a warlord. Crowther took him on as a guide.

Many Muslims lived along the middle Niger. Crowther did not debate with them in order to win. During Ramadan they asked him again and again whether Christians did not fast. He answered that Christian fasting is private and known only to God, just like prayer. Listeners would then often say that the Christians were sincere and that their religion was better. He looked for what the Bible and the Qur'an had in common, such as the figures who appear in both books. Walls describes how careful he was in handing out Arabic Bibles, because they were sometimes used as amulets. He wrote that the Bible, the sword of the Spirit, must fight its own battle. The

image comes from Paul: *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17).

When envoys of the king of Nupe came later, Crowther explained the gospel with what stood on the mission station. He called the cotton machines guns, the cotton gunpowder and the cowries bullets. So it stands in Page. In Gbebe he later baptized eight adults and a baby in a small clay chapel. He wrote that he had taken courage.

"Will you refuse me my last wish?"

In 1864 Venn wanted to go a step further. The African church should have an African bishop, he thought, and it should be Crowther. Crowther refused. Walls calls him a truly humble man. Rochester Cathedral tells that he called himself unworthy.

A saying of Venn's circulates about the conversation between the two men. He is supposed to have asked, in words I render loosely, whether his son Samuel Ajayi would refuse him his last wish before he died. The Nigerian biographer Owodayo tells that Crowther, in his haste to get to London, even forgot his clean clothes, that Venn kept pressing, and that Crowther wept and then said yes. I have not found an account from 1864 for it. It is a story that has been handed down, and that is why I tell it as one.

Not everyone was enthusiastic. Henry Townsend, with whom Crowther had gone to Abeokuta, opposed an African bishop. Venn pressed on.

On June 29, 1864, Archbishop Charles Longley consecrated Samuel Ajayi Crowther bishop in Canterbury Cathedral, on St. Peter's Day. Page writes that many of those present were moved to tears as they remembered his childhood as a slave. Three bishops were consecrated that day, and people filled every aisle. His title was bishop of the countries of West Africa beyond the territory of the British

queen. He was sent to peoples where Britain had no authority yet. That same year the University of Oxford gave him an honorary doctorate in divinity.

A man who as a child had been sold six times now stood in one of the oldest churches in England, with the archbishop's hands on his head.

In Hannah's prayer it says: *He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes* (1 Samuel 2:8). Crowther called himself unworthy. He was called.

At the annual meeting of the CMS in Exeter Hall he later spoke himself. He told of a journey in a railway compartment, where a man ridiculed the missionaries. He said in his own words that he wanted to introduce himself to the hall as a fruit of the labor of missionaries. Page calls the speech simple, straightforward and convincing.

Bonny and the river

As bishop, Crowther traveled up and down the Niger again and again. His diocese had no borders on a map. It consisted of stations on the river and in the delta, each with a few African ministers, catechists and teachers.

An important place became Bonny, a trading town in the Niger Delta. According to a Nigerian biography, the leaders of Bonny renounced their idols on Easter Day 1867, and a young Christian, Joshua Hart, was killed there because he refused to take part in the old rituals. Walls names Bonny as one of the most important places of his work, but without those details. Page describes Bonny years later: the church was full twice every Sunday, the captain who had persecuted the Christians confessed on his deathbed that the gods did not exist, and a schoolmaster reported to the bishop that Bonny had become a Bethel, a house of God. When Crowther came to visit,

people walked along the beach to the church, even when the water stood knee-deep. When he named the villages whose people had sent messages, listeners who had themselves been taken from there and sold smiled and nodded.

That same year a local leader, Abokko, held Crowther and his son Dandeson for days, according to Owodayo. They were kept outside, stripped of their clothes, and he demanded a ransom. The British consul did not want to pay it, because it would breathe new life into the slave trade. They were freed by force. A poisoned arrow struck the consul, who died on the way. I have found that story in only one source.

Dandeson was ordained a priest in 1870 and later became archdeacon of the delta. In 1878 the CMS bishop was given his own ship, which bore the name Henry Venn. In 1880 the Royal Geographical Society honored him with a gold watch for his exploration along the Niger. He wrote the first book on the Igbo language and worked on Nupe.

On October 19, 1880, Susan died, after about fifty years of marriage. According to Owodayo, Crowther had been away on a long journey on the upper Niger. When he came home, she was ill, and she died in his arms.

A commission he was not allowed to read

Henry Venn had died. In London other people took the helm, with other ideas. Walls points to a change in mission policy and in thinking about race.

Complaints came in about the conduct of some African workers in the Niger Mission. Some of those complaints were justified. Crowther himself had warned for years that many of his helpers were poorly trained and that he lacked the means to guide them.

In 1881 he met with CMS delegates on Madeira. Control over the mission's money went to a committee, and an investigation into his workers followed. According to Christian History and an African biographical dictionary, Crowther did not get to see the report before it went to London. In 1883 the first African workers were dismissed.

Honesty also requires this: according to the Nigerian church historian F. Anyika, Crowther supported the arrival of European missionaries and stricter supervision in those years.

In October 1883 his mother died, according to Owodayo at the age of ninety-seven, while he was on his way on the Niger. According to him, she had once told him that he was no longer her son, but a servant of God. That is found in only one source.

Onitsha, 1890

In 1887 John Alfred Robinson became CMS secretary for the Niger. In 1889 he came under the influence of Graham Wilmot Brooke, a young Englishman with great ideals. Brooke was about twenty-five when the CMS put him in charge of a group of new missionaries. Early in 1890 they left for the Niger.

These young men wanted a pure church. They saw sin wherever they thought they saw it, and they had little regard for culture and age, writes the historian Peter Williams. In 1890 it came to a confrontation in Onitsha, with the bishop and the leading African ministers. Robinson wrote a report that the Dictionary of African Christian Biography calls harsh and one-sided. In August 1890 the new secretary, F.N. Eden, dismissed or suspended a series of African ministers, in the presence of Crowther himself. Dandeson was suspended too. Crowther publicly distanced himself from that decision.

Crowther was over eighty. He resigned in protest in 1890, write Brockman and Rochester Cathedral. Exactly which positions he laid down differs from source to source. What is certain is that the work of a lifetime was taken out of his hands in a short time.

I do not want to make one group holy and the other bad here. Brooke was young and was given a task too big for him, writes Williams, and he lays much of the blame on the CMS in London. Robinson died of meningitis in Lokoja in 1891, Brooke shortly afterward of blackwater fever. One of the young missionaries from that group, H.H. Dobinson, later regretted his hasty judgments, writes Walls.

Crowther saw his life's work pass into the hands of men who could have been his grandchildren.

Paul wrote to the young Timothy: *Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father* (1 Timothy 5:1). Dobinson later saw that he had judged too hastily. By then the work on the Niger had already been taken out of Crowther's hands.

The last day of the year

According to Owodayo, on May 8, 1891, Crowther wrote a plan for an independent church in the Niger Delta. In September 1891 he suffered a stroke. After that he could hardly move or speak. On Christmas Day he went to church one last time, Christ Church in Lagos.

He died on December 31, 1891, in Lagos, in the night, at about a quarter to one. Walls describes him in those last months as a desolate, broken man. On January 1, 1892, he was buried. Many people came. The CMS wrote that the world had become poorer.

His successor was an Englishman, Joseph Sidney Hill, who arrived in Nigeria at the end of 1893.

In April 1892 the congregations in the Niger Delta decided not to go along with the European takeover. Under the leadership of Dandeson Crowther they continued as the Niger Delta Pastorate, a church that governed and supported itself, outside the CMS. It was what Henry Venn had once envisioned. Walls writes that the way Crowther was pushed aside played a part in the rise of the independent African churches that later sprang up all over West Africa.

Prayers in Canterbury

In July 2014, a hundred and fifty years after his consecration, a service was held in Canterbury Cathedral. Thanks were given for his life, and prayers were said asking for forgiveness. In his sermon the Archbishop of Canterbury called him the apostle of Nigeria, a man who had been betrayed, let down and undermined by his own church.

I often think of the boy on that Portuguese ship. He was on his way to the other side of the ocean. Then another ship came. He was set free, received a new name and learned to read. Later he translated the words of Jesus for his own people, with the tones marked, so that they could hear them as they were meant.

His translation proved lasting, writes Walls. In Abeokuta a mother once sat beside her son. They said nothing. She held his hand.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Osogun in Yoruba-land, around 1807 to 1810; capture around 1821 and six changes of owner; liberation by the British navy in April 1822 (Myrmidon, Cap-

tain Henry Leeke) and arrival in Sierra Leone in June 1822; baptism on December 11, 1825, by John Raban; one of the first students at Fourah Bay; marriage to Asano (Susan Thompson); the Niger expedition of 1841; ordination as deacon and priest in 1843; arrival in Abeokuta in 1846 and reunion with his mother; visit to Queen Victoria in 1851; translation work in Yoruba with tones; the expeditions of 1854 and 1857; consecration as bishop in Canterbury in 1864; Henry Townsend's opposition; the takeover of the Niger Mission by European missionaries and the confrontation in Onitsha in 1890; his resignation in 1890; stroke and death on December 31, 1891, in Lagos; English successor; the Niger Delta Pastorate from 1892; the service in Canterbury in 2014.

From his own letters and journals: the letter of February 22, 1837, to Williams Jowett about the raid, the march, the sales, the years in Lagos, the rescue and his conversion (via Nigerian reprints of the letter; I was not able to see the original text myself); the journal about the reunion with his mother on August 21, 1846 (via Page); the prayer in Gbebe; the decision not to buy the slave woman in Onitsha; the description of the fasting question during Ramadan; the speech in Exeter Hall (via Page); his words about the Bible as the sword of the Spirit (via Walls).

Only from later tradition or hagiography: the trade for a horse near Iseyin; the attempt at suicide (Page and Owodayo; in the letter he mentions only the thought); the scene with the pig and the cannonballs on the slave ship (Page); the school scene with the alphabet card (Page); the Lord's Prayer in Yoruba for the queen (Owodayo); Venn's saying about his "last wish" and Crowther's forgotten clothes (Owodayo); the conversion of the leaders of Bonny on Easter Day 1867 and the death of Joshua Hart (Owodayo; Page mentions a Captain Hart who renounced his idols on his deathbed, who may be a different man); the hostage-taking of 1867; the last words

of his mother and her age; the plan of May 8, 1891; the last visit to church on Christmas Day and the hour of death.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one reading each time):

- *Year of birth.* About 1807 (Walls), 1809 (Rochester, after Crowther himself) or 1810 (Owodayo).
- *Year of the raid.* 1820 (Walls), 1821 (Christian History and his letter).
- *Liberation.* April 1822; as the date of landing in Freetown, Rochester gives June 1822, the letter June 17.
- *The ship.* The name Esperanza Felix appears only in Christian History. In his letter Crowther speaks of about 187 people on board. Owodayo gives 189 and one hundred and two dead, Page one hundred and two lost slaves.
- *Baptism of his mother.* Walls names her among the first to be baptized in Abeokuta, Brockman gives 1848. Owodayo writes that she was already found in 1845 and that a daughter paid a ransom of four pounds and ten shillings.
- *Date of the consecration as bishop.* June 29, 1864 according to most sources, June 24 according to Rochester.
- *Complete Yoruba Bible.* Only Wikipedia mentions the 1880s.
- *His resignation in 1890.* Which positions he laid down differs from source to source.

Unconfirmed: the name of the slave ship; the complete Yoruba Bible in the 1880s; what exactly was said in Onitsha in 1890.

Interpretation: historians differ on the weight of the complaints against Crowther's workers. Some were justified, and Crowther himself admitted that his helpers had too little training. That the young missionaries sidelined him, and that racial ideas played

a part in it, is widely acknowledged, including by the Anglican Church itself.

Sources for this chapter

1. Andrew F. Walls, "Crowther, Samuel Adjai (or Ajayi)", Boston University History of Missiology
2. Andrew F. Walls, "Samuel Ajayi Crowther 1807-1891: Foremost African Christian of the Nineteenth Century", Dictionary of African Christian Biography
3. Andrew F. Walls, Dictionary of African Christian Biography (from Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions)
4. Mark R. Lipschutz en R. Kent Rasmussen, Dictionary of African Christian Biography
5. CMS Register of Missionaries, Dictionary of African Christian Biography
6. M.O. Owodayo, "Crowther, Samuel Ajayi", Dictionary of African Christian Biography
7. Norbert C. Brockman, Dictionary of African Christian Biography
8. Ted Olsen, "Bishop Before His Time", Christian History 79 (2003)
9. Jesse Page, Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger, chapter 1 (Project Canterbury)
10. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 2 (Project Canterbury)
11. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 3 (Project Canterbury)
12. Jesse Page, same book, chapters 4 and 5 (Project Canterbury)
13. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 6 (Project Canterbury)
14. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 7 (Project Canterbury)
15. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 8 (Project Canterbury)
16. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 9 (Project Canterbury)
17. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 10 (Project Canterbury)
18. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 11 (Project Canterbury)

19. Jesse Page, same book, chapter 12 (Project Canterbury)
20. Sarah Tucker, Abbeokuta; or Sunrise within the Tropics (1854), Project Canterbury
21. Crowther's letter of 1837 to Williams Jowett, in a Nigerian reprint (The News Nigeria)
22. Crowther's letter of 1837, summarized in Church Times Nigeria (after J.F. Ade Ajayi)
23. Rochester Cathedral, "Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther"
24. Peter Williams, "Brooke, Graham Wilmot", Dictionary of African Christian Biography
25. "Robinson, John Alfred", Dictionary of African Christian Biography
26. "Crowther, Dandeson Coates", Dictionary of African Christian Biography
27. F. Anyika, "Prelude to White Domination of the C.M.S. Niger Mission", Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology
28. Anglican Communion News Service, "Canterbury remembers Crowther", 4 juli 2014

Toyohiko Kagawa: the student who moved into the slums on Christmas Eve

On Christmas Eve 1909, a twenty-one-year-old theology student moved to Shinkawa, the poorest district of the Japanese port city of Kobe. Shortly before, he had been seriously ill. He had preached until he collapsed, with pneumonia brought on by tuberculosis. He had recovered, and now he went to live where no one chose to live.

His lodging was a small shed. He shared it with people who had nowhere else to go, and he fed them from the small allowance he received as a student. According to one later biographer, some 7,500 people lived in the district. According to another source, it was ten thousand. The little houses, his biographers tell us, were no bigger than about six and a half feet by six and a half feet. For years it would be his home.

That student's name was Toyohiko Kagawa. He became the best-known Japanese Christian of his century. He wrote bestsellers, founded labor unions and cooperatives, went to prison and spoke to packed halls in America. American churches named him in the

same breath as Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer. After his death he was given a statue in the cathedral in Washington.

He also left words behind that later shocked his own followers. This chapter tells both. It begins with a boy without parents.

A son of the concubine

Toyohiko Kagawa was born on July 10, 1888, in Kobe. His father, Junichi Kagawa, was a wealthy businessman. His mother, Kame, was not his father's wife. She was a concubine. By the time Toyohiko was four, his father and mother had both died.

In those years Japan was a country in a hurry. After centuries of isolation it had opened itself to the West in 1868, under Emperor Meiji. The country built factories, railways and a navy. Christianity had only been permitted again since 1873, after almost three centuries of persecution. Anyone who became a Christian was choosing what many Japanese saw as a Western religion.

The boy grew up with relatives in his father's family home, where an uncle was in charge. His biographers describe the years after his parents' death as lonely. One of them tells that he sought comfort in the bamboo forest and by the river. That comes from retelling. I have not been able to see his own account of those years.

A Bible class to learn English

As a teenager, Toyohiko went to a Bible class run by two American missionaries of the Southern Presbyterian Church, Harry W. Myers and Charles A. Logan. He came mainly to learn English. They took him into their home. According to Plough, he later said that it was there he first woke up to the feeling that he was alive. He read Ruskin and Tolstoy, and the Bible. His biographers tell that the missionaries gave him an English Gospel of Luke, and that after

reading it he prayed: God, make me like Christ. That prayer comes from retellings of his life and not from a source I opened myself.

What drew him to faith, he told himself. He had read in a book, he said, that a man called Christ went around doing good. That picture comes from the Bible, from Peter's sermon in the house of Cornelius, about Jesus, *who went about doing good* (Acts 10:38). It became the thread running through his life.

On February 14, 1904, Myers baptized him in the church at Tokushima, on the island of Shikoku. He was fifteen. When he made it known that he wanted to become a minister, his uncle cast him out of the family. From then on, the missionaries supported him. The Christian History Institute tells that he worked as a servant to finish school.

I pause here for a moment, because the story grows so large later on. At the beginning stands a fifteen-year-old boy who loses his family and his inheritance over a baptism. What would you have done, if believing cost you your family?

A sick student by the sea

Toyohiko studied at Meiji Gakuin in Tokyo, a Presbyterian college, and then at the theological seminary in Kobe. His lungs were weak. The Christian History Institute tells that he fell ill with tuberculosis and lived for a time among farmers on the coast. There, so the account goes, he saw how hidden sin made people's homes unhappy. On that experience he based a novel, which he could not get rid of and set aside. Later it would become his best-known book.

In 1909 he collapsed after preaching. After his recovery came the move to Shinkawa that Christmas Eve. Friends begged him not to do it. He expected to die there, the Christian History Institute tells, and his health actually improved.

Among the homeless of Shinkawa

He did not come as a visitor. He took people into his home and preached in the streets. The district was home to thieves, murderers and prostitutes, the Christian History Institute writes, and whole families shared a few mats, with no privacy. One of the men he took in was, according to one of his biographers, a murderer who could only sleep when he held Kagawa's hand. Another story tells of people who demanded money or clothes and made threats if they did not get them, and of the husband of a prostitute who worked against his help, because it reduced the family's income. I cannot tie those stories to a document. They are passed on, and they fit what we know of his first years.

He caught trachoma there, a contagious eye disease that troubled him for the rest of his life. Around 1910 he started a small group, which he called Kyūrei Dan, the Salvation Band. He lived, the Christian History Institute writes, on the equivalent of a dollar and a half a month.

In Shinkawa he came to an insight that Plough sums up like this. Personal charity alone was not enough. How do people regain the will to care for themselves? How do you change the economy, so that people can live? How do you keep families together, so that children do not grow up without love?

Jesus said: *Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me* (Matthew 25:40). In Shinkawa that had an address: a small shed he shared with people who had nowhere else to go.

In 1913 he married Haru Shiba. She shared his work wholeheartedly, Plough writes. The sources I read say little about her own life, and I will not fill it in.

A novel about the death line

Back in Kobe, Kagawa wrote a novel about his years in the slums: *Shisen o koete*, across the death line. In Dutch the title has been rendered as *Voorbij de grens van de dood*, which means "Beyond the Border of Death." In English it appeared as *Across the Death Line* and later as *Before the Dawn*. The English translators write in their 1924 preface that he began the book long before, and that he added the part about the slums later, at the request of his publisher.

The book appeared in 1920 and became a bestseller. On exactly how it came about, the sources differ: Britannica writes that he wrote his first novels in prison in 1921 and 1922. An article in Japan Harvest speaks of a million copies sold; I have not found that figure confirmed anywhere else. The Christian History Institute tells that the proceeds went to the poor.

In the book the main character is called Eiichi. He closely resembles the author, and the book is generally called autobiographical. It takes the reader into the little houses of Shinkawa. There is a scene in which Eiichi pawns his own winter clothes to pay for the funeral of a starved child, then holds a Christian service himself and weeps at the crematorium. In another chapter he prays for a man who could not stand, and the man walks again. This is a novel. I do not tell these scenes as events from Kagawa's life, but as something he held up before his readers.

According to Armstrong, who retells his life in an article, the book set the government in motion: action followed to clear Shinkawa and the slums in five other cities, and Kagawa used the proceeds to pay for neighborhood centers. The Christian History Institute tells that a great-grandson of Prince Iwakura, one of the great names of the Meiji era, became a Christian through the book. The same institute mentions a poem by Kagawa in which he voices his despair

over people he helped who betrayed him, and his fear that he had gone mad. I have not read that poem myself. It shows that the man of the statues had doubts too.

What is certain is that all of Japan knew his name after this novel. In his lifetime he would write more than a hundred and fifty books: novels, poems, sociology and theology.

What he wrote about his neighbors

In the summer of 1914 Kagawa left for the United States. He studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and also took classes there in biology and genetics. He wanted to understand where poverty came from. According to Fukada he stayed until May 1917; other sources give 1916.

Around those years his study *Hinmin shinri no kenkyū* appeared, an investigation into the psychology of the poor. The book described life in the slums, a world unknown to the Japanese middle class. It also contained something else. Next to Shinkawa lay a Buraku neighborhood. The Buraku are Japanese who had been excluded for centuries, because their ancestors did work that was considered unclean, such as slaughtering animals and tanning leather. In that book Kagawa described them as a separate and degenerate race, attributed to them a tendency toward crime and spoke of racial improvement. So writes the Japanese historian Fujino Yutaka. A 2023 study by Hiroshi Sekiguchi shows how Kagawa at that time adopted the accepted science that linked poverty, crime and disease to heredity.

It was the language of his time, in Europe and America too. For the people he wrote about, that does not make it any less painful. In the 1980s an open debate arose in Japan over these passages, which

became known as the Kagawa problem. It has never entirely died down.

I find it hard to read this about a man who spent his life among the poorest of the poor. Yet it belongs to the story. A person can live closer to the outcasts than anyone else, and still look at them through the wrong lens.

When Samuel looked at the appearance of Jesse's sons, God said to him: *For man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7). Kagawa looked at his neighbors with the science of his day, and that science saw no further than the outward appearance.

Thirty thousand men at the shipyards

In 1921 about thirty thousand workers walked off the job at the Kawasaki and Mitsubishi shipyards in Kobe. It became the largest labor dispute in Japan between the two world wars. In those years Kagawa was one of the leaders of the young labor movement. In 1921 he was briefly imprisoned for his union work, and again in 1922. According to the preface of his English translators, he encouraged the strikers at the Kawasaki yard and was held without charge. A devotional source tells that the workers asked him to lead the strike and that he agreed on the condition that there would be no violence. I have not been able to check that last point.

Armstrong sums up his demand for workers in three wishes: a chance to live, a chance to work and a chance to show the marks of a human being. Kagawa himself lived with tuberculosis, kidney disease and glaucoma, and his eyes kept getting worse. He prayed, fasted and meditated. Religion, he said in words I render loosely, is an art that touches the whole of life.

He believed that the gospel was also about wages, housing and food. According to the Christian History Institute, he said he was a socialist because he was a Christian. Plough sums up his conviction like this: because God cares for every person, we must too. In 1921 he and others started a cooperative in Kobe, a shop owned by its own members. From that beginning grew what later became Coop Kobe, one of the largest cooperatives in the world. He helped build the Japanese federation of labor unions and campaigned for the vote for all men, which came in 1925. In 1921, a biographer tells, he also founded a farmers' union.

He also saw how other leaders in the labor movement moved toward Marxism and class struggle. According to Loucky, he concluded from this that more was needed than organization. He returned to what he called a spiritual renewal.

In 1922 their first child was born. According to Plough, the family then left Shinkawa, where three quarters of the infants died. That figure comes from one source.

The Friends of Jesus

On October 5, 1921, Kagawa, Haru and thirteen ministers founded the Friends of Jesus. It was a brotherhood made up mostly of young people, who committed themselves to prayer and discipline, to caring for the poor and to bearing witness to Christ. Biographers compare the group to the followers of Francis of Assisi. According to Loucky there were more than five hundred members within a year, a figure that comes from the movement's own circle. In America a stained glass window was later dedicated to the movement, with five key words: devotion, peace, purity, service and labor.

That name fits what Jesus said to His disciples: *I have called you friends* (John 15:15). In Kobe that friendship took shape: prayer, discipline and care for the poor.

Two years later that brotherhood was put to the test. On September 1, 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed much of Tokyo and Yokohama. The Friends of Jesus helped with the emergency relief, and Kagawa shifted the center of his work to Tokyo. The Ministry of Home Affairs later gave him an award for that work.

A million souls

In August 1925 Kagawa proposed a national evangelistic campaign. The goal was a million converts. In November 1925 the campaign began in Sendai. At a conference in Karuizawa in 1927 the plan even spoke of fully Christianizing Japan.

It did not succeed. In 1929 the campaign was named the Kingdom of God Movement, and the goal was scaled back to four hundred thousand converts in ten years. For years Kagawa spoke in cities across the whole country. There was also tension with Western missionaries within the movement; in 1933 the American magazine *The Christian Century* wrote about it. In 1934 the committee brought it to an end. The money had run out, and the climate in Japan had grown harsher.

The historian George Bikle pointed to something else. For many Japanese, Christianity counted as the religion of Western colonialism in Asia. An evangelist who proclaimed the Kingdom of God in Japan carried that image with him, whether he wanted to or not.

An apology to China

In 1931 Japan conquered Manchuria, in the northeast of China, and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo there. Kagawa had founded

the National Anti-War League in 1928. In the 1920s he had signed an appeal, together with Gandhi and Einstein among others, to abolish military conscription. In 1934 he publicly apologized to the Chinese people for what Japan was doing in China.

In America he became a hero in those years. In 1931 he had already given lectures at the Yale divinity school. In 1932 a biography by the missionary William Axling appeared in America. His tour from December 1935 to June 1936 was organized by American church leaders.

He arrived in San Francisco on the *Asama Maru*, after fourteen days at sea from Yokohama. The mayor had planned a welcome lunch. At the inspection, doctors found trachoma, the eye disease from Shinkawa, and sent him to Angel Island, where most Japanese immigrants used to be examined. He was neither an immigrant nor poor. Stanley Hunter, pastor of a Presbyterian church in Berkeley, visited him there. Veterans' associations and shopkeepers' unions had protested his coming. *Time* magazine called him the Christian in quarantine. John Mott, the international chairman of the YMCA, sent a telegram. President Franklin Roosevelt took a personal interest, and Kagawa was allowed to continue, on condition that a doctor or nurse traveled with him.

The tour became a great success. In Cleveland, on March 4, 1936, there were four meetings, with overflowing halls. The director of the local YMCA wrote that he had said nothing remarkable, and that people came anyway because of his simple, devoted life. In mid-April Kagawa gave the Rauschenbusch Lectures at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, the high point of the journey. His book *Brotherhood Economics*, about an economy of brotherhood, grew out of them. In May he spoke in St. Louis to a large crowd, and from May 24 he gave lectures for ten days in Los Angeles, where his Japanese American congregations welcomed him. Those

evenings for young people were so crowded that sports games were canceled. The Fellowship of Reconciliation collected signatures to end the American exclusion of Asians, and gave them to him.

In the years of the Depression, many Americans were looking for a way between capitalism and communism, and his cooperatives seemed to offer one. The historian David King shows that American church leaders also saw themselves in Kagawa. He became a hero seen through Western eyes, King writes. The Japanese knew a more complicated man.

According to an article by The Nonviolence Project of the University of Wisconsin, he met Gandhi in India in 1939. The conversation went awkwardly, because it turned to the Japanese war in China.

In August 1940 he was briefly imprisoned in Japan because of that apology from six years earlier. The New York Times reported it as news. In 1941 he traveled with a Japanese Christian peace delegation to the United States, to try to avert the looming war. Three months after his return, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

The voice on Radio Tokyo

What he did next does not fit the picture of the pacifist. During the war in the Pacific, Kagawa spoke on Radio Tokyo. He defended his country and condemned what he called American barbarism. About Japanese atrocities in Asia he said nothing comparable, Plough writes. American services listened in and recorded the broadcasts.

The historian Bo Tao has researched these years in the archives, including those of the FBI and the American occupation. In his 2025 book he describes how, from the late 1930s, Kagawa increasingly sided with the Japanese government, hesitated to condemn its aggression and during the war became a voice that defended the state.

Another researcher points to a Christian pioneer settlement that Kagawa led in Manchukuo, part of the Japanese colonization there.

After the war an American journalist wrote in the army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* that Kagawa had supported the war under a Christian cover. Others came to his defense. The debate went on for years.

I will not pass a final judgment on that. He lived in a dictatorship in wartime, where anyone who kept silent was suspect and anyone who spoke out went to prison. He had already experienced that himself. What exactly he was thinking as he sat at that microphone, we do not know. The broadcasts themselves have been preserved, though, and they belong to his story.

Before the emperor

In August 1945 Japan surrendered. In February 1946 Kagawa was summoned to Emperor Hirohito, after the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to Plough, he quoted there the words of Jesus that whoever wants to be great must become the servant of all. He told the emperor that a ruler's authority rests in the heart of the people. He became an adviser in the reconstruction and was a member of the House of Peers from 1946 to 1947. Plough names what was achieved afterward: recognized labor unions, land reform, cooperatives and women's suffrage, goals he had worked for all his life.

He campaigned for women's suffrage and worked for a world federation, one government for all nations to prevent war. In those postwar writings the old thinking returned too. The historian Konrad Lawson shows that Kagawa was still arguing for eugenics, as a path toward a better and more peaceful people.

Meanwhile his name lived on internationally. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947 and 1948, and several times for the Nobel Peace Prize in the 1950s. He made further journeys to the United States, where Japanese American congregations welcomed him warmly.

In March 1955 Kagawa collapsed in Osaka. His heart was worn out. He was bedridden for two weeks. Four years later he spent three months in the hospital in Takamatsu. On April 23, 1960, he died in Tokyo, seventy-one years old.

In his short writings, which he himself called Kagawa-graphs, an exclamation returns that Armstrong quotes: life is a wonder. He also wrote, in words I render loosely, that whoever wants to meet God must first visit the prison cell and only then the temple. They are the words of a man who had lived for years among the sick, the homeless and the imprisoned, and had himself sat in a cell. Whether he said them exactly like this, I cannot check, because I have found them only in that article.

According to tradition, at the end he asked those around him to give everything for world peace and for the church in Japan. I have found those words only in a reference work that gives no source of its own. After his death the Japanese state awarded him the Order of the Sacred Treasure.

A face of stone

Fukada, who wrote his biography for a reference work on missions, put it this way: inside and outside Japan, Kagawa was known mainly as a social reformer, but all his life he was first and foremost an evangelist. He preached, he wrote and he built. His cooperatives still exist. His words about the Buraku and his voice on Radio Tokyo have been preserved as well.

Perhaps you know Christians you admire, and you also know things about them you would rather not have known. Then you are standing roughly where I stood while writing this chapter.

In 1970 a sculptor was commissioned to carve Kagawa in stone for the Washington National Cathedral, in the capital of the country where his voice had come over the radio during the war. The commission came from a memorial fund set up by the family of an American naval officer who had been at Pearl Harbor and later worked in occupied Japan. On a decorative corbel beneath the statue a chrysanthemum was carved, the flower of the Japanese imperial house. Bo Tao calls the statue a mirror of the rise and fading of twentieth-century Christian internationalism.

There he still stands, among saints and reformers, with the face of the student who walked into the slums of Shinkawa with his belongings on Christmas Eve.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Kobe on July 10, 1888, as the son of a concubine; loss of both parents around the age of four; Bible class with the missionaries Myers and Logan; baptism in Tokushima in 1904 (date February 14 according to Fukada); break with his family; studies at Meiji Gakuin, the seminary in Kobe and Princeton; move to Shinkawa on Christmas Eve 1909; marriage to Haru Shiba (1913); the novel *Shisen o koete* as a bestseller (1920); imprisonment in 1921 and 1922; founding of cooperatives and the Friends of Jesus (1921); relief work after the 1923 earthquake; the campaign for a million converts and the Kingdom of God Movement (1925 to 1934); apology to China (1934) and arrest for it (1940); the tour of 1935 and 1936 with the detention on Angel Island; peace journey to the US (1941); broadcasts on Radio Tokyo during the war; House of Peers 1946 to

1947; Nobel Prize nominations; death in Tokyo on April 23, 1960; the statements about the Buraku in his early work and the later Kagawa problem.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: what he felt in the missionaries' home and how he read about Christ; his prayer to become like Christ; his years by the sea and his expectation of dying in Shinkawa (Christian History Institute); the stories about the murderer who held his hand, the extortioners and the husband of the prostitute (one biographer); his words to Emperor Hirohito in 1946 (found only in Plough); his last words. The scenes from the novel (pawning his winter clothes for the funeral, the healing of a man who could not stand) are fiction, not tradition.

Unconfirmed: a million copies of the novel sold (one source); the exact year and place in which the novel was written (sources differ); his personal role in the great shipyard strike of 1921, beyond his arrest that year (a devotional source says he took the lead on condition of nonviolence); the figure of five hundred members of the Friends of Jesus within a year (one source, from the movement itself); the number of residents of Shinkawa (7,500 according to one source, ten thousand according to another); the figure of 75 percent infant mortality (one source); his award for the relief work after the earthquake in 1923 (one source); the founding of a farmers' union in 1921 (one source); the years by the sea (Christian History Institute, no second source); his work as a servant during his school years (one source).

Interpretation: how far Kagawa went along with the Japanese government during the war, and why, is the subject of ongoing historical research. Bo Tao and Plough speak of propaganda and defense of the state; older, mainly American sources emphasize his pacifism and his arrests.

Sources for this chapter

1. Robert M. Fukada, “Kagawa, Toyohiko”, Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions, via Boston University History of Missiology
2. Britannica, “Kagawa Toyohiko”
3. Greg Robinson en Bo Tao, “Laying Down the Law of Love: The 1936 American Tour of Toyohiko Kagawa”, Discover Nikkei, 2021
4. Susannah Black Roberts en Jason Landsel, “Toyohiko Kagawa”, Plough, 2022
5. John P. Loucky, “Japan’s parachurch pioneers”, Japan Harvest
6. George B. Bikle Jr., “Thy Kingdom Come on Earth: Some Reflections on the Social Gospel Movement in Japan”, Japanese Journal of Religious Studies
7. Fujino Yutaka, on Ramseyer and the Buraku, Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, 2021
8. Hiroshi Sekiguchi, “Social welfare and scientific racism in modern Japan”, Anthropological Science, 2023
9. Konrad M. Lawson, “Reimagining the post-war international order: the world federalism of Ozaki Yukio and Kagawa Toyohiko”, 2018
10. Bo Tao, Cooperative Evangelist: Kagawa Toyohiko and His World, 1888-1960 (2025), publisher’s description
11. Bo Tao, “The Chrysanthemum and the ‘Saint’: Kagawa’s Statue in the Washington National Cathedral”, Church History, 2020
12. David P. King, “The West Looks East: The Influence of Toyohiko Kagawa on American Mainline Protestantism”, Church History, 2011
13. MIT Visualizing Cultures, “Labor activism” (Protest in interwar Japan)

14. Shatrunjay Mall, “Toyohiko Kagawa: Gandhi of Japan?”, The Nonviolence Project, 2022
15. Christian History Institute, “It happened on July 10”
16. Toyohiko Kagawa, Before the Dawn, translated by I. Fukumoto and T. Satchell (1924), PDF van Log College Press
17. Robert Armstrong, “Toyohiko Kagawa Revisited” (blog, 2008)
18. Alkitab.or.id, “Kagawa: The Saint of Shinkawa” (devotional article)
19. Wikipedia, “Toyohiko Kagawa” (starting point)

Ju Ki-cheol: the pastor who would not bow

Early in 1939 Ju Ki-cheol stood once more in the pulpit of the Sanjeonghyeon Church in Pyongyang. He had just come out of a cell, where he had spent months. The Japanese police were watching him closely.

It was no ordinary sermon that day. He read out a list of five things he was praying for. One of them has been preserved in the Korean sources. He asked God to let him overcome the power of death. In the English wording of the Korean American theologian Giuk Choe: *Facing death, I cannot but pray for the strength to overcome its power.* In the same sermon, Choe tells us, he prayed that he would not defile the Lord's name by cherishing this life. And he spoke to the sword of his persecutors: *Sword, do you wait for me! I shall go forth to you.*

Ju Ki-cheol, often spelled Joo Ki-chul in English, was a Presbyterian minister. He refused to bow at the Japanese Shinto altars, and for that he was arrested again and again. In all he spent more than five years behind bars. In April 1944 he died in Pyongyang prison. Today Korean Christians call him a martyr. The South Korean government honors him as a freedom fighter.

It began in a village on the south coast.

A country that was no longer its own

Ju Ki-cheol was born on November 25, 1897, in Ungcheon, in Changwon county, in southeastern Korea. Ungcheon is now part of the city of Changwon. As a child he was called Ju Gi-bok. His father was called Ju Hyeon-seong, his mother Jo Jae-seon. She was his father's second wife, and his father already had children from his first marriage: three sons and three daughters. The sources disagree on which son Ki-cheol was. The family was not poor. According to the Korean encyclopedia they were middle-class farmers, and his father was a former clerk in the local administration. He died in August 1934.

To follow this life, you need to know something about Korea at that time. For centuries it had been a kingdom, with Confucianism as the foundation of state and family. Buddhism and the old folk religion lived alongside it. Around 1900 the power of Japan was growing. In 1910 Korea was annexed to the Japanese empire, and the Koreans lost their own government. Japan would rule the country until 1945.

Christianity was young in the country and had come mainly through missionaries from the West. The church grew strongest in the north, around Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea. In 1907 a revival set the city in motion. Lay believers traveled up to a hundred miles, sometimes through the snow, to be there, and there is talk of mass conversions, tears and all-night prayer meetings. How much of that came from missionaries and how much from Korean preachers like Gil Seon-ju is not entirely clear. Around that time a Christian hospital, a Presbyterian seminary and a Christian college arose in the city. In 1945 about three hundred thousand people lived there, of whom about one in six went to church regularly. After the revival the city was nicknamed the

Jerusalem of the East. Ju himself would later call it that, in his own words: my Jerusalem of the East.

In the southeast, where Ki-cheol grew up, it was mainly Australian Presbyterians who worked. A commemorative calendar of the Uniting Church in Australia says he came to know the gospel through that Australian mission. It is a church source, but it fits what we know about the region.

Christmas 1910

At Christmas 1910 Ki-cheol went to the church in Ungcheon for the first time. He followed his eldest brother, Ju Gi-won, who already attended. He was thirteen. That same year Japan had annexed the country.

In 1912 the writer Yi Gwang-su came to Ungcheon to give a lecture. According to the Korean encyclopedia, that lecture was decisive. The boy wanted to go to the Osan School in Jeongju, on the other side of the country, in the north.

From 1913 to March 1916 he attended the Osan School. There he came under the influence of Yi Seung-hun and Cho Man-sik, two Christians who worked for the future of their people. At that school, faith and love for Korea were woven together. According to the Korean Wikipedia, Cho asked him in 1936 to come to Pyongyang.

In 1916 he went to study commerce at Chosen Christian College in Seoul, the school that would later become Yonsei University. It did not work out. He developed problems with his eyes and his health, and within a year he was back home. A young man with plans, back in his village.

In October 1917 he married An Gap-su, a woman from a well-to-do family in Gimhae. She had studied in Seoul at the Jeongsin Girls' School, a Christian school.

March 1919

On March 1, 1919, a nationwide movement for independence began in Korea. Everywhere people rose in resistance against Japanese rule. According to Michael Breen in the Korea Times, 9,458 people were imprisoned afterward, more than twenty percent of them Christians, while Christians made up only about 1.3 percent of the sixteen million Koreans. Fifteen of the thirty-three signers of the declaration of independence were Christians. After 1910 the Japanese administration saw the Christians as the greatest possible opponent, and so it supported Buddhism as a counterweight.

Ki-cheol took part. According to the South Korean Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, he was chairman of a youth association in his region. We know nothing more about his role. He was twenty-one and had already made his choice for his country. The choice for his life was still to come.

The revival preacher from Masan

In September 1920 Kim Ik-du held revival meetings in the Munchang Church in Masan, a port city not far from Ungcheon. Kim was known for his gift of healing, writes the historian Kim Kang-sik. In those meetings Ki-cheol went through what the Korean encyclopedia calls an experience of rebirth.

On November 1, 1920, Kim Ik-du gave a Bible class in the church in Ungcheon, Ki-cheol's own church. There he decided to become a minister.

A story goes around that his eyes were healed during Kim Ik-du's prayer. The English Wikipedia reports it cautiously, with the word "allegedly." The detailed Korean encyclopedia says nothing about it. I cannot confirm it. What the sources do confirm is that he was changed in a full church and tied his life to that change from then on.

What makes a person change direction? For Ki-cheol it was not a new country or a new job. It was a preacher in a hall full of people, and then a Bible class in his own village church. For him that was the moment when listening alone would no longer be enough.

From Pyongyang to Busan

In December 1921 the presbytery of South Gyeongsang gave him permission to study. In a Presbyterian church, the presbytery is the regional assembly of ministers and elders. In March 1922 he began at the Presbyterian seminary in Pyongyang, where nearly all Presbyterian ministers in Korea were trained. From 1923 he also worked alongside his studies as an assistant preacher in Yangsan.

On December 22, 1925, he graduated. On December 30 he was ordained as a minister. On January 10, 1926, he began at the Choryang Church in Busan, then called Pusan. It was the first church ever founded in that city.

He was pastor and teacher at the same time. At the provincial Bible institute he taught young men who wanted to become pastors themselves. One of them was Son Yang-won, who would later be imprisoned for his own faith as well. According to an Australian church source, Ju was a support to his former student in prison.

According to an article by the historian Kim Kang-sik in the Busan Ilbo, in 1929 Ju submitted a proposal to the presbytery against Shinto worship. That would be early. Other sources speak of

protests in his province in 1931. I leave open exactly how it went. What is certain is that he had been raising the subject for years before his arrest.

Masan and an empty house

In July 1931 he became pastor of the Munchang Church in Masan, the church where he had come to repentance in 1920. In 1932 and 1933 the ministers of his province chose him as moderator of the presbytery. From 1933 the seminary in Pyongyang also invited him as a speaker at its revival meetings. His name became known throughout the country.

In May 1933 his wife An Gap-su died after an illness. She was thirty-four. The sources say little about how he bore that loss. So I leave it at that one fact.

In 1935 he married again, to Oh Jeong-mo, a deaconess from the church in Masan. She was the only daughter in her family, raised in Gangseo near Pyongyang, at first in an Adventist church. She had gone to Pyongyang, to the Jeongui Girls' School, where she sang in the choir and taught Sunday school. Afterward she taught at the Uishin School in Masan. There, in the Munchang Church, she met Ju. In the years that followed she would prove at least as determined as he was.

A bow at the emperor's altar

What did Japan actually want from the Korean Christians?

Shinto is the ancient religion of Japan, with shrines to gods, ancestors and the emperor. In Korea, Japan built a large Shinto shrine in Seoul and then, according to Breen, more than eleven hundred others across the country. Students and citizens had to bow there. The government said it was an act of patriotism, not religion. Many

Christians saw it differently. To them the bow was homage to other gods.

According to Breen, it became the greatest political, social and religious issue of the 1930s. At first the obligation applied mainly to schools. Christian schools that refused could be closed. In 1935 George McCune, the head of the Christian college in Pyongyang, had to leave the country as the first foreign missionary because he opposed Shinto worship. In 1936 Presbyterian missionaries in Pyongyang decided to close their schools rather than give in. In 1938 Japan extended the obligation to all Christians. The Methodists and the Roman Catholic Church accepted the government's explanation. They agreed that it was a civil ceremony. Among the Presbyterians the resistance was strongest, but there too the regional assemblies gave in one by one.

In July 1936 Ju Ki-cheol became pastor of the Sanjeonghyeon Church in Pyongyang. Some sources say 1937. The Korea Times calls that congregation one of the birthplaces of the Presbyterian church in Korea. He arrived in exactly the years when the pressure was at its greatest.

Ready to die

In 1936 he had already preached about what he would do if it came to that. On September 1 of that year he spoke at the seminary in Pyongyang on *ilsa gakoh*, the readiness to die. According to Giuk Choe, who summarizes the sermon, he had three points: be ready to die because you follow Jesus, because you lead others to Jesus and because you bear witness to the resurrection. He asked his hearers why we Christians hesitate to abandon our lives for the Lord. The title of the sermon in Choe's article is *Let us walk the way of the Cross*. Kim In-seo, who collected his sermons after the war, wrote: *His sermons were his confessions, his life, and his spirit sealed by his blood.*

In 1938 he was arrested for the first time. Britannica says February, the Korean encyclopedia says spring. After his release he went on refusing.

In September 1938 he preached the sermon for which he became best known, again on the readiness to die. According to the Korea Times, he said openly in it that the national church should not have given in to Japanese pressure. Britannica points out that his motive was faith, not patriotism.

In September 1938 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church met, the highest assembly of the denomination. The assembly passed a resolution approving visits to the Shinto shrines. According to Breen, police stood at the doors and critics were given no chance to speak. Ju was in custody again at that moment. According to the sources Wikipedia cites, that was precisely to keep him away from the assembly.

That year the Presbyterian seminary in Pyongyang was also closed, the school where he himself had been trained.

I do not write this to condemn the men at that assembly. They faced a choice between their churches, schools and church members on one side, and their conscience on the other. Some thought that giving in would save the church and its schools. I mention it to show how alone Ju stood at that moment.

It brings to mind the three friends of Daniel in Babylon, who would not bow down to the king's image. They said: *But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods* (Daniel 3:18). They did not know how it would end either. They only knew what they would not do.

Why he could not bow

What did he tell his congregation? Choe sums it up in three reasons. For Ju, Shinto worship was idolatry. It took away freedom of conscience and religion. And it threatened the purity and holiness of the church. Beneath it lay the first commandment, that God alone must be honored. Choe ends his article with the commandment to love God with all your heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

He preached about it with fire. In a sermon that Choe summarizes, he said that the prophets rebuked their people because they did not love God fervently enough. Anyone who believes that God exists, he said, must serve Him with his whole heart and with fervent love. In another sermon, on preparing for death, he described heaven as the place where believers serve and rejoice, and against that heaven he set hell for those who live only to fill the stomach. His sermons, say his admirers, were apocalyptic in tone: they revolved around the cross, the resurrection and hope.

The Uniting Church in Australia sums up his choice in two sentences. He could have compromised. He chose to follow the Lord, who did not compromise either.

I wonder what that feels like, when the men with whom you built a church agree all around you to what you cannot accept, and you remain standing. He had a congregation, a wife and a life, and he put it all at stake.

Five prayers

On January 29, 1939, he was released from the police station in Daegu. Shortly afterward he stood in the pulpit in Pyongyang and preached the sermon with which this chapter began. Wikipedia says it was a three-day leave, the Korean encyclopedia speaks of release. The sermon itself is certain. It was later published in En-

glish under the title *My Five Fold Prayer*. His health was poor and he could not lead the congregation alone. The American missionary Charles F. Bernheisel helped with the evening services.

Of the five requests in that sermon, I can reliably give only two: the request to overcome the power of death and the request not to defile God's name by clinging to life. I did not find the rest in a source I could open, and I do not write down what I have not seen. What is clear, though, is what kind of prayer it was. A man who has just come out of a cell knows what awaits him, and he does not ask to escape. He asks for steadfastness.

After that, things moved fast. In October 1939 the Pyongyang presbytery, under police pressure, decided that ministers and elders who refused to bow could no longer preach or lead in prayer. Ju preached anyway. In mid-October they arrested him again. On April 20, 1940, he was released.

It was the last time. In 1940 he was arrested once more, in a nationwide operation against everyone who refused: in July according to most sources, on September 20 according to the Korean encyclopedia. The charges were lèse-majesté and violation of the public order law.

Under Japanese pressure the Pyongyang presbytery deposed him as a minister. His family had to leave the manse. Exactly when the Sanjeonghyeon Church was closed is not entirely clear. One Korean source says 1940, Britannica says after his death.

A wife who stayed

While her husband was in prison, Oh Jeong-mo did not keep quiet. The Korean encyclopedia devotes a separate article to her. She was arrested more than ten times. In those years Sanjeonghyeon was the center of the resistance against Shinto worship, which spread

across the country from early 1939. When the church was closed, she gathered the members together. She encouraged her husband to hold out to the end and to hold on to his people and his faith.

The letter to the Hebrews says: *Remember the prisoners as if chained with them* (Hebrews 13:3). For Oh Jeong-mo that was no figure of speech. She herself was arrested more than ten times.

According to the encyclopedia, an American missionary, Charles F. Bernheisel, also helped with the evening services as long as Ju was in his cell. It is a small detail. It shows that in those years the line between Korean and Western Christians did not always run sharply. There were missionaries who left, there were missionaries who stayed, and there were Koreans who gave in and Koreans who refused.

Ju himself was held in Pyongyang prison without ever being convicted. Anyone who reads the sources knows that he suffered severely there. I will not go into detail. It is enough to know that he stayed there four years, and that his body could not endure it. A church newspaper reported after the liberation that about two thousand Christians were arrested between 1938 and 1945 over Shinto worship and about fifty died in prison. In Choe, Ju is among those fifty.

How long can you hold to a decision when no one outside sees you? For Ju the answer was apparently: as long as it took.

Nine o'clock in the evening

On April 13, 1944, he was moved to the prison infirmary. Eight days later, on April 21, Oh Jeong-mo came to visit him. It was the last time they saw each other. That same evening, around nine o'clock, he died. He was forty-six.

Words have been handed down that he is said to have spoken at the end. Wikipedia gives them, on the authority of a Korean book from 2002. Loosely, they are a plea to the God of his soul to hold him firm. I have found no second source for them. It is a tradition, and I present it as such.

He was buried in a public cemetery in Pyongyang. A little over a year later, in August 1945, Japan surrendered and Korea was liberated. Christians still in prison were set free. He was no longer there to see it.

Of the believers of the Old Testament it is written: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises* (Hebrews 11:13). Ju had prayed to overcome the power of death. He did not live to see his country's freedom.

The church around him was also tightened more and more. According to Breen, churches needed a police permit to gather. By the end of 1940 ninety percent of the missionaries had left, and after Pearl Harbor the remaining missionaries were locked up for a time. Weeks before the end of the war, all Protestant churches were forcibly merged into one church. Breen writes that many church leaders were on a list to be executed, because the army feared they would side with the Allies. Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, three days before the date that had been set for it.

One of the young men he had trained, Son Yang-won, survived. He was in prison too, hoped for martyrdom according to the Australian church source, and was released at the end of the Japanese era. He became pastor at a large leprosarium in Suncheon. Before the Korean War, rebels murdered two of his sons. He later took into his home the young man who had played a key role in it, saved him from the authorities who wanted to execute him and raised him as a son. That story is in the same calendar. Whether Ju could have

foreseen this, I do not know. His student at any rate chose forgiveness where revenge lay close at hand.

Oh Jeong-mo died on January 28, 1947, of breast cancer, after the liberation. She had undergone an operation and seemed to be recovering.

An empty grave

After the liberation Korea was divided in two. Pyongyang ended up in the communist north, where South Koreans cannot go. The crosses disappeared from the skyline there. On Christmas Day 1949 the first statue of Kim Il-sung was unveiled. Christians who resisted were killed or sent to labor camps, and churches that survived the Korean War became schools or hospitals. What happened to Ju's grave, I do not know.

In the south he was remembered. In 1968 a memorial to him was placed in the National Cemetery in Seoul, with no body in it. The government awarded him a high decoration for his struggle for independence. The sources disagree on the year: 1963 or 1990. In 2007, a hundred and ten years after his birth, the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs named him independence activist of the month. In Changwon, the region where he was born, there is a memorial center. In May 2025 a memorial house opened in Uiseong, in the southeast, built in a former Japanese police station where, according to the report, he was held in custody.

I find it striking that he is honored by his government as a patriot and by his church as a martyr. In his life the two belong together, but they are not the same. Britannica points out that his resistance came from faith. He would not honor another god.

In Seoul there is a memorial with no grave beneath it. His grave lies in a city on the other side of a closed border. What remains of

him to read is that sermon from 1939, by a man who had just come out of a cell, climbed into the pulpit and asked God that he might overcome the power of death.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on November 25, 1897, in Ungcheon (Changwon); church attendance from 1910; Osan School until 1916; brief studies in Seoul, cut short by illness; marriage to An Gap-su (1917) and her death (1933); participation in the March 1st Movement of 1919; Kim Ik-du's revival meetings in 1920 as a turning point; seminary in Pyongyang and ordination (1925/1926); pastorates in Busan, Masan and Pyongyang; marriage to Oh Jeong-mo (1935); refusal of Shinto worship; sermon on being ready to die (1938); repeated arrests from 1938; deposition by the Pyongyang presbytery; more than five years of imprisonment without conviction; death in Pyongyang prison on April 21, 1944, after a last visit from his wife; posthumous honors in South Korea.

From his sermons (via Choe, 2014, and Kim In-seo): the sermon *Ilsagako* of September 1, 1936, with three points; the words about the cross; the request not to defile God's name and the sword he addressed; Pyongyang as the Jerusalem of the East. I have read Choe's summary, not the sermons themselves.

Only from later tradition: his last words (one source); that he came to know the gospel through the Australian mission (only a church commemorative calendar); that he was a support to his former student Son Yang-won; that Cho Man-sik called him to Pyongyang in 1936 (only the Korean Wikipedia).

Unconfirmed: the healing of his eyes under Kim Ik-du; a proposal against Shinto worship as early as 1929; the exact month of the last arrest (July or September 1940, or August according to Choe);

the year he came to Pyongyang (1936 or 1937); when the Sanjeonghyeon Church was closed; the year of the state decoration (1963 or 1990); the circumstances of the 1939 sermon (release or short leave; the Korean Wikipedia dates it in February 1940); the periods of imprisonment (Choe gives February to June 1938, August 1938 to February 1939, August 1939 to April 1940 and then until his death; the encyclopedia gives other dates); his age at death (forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight or forty-nine, depending on the count); his place in the family (second, fourth or fifth son); the content of the five prayers, of which I could find only the parts given above.

Interpretation: the government honored him as a freedom fighter, the church as a martyr. The sources closest to him point out that his refusal came from faith.

Sources for this chapter

1. Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, Kim Seung-tae, "Ju Gi-cheol" (Korean)
2. Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, Yoon Jeong-ran, "Oh Jeong-mo" (Korean)
3. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Chu Ki-Chol"
4. The Korea Times, "Pastor Joo Remembered"
5. Busan Ilbo, Kim Kang-sik, July 2, 2003 (Korean)
6. Academy of Korean Studies, wiki "Ju Gi-cheol" (Korean)
7. Uniting Church in Australia, "April 21: Joo Ki Chul & Son Yang-won"
8. Michael Breen, The Korea Times, 15 februari 2010
9. Giuk Choe, "Ju, Gi-Cheol (1897-1944)", Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology 6 (2014)
10. Asiae, "Memorial Honoring Pastor Ju Ki-chul Opens in Uiseong", 19 mei 2025

11. Korea Times, “Pyongyang, one-time Jerusalem of the East”, 4 maart 2021
12. Korean Wikipedia, “Ju Gi-cheol” (starting point)
13. Wikipedia, “Chu Ki-chol” (starting point)
14. Wikipedia, “Shinto in Korea” (starting point)

Watchman Nee: the night watchman of Shanghai

At the end of May 1972, a niece of Watchman Nee (one of the sources says a grandniece) found a scrap of paper under her uncle's pillow. A few days earlier he had died in a labor camp in Anhui province, in the interior of China. He had been in captivity for twenty years. By the time the family arrived, his body had already been cremated.

On the paper were a few sentences in his handwriting. Christ is the Son of God, he wrote, who died for the sins of mankind and rose again after three days. He called this the greatest fact in the world. The last sentence (my translation) said that he would die believing in Christ.

We know about that note through his family. There is no photograph of it in any archive I was able to consult, and the wording differs a little from source to source. But biographers, historians and a Chinese Christian reference work all pass it on. In China in those years there were rumors, spread by the state and the official church, that he had renounced his faith. This note said something else.

The man who wrote it was, in the West, one of the best-known Chinese Christians of the twentieth century. His books, such as *The Normal Christian Life*, are still read today. In China he founded hundreds of churches that wanted nothing to do with Western denominations. He was also a businessman, a man against whom serious accusations were made, and a prisoner. All of this belongs to his story.

It began with a promise his mother made.

A gong in the night

He was born on November 4, 1903, in Shantou, a port city in Guangdong province in the south of China. Westerners wrote the name as Swatow at the time. China still had an emperor. The country was poor and divided, and Western nations had forced their way in with trading posts and influence. Christians were a small minority.

His parents were Christians. His father, Ni Wenxiu, worked for the imperial customs service and was himself the son of a pastor. His mother, Lin Heping, had attended a Methodist mission school. Watchman was the third of nine children. When he was six, the family moved to Fuzhou, further up the coast.

Before he came, his mother had given birth to two daughters. An aunt had already had six daughters, and everyone expected that his mother would surely get a boy in the end. She was not yet a true believer then, he later said himself. She prayed that if she had a son, she would give him to God. His father told him about that promise only later. We know this story only from him, from the testimony he gave in 1936.

He was given the name Shuzu, which means roughly: proclaim the merits of your ancestors. Later he chose another name for himself: Tuosheng, after the sound of the night watchman who strikes a bam-

boo gong at night in a Chinese city to mark the hours. From that name comes his English name: Watchman. According to Wikipedia he took the name in 1925.

A room in Fuzhou, April 1920

Watchman attended schools of the Church Missionary Society, an Anglican mission organization from England. From 1916 he went to the secondary school of Trinity College in Fuzhou. In his final exams he came second in his class. In his own testimony he writes that he was often first and that his essays hung on the school's bulletin board. He had many plans. Preaching held no appeal for him: among the missionaries a preacher earned eight or nine dollars a month.

In the spring of 1920 the Chinese Methodist evangelist Dora Yu held meetings in Fuzhou. First his mother went. She came home and apologized to her son. Then he went himself.

On the evening of April 29, 1920, he came to faith. The sources give April 28 or 29. He later told how it happened. He sat alone in his room and wrestled. For him, believing and being called belonged together. If he said yes to Jesus, he was also saying yes to a life in His service, and no to the career he saw ahead of him. He knelt down. At first he found no words, and then he thought of his sins, one after another. He saw himself as a sinner. Then he saw, as he told it, the Lord's hands nailed to the cross, and at the same time the Lord stretching out His arms to welcome him. He remembered what He said: "I am here waiting to receive you." He wept and confessed his sins, and felt a burden fall from him. His prayer was short: "Lord, You have really been gracious to me."

Saying yes to God cost him something straight away. For this sixteen-year-old it was no side issue. He knew he was giving

something up. About his future, he said, he decided for good in that hour. Later he never doubted it.

The missionary who baptized him again

After his conversion he went for a short time to Dora Yu's Bible school in Shanghai. According to Wikipedia he was sent away because of his habits. Other sources I read do not mention this.

The person who would shape him most was an Englishwoman. Margaret E. Barber (1869-1930) had come to China as a missionary, but had cut her ties with the Anglican Church. She lived without a fixed income, depending on God. In 1921 she baptized Watchman and his mother again. They no longer considered the infant baptism they had received as babies enough, and wanted to be baptized as believers.

The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity calls Barber the most important personal influence on his thinking. His emphasis on the inner life with Christ fits with Western writers such as Andrew Murray, writes the Christian Research Journal.

Seventy names

After his conversion he preached to his classmates for almost a year. Nobody came to faith. A co-worker of Barber, Miss Groves, told him what she thought the problem was: something stood between him and God. Her advice sounded simple, and he remembered it. "You must speak to God first, before you speak to people," she said.

He paid off his debts, made things right and sought reconciliation where it was needed. Then he wrote down the names of about seventy classmates and prayed for them every day, by name. Sometimes every hour, he said later, even during class. According to his

own account, after a few months all but one of the seventy came to faith. Only he has given that number.

The number cannot be checked. The task itself was simple: every day, by name. James wrote: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much* (James 5:16).

An eighteen-month lesson

Another lesson took him longer. Around 1923 seven young co-workers were working together. Watchman was at odds with one of them, five years older, and often went to Barber to complain. She sent him back. He had to obey the older man, she said, and she asked whether he was carrying the cross like a lamb. It took him about a year and a half. Later he called it the most precious lesson of his life.

In the same period he also learned something about money. He had received an invitation for a trip to Kien-ou, and he had about fifteen dollars. God asked him, he said, to give five dollars to a colleague. He did it. The boat cost seven dollars. On the way back, a British minister, Mr. Philips, offered to pay for the trip. Watchman declined, because he wanted to rely on God. Later a letter arrived after all with a gift, enough for the return trip and for one issue of his magazine. The less money he had, he said, the more God gave. The colleague's family could have bought food with those five dollars.

Breaking bread without a denomination

In 1922 Watchman began meetings in Fuzhou in the way he believed he saw in the book of Acts. Believers were baptized, the Lord's Supper was celebrated every week, and elders led. There was no pastor in the usual sense, and no tie to any Western denomination.

That was a bold choice. At the time most Chinese Christians belonged to churches founded by missionaries: Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists. Watchman saw that division as a problem. In his view there should be only one church in each place, just as the New Testament speaks of the church in Ephesus. He spoke of the priesthood of all believers and wanted Chinese churches to train their own leaders and pay for their own work. He was grateful to the missionaries and yet criticized them, as he did what he saw as a shallow Chinese church.

In 1923 he started a magazine, and later a second one followed. He wrote a great deal and read even more.

One hundred and seventy-six days

Then he fell ill. Doctors diagnosed tuberculosis, a disease that killed many young people in those days. The sources disagree about the year: 1924 according to his own testimony, 1926 according to the Biographical Dictionary. A Chinese doctor, Dr. Wong, prescribed a long rest. A German doctor took X-rays of his chest and said there was no hope left.

Watchman rented a room in Wusih, in Kiangsu. There, in about four months, he wrote *The Spiritual Man*, a work in three volumes that appeared in 1928. He sat in a chair with a high back and pressed his chest against the desk to ease the pain. He had night sweats and a hoarse voice. An experienced nurse wept at his bedside. A brother wired the churches that they no longer needed to pray for him.

Later he told how it turned. He had fasted until three in the afternoon, at the home of Sister Ruth Lee. Three Bible words came to him, from Romans and Corinthians, among them that we *walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7). He believed that God had healed him. He had been in bed for a hundred and seventy-six days.

He dressed, stood up and nearly fell, in a cold sweat. He said to himself: stand in faith.

He walked down twenty-five steps to Sister Lee's house, at number 215. The brothers and sisters who had fasted for him could not get a word out. The Sunday after, he spoke for three hours. When he visited Dora Yu, in Kiangwan, she was shocked, because she had heard he was dying. Later he heard that the German doctor had died. At an auction he bought a few things from the doctor's house as a keepsake. All of this we know from his own story.

The Little Flock in Shanghai

In the second half of the 1920s Watchman moved to Shanghai. The sources give 1926, 1927 or 1928. Shanghai was the largest and most international city in China, with districts under foreign administration.

There his work grew into a movement. He himself simply spoke of the church in that place. Outsiders called the group the Little Flock. Co-workers traveled the country as itinerant workers and founded new churches. Families sometimes moved to another city to start a church there. By 1932, according to Wikipedia, there were already churches in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

In 1933 Watchman traveled to England and America. In London he broke bread with the church at Honor Oak, and also with missionaries outside the circle of the Brethren, an English movement of independent churches. In 1935 leaders of the strict branch of that movement, the Exclusive Brethren, broke off fellowship with him and his churches.

In 1934 he married Zhang Pinhui, known in English as Charity Chang. Her aunt opposed the marriage. According to the Biographical Dictionary, she spread accusations about his conduct,

after which he withdrew from leadership for a time. The following year he took it up again. Charity and Watchman had no children.

Around the same time he brought a younger man from the north to Shanghai to edit his writings: Li Changshou, known in the West as Witness Lee. That name will come up again.

"In a flash I saw it"

In 1938 and 1939 Watchman was in Europe again. He spoke to groups of young Christian workers, in Denmark among other places. The talks were about the letter to the Romans, about what Christ had done on the cross and what that means for the life of a believer.

Those talks became the book *The Normal Christian Life*. They appeared in installments in an English magazine from 1940 onward. The Briton Angus Kinnear later collected and edited them. His foreword is dated Bangalore, India, 1957. Since then the book has appeared in many languages.

At its heart is one verse: *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him* (Romans 6:6). In the book Watchman tells how for months he had tried to reckon himself dead to sin. It did not work. One morning, while he was reading the Bible and praying, he saw it. In his words: "And then in a flash I saw it." He saw that he was in Christ, and that when Christ died, he died.

I find it striking that Watchman gives no method in that chapter. He describes something he saw. How much of what you know about God have you seen like that, and how much have you only heard?

A pharmaceutical company

In 1939 Watchman became involved in the pharmaceutical company of his brother, a chemist. According to Asia Harvest it was

called China Biological and Chemical Laboratories, and Watchman became chairman of the board. The company was meant, according to that source, to earn money for the work of the churches, which were short of funds.

It was wartime. Japan had launched a major attack on China in 1937, and Shanghai was occupied territory. In 1945 Watchman moved west to Chongqing to oversee the factory there.

A Christian leader running a business raised questions. But what happened in 1942 was about more than business.

Six silent years

In 1942 the elders of the church in Shanghai removed Watchman from his ministry. He was no longer allowed to preach. After that the church in Shanghai stopped meeting for a time.

Why this happened is disputed to this day. According to Wikipedia and Asia Harvest, the elders had difficulty with his involvement in the company. The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity mentions irregularities in his business and sexual immorality. A Hong Kong church historian believes it was about his personal morals. Writers from within the local churches themselves say the rumors were not true. The full comparison of those voices is in the box at the end.

I cannot settle this, and I am not going to try. What is certain is that there were accusations, that his own elders took action, and that he did not serve in the church for six years. What it was like for him inwardly, we do not know from any reliable source.

In April 1948 revival came to the church in Shanghai. Witness Lee and a co-worker, Peace Wang, had rebuilt the church in the preced-

ing years. With Witness Lee's help, Watchman returned to the ministry. On that return the sources agree.

The man who did not want a Western church

Around 1949, according to the Biographical Dictionary and Christian History, the movement numbered some seven hundred churches with about seventy thousand members. These are estimates that the sources do not support any further. Another article speaks of at least six hundred churches.

In 1949 the Communist Party took power. At the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949 Watchman gave a training for leaders at the mountain resort of Guling (Kuling). According to the historian Joseph Lee, it dealt among other things with martyrdom. He sent Witness Lee to Taiwan, so that the work could continue outside the mainland.

What followed is complicated. The new government set up the Three-Self Movement: churches had to govern themselves, support themselves and spread themselves, without foreign help and under the supervision of the Party. All his life Watchman had argued for Chinese churches without Western leadership. In 1950 he encouraged the churches to take part. The movement also signed the Christian Manifesto, a declaration of loyalty to the new state.

It did not help. In September 1951 four members of the church in Nanjing publicly denounced him as a reactionary, an enemy of the revolution.

April 10, 1952

On April 10, 1952, Watchman Nee was arrested in Manchuria, in the northeast of China. The sources name different cities. The charges concerned his company: bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property.

The company was confiscated. His Bible was taken from him as well.

Asia Harvest writes that he was portrayed as a capitalist who broke the law. According to the Hong Kong church historian, he was arrested in the first place for commercial offenses, not for his faith. In China that distinction can never be fully drawn. A Christian leader with a business was a double target for the state.

For four years he was held without a sentence. In January 1956 coworkers and elders of the movement were rounded up across the country. In Shanghai, denunciation meetings followed, where people had to testify against him in public. According to Asia Harvest, about two thousand five hundred people gathered on January 30 in the church building on Nanyang Road. Among the accusers were former leaders of his own movement who had joined the Three-Self church. It was there too that accusations of sexual misconduct were made public.

On June 21, 1956, the High Court of Shanghai found him guilty on all counts. He was sentenced to fifteen years. Christian History gives the description under which he was convicted: head of a counterrevolutionary clique. The elders of the church in Shanghai excluded him.

What was true?

Here I have to be honest about what we do not know.

The American historian Joseph Lee, who studied the denunciation material from those years, calls it highly contested evidence. It was written in the language of the Maoist campaigns and was meant to break Christian communities. The 2002 Hong Kong study reaches a different verdict: exaggerated, but largely justified. Writers from the local churches see all of it as political propaganda and rumor.

I have let those three voices stand side by side. A court in the China of 1956 was not a place where a defendant received a fair trial. That does not automatically make the charges untrue. It does make them unreliable as evidence. What happened in his personal life, I cannot establish from here.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes* (1 Corinthians 4:5). That is neither an acquittal nor a conviction. It leaves the last word with Someone who knows more than the sources.

What is certain: he was convicted, and he stayed in prison, even after his sentence had ended.

Twenty years

Watchman was first held in Tilanqiao Prison in Shanghai, in a cell of about nine feet by four feet. He was allowed to send and receive one letter a month. There are stories from a fellow prisoner about what he said and did there. Joseph Lee warns that they should be read with great caution, because their tone is strongly hagiographic. One of those fellow prisoners, Wu Youqi, was held for twenty years and sometimes shared a cell with him. He told how he came to faith through the way Watchman lived, not through what he said.

According to Christian History, he was someone who wanted nothing for himself and everything for the Lord. In prison that was put to the test. According to Asia Harvest, he was repeatedly offered release if he would take the lead of a state-approved Three-Self church. He refused. His sentence was due to end in 1967. He was not released. An English biography relates that he was offered release if he would stop preaching, and that he refused. I have not been able to check that story in an independent source.

In 1957, while he was in prison, *The Normal Christian Life* appeared in English. It became a bestseller. Five years later, in 1962, fellow prisoners wrote that he was frail and weighed less than a hundred pounds. He was diagnosed with coronary ischemia. In the 1960s there were rumors that he had been tortured and maimed. Asia Harvest says these were not true.

After that he was transferred to a labor camp in Anhui, Baimaoling. According to Joseph Lee this was in 1969, according to Asia Harvest not until 1972, after his twenty years behind bars were complete on April 12, 1972, and his release date had long since passed.

Charity was arrested in 1966, during the Cultural Revolution, and according to Asia Harvest severely mistreated. Relatives waiting outside heard whippings and threats. When she came out, her face was marked and her eyes were swollen. In 1971 she fell and broke several ribs. She had a light stroke and died a few days later. Watchman heard the news calmly. He was not allowed to attend her funeral. They had been married for thirty-seven years. Nineteen of those he had spent behind bars.

A tractor on the way to the hospital

In the camp he grew weaker. He suffered from angina pectoris. In a letter to his sister in Beijing he wrote (my translation) that the inner joy surpasses everything. In another letter he expressed the wish to be with his family and wrote that he was looking for a final resting place.

In May 1972 his heart was in serious trouble. On May 30 the guards finally saw how urgent it was. According to the Biographical Dictionary and Asia Harvest, he was taken by tractor to a prison hospital about twelve miles away. The road through the mountains shook the weakened man badly. He died on the way, on May 30, 1972,

in his sixty-ninth year. There was no official announcement and no funeral. On June 1 his body was cremated, before his family arrived.

Afterwards his niece found the scrap of paper under the pillow.

At the end of his life Paul wrote: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7). After twenty years in prison, the note under the pillow says something similar.

The watchman on the wall

What Watchman Nee left behind has gone in two directions.

Outside China his books were widely read. According to Wikipedia, more than a million copies of *The Normal Christian Life* have been sold. Many of those books grew out of talks that others wrote down and edited, often years later. In Taiwan, and later in the United States, Witness Lee built up a worldwide movement of local churches that appeals to Watchman Nee. That movement has its own history and its own debates, which lie outside this chapter.

In China the churches went underground. According to Joseph Lee, the Little Flock's way of working, with small groups, lay people in leadership and no ties abroad, became a model for many house churches after 1978. The magazine Christian History today calls the Little Flock one of the largest Christian groups in China.

He was no picture-book saint. He was accused by his enemies and by his own brothers. Some of those accusations have never been cleared up. What remains in the sources is a man who wanted the gospel to be Chinese, who saw what the cross had done to him, and who spent twenty years in captivity without any known evidence that he let go of Christ.

In the Chinese cities of his youth, a watchman walked the streets at night with a bamboo gong. He struck the hours. Watchman Nee

took that sound as his name. The last thing he sounded lay under a pillow in a camp in Anhui.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on November 4, 1903, in Shantou; Christian parents; schooling with the Church Missionary Society and at Trinity College in Fuzhou; conversion in April 1920 through Dora Yu; baptism by Margaret Barber in 1921; the start of independent meetings in Fuzhou in 1922; *The Spiritual Man* (1928); the move to Shanghai in the second half of the 1920s; marriage to Charity Zhang in 1934; the European talks of 1938-1939 as the basis of *The Normal Christian Life*; involvement in his brother's pharmaceutical company; removal by the elders in 1942 and return in 1948; arrest on April 10, 1952, on business charges; denunciation meetings in January 1956; sentence of fifteen years on June 21, 1956; Charity's death in 1971; his death on May 30, 1972, in a labor camp in Anhui and the cremation on June 1.

From his own testimony (1936, published by Living Stream Ministry, a publisher from the circle of Witness Lee): his mother's promise before his birth; the evening of his conversion and what he saw; the lesson of Miss Groves and the seventy classmates; the lesson about submission to an older co-worker; the trip to Kien-ou and the five dollars; his tuberculosis, the 176 days, the three Bible words and his healing; the writing of *The Spiritual Man* in Wusih; the meeting with Dora Yu. I have read the text as it stands there; I know of no independent confirmation of these stories.

Only from later tradition: the moment he "saw" Romans 6 (from the book itself, via the editor Kinnear); the note under his pillow (through his family, passed on by several sources); the stories of a fellow prisoner from Tilanqiao; the saying that he wanted nothing for himself; the offer of release, either on condition that he would

stop preaching (an English biography) or on condition that he would lead a Three-Self church (Asia Harvest); the words from his letters to his sister.

Unconfirmed or disputed: the reason for his exclusion in 1942 (business, moral, or rumors); the truth of the charges of 1952 and 1956, including the accusations of sexual misconduct; the city of his arrest (Manchuria, Manzhouli or Harbin); the year of his transfer to the labor camp (1969 or 1972); the year of his illness (1924 or 1926) and of his move to Shanghai; whether he was sent away from Dora Yu's Bible school (only Wikipedia); the prison where he was held (Tilanqiao, according to Joseph Lee, or the Shanghai First Municipal Prison, according to Asia Harvest, which may be the same); his age at death (sixty-nine or sixty-eight, depending on the count).

What the sources say about 1942 and the charges: Wikipedia and Asia Harvest give his business involvement as the reason. The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity mentions irregularities in his business and sexual immorality. Leung Ka-lun (Hong Kong, 2002) concludes that the accusations were exaggerated but largely justified and that it was about his personal morals. Joseph Lee (2017) calls the denunciation material "highly contested evidence," written in the jargon of the Maoist campaigns and meant to break Christian communities, but still usable for data about the organization. Writers from the local churches (Abraham Ho and others) see political propaganda and rumors. Charity's aunt is said to have spread accusations as early as 1934 (Biographical Dictionary). In the chapter I have not taken sides.

Interpretation: the numbers of churches and members around 1949 (about seven hundred churches, seventy thousand members) are estimates without further support in the sources. Historians and

writers from within the movement itself judge the accusations differently; this chapter does not take sides.

Sources for this chapter

1. Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity, "Nee, Watchman" (G. Wright Doyle)
2. Christian History 98, "Everything for the Lord; Watchman Nee" (Yading Li, 2008)
3. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Faith and Defiance: Christian Prisoners in Maoist China", Review of Religion and Chinese Society 4 (2017)
4. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Dying for Faith, Transforming Memories: Chinese Christian Martyr Watchman Nee"
5. China Change, summary of "Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China" (2011)
6. Alliance Bible Seminary, Jian Dao 17 (2002), study of the charges against Watchman Nee (summary)
7. The History and Martyrdom of Watchman Nee (defensive edition, draft)
8. Asia Harvest, "1972: Watchman Nee"
9. Watchman Nee's Testimony (Living Stream Ministry)
10. The Normal Christian Life, foreword by Angus Kinnear (CCEL)
11. The Normal Christian Life, full text (CCEL)
12. Elliot Miller, "The Local Church as Movement and Source of Controversy", Christian Research Journal
13. Geoffrey Hanks, Seventy Great Christians (1994), via localchurches.org
14. Wikipedia, "Watchman Nee" (starting point)
15. Wikipedia, "The Normal Christian Life" (starting point)

Bakht Singh: the Sikh who tore up the Bible

On April 6, 1933, Bakht Singh arrived in Bombay, today's Mumbai. He was twenty-nine and had spent seven years studying in England and Canada. His parents had come to wait for him. He had become a Christian, and they asked him one thing: keep it secret. Think of the family's honor.

According to his own account, his father laid his turban at his son's feet. For a Sikh, the turban is a sign of honor and faith. It was a plea without words. Bakht answered with a question: "Can I live without breathing?" Christ had become his life, he said. How could he live without Him?

His parents left him behind in Bombay. He had no home anymore. Later he said that the street was his home and the lamppost his light.

Jesus said of Himself: *Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head* (Matthew 8:20). From that day on, the son of a wealthy Sikh followed a Lord who had no fixed place either.

This man would grow into one of the best-known evangelists and Bible teachers in India. He founded churches that were led by Indi-

ans and depended on no one in the West. At his death, Christianity Today wrote that he had helped start more than six thousand churches and groups in India. When he was buried in Hyderabad in 2000, about a quarter of a million people walked behind the bier, according to his own movement.

It began in a village in the Punjab, with a boy who tore a Bible to pieces.

A dream about a hill

Bakht Singh Chabra was born on June 6, 1903, in the Punjab, in the northwest of what was then British India. According to most sources he came from the village of Joiya in the Sargodha district, an area that has been part of Pakistan since 1947. His parents, Jawahar Mal Chabra and Lakshmi Bai, were well-to-do Sikhs. He was the oldest of six brothers. His father, a businessman, had set up a cotton factory and wanted his oldest son to help him run it.

First, some background. Sikhism arose around 1500 in the Punjab, with Guru Nanak. Sikhs believe in one God and read from their holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib. Men wear their hair uncut under a turban. While Bakht was growing up, the British ruled India. The movement for independence was growing, and many Indians saw Christianity as the religion of the ruler.

Bakht spent seven years at a Christian mission school. He was hostile to the Christian faith, he later said himself, and in the boarding school he avoided the side where the Christians lived. He heard little about Jesus there. According to Christian History Institute, the teachers did not dare to proclaim Christ strongly, because British rule was being criticized. The Christians he saw around him were British administrators or people from the lowest castes. Neither attracted him. Christianity seemed to him more a cultural identity

than a living faith, as the American organization Renovaré sums up his picture of it in his youth.

He himself was a devoted Sikh. He spent hours in the temples and did social work. He found no joy in it, he wrote later.

After his final exams he was given a Bible. He tore it apart with his hands, pulled out the pages and kept only the leather cover, which he thought was beautiful. He told that story himself, and it is also on the website his co-workers maintained after his death.

In the same testimony he tells of a dream that kept coming back to him as a boy. He climbed a steep hill, fell and landed on rocks, and then suddenly he was lying on soft silk cushions. Years later, he writes, a voice said to him: "This is your testimony."

Seven months in one

He graduated from the University of the Punjab in Lahore. His mother, who loved him most, made him promise that he would not change his faith. Then she managed to persuade his father to let him go. In 1926 he left for England to continue his studies in London, at King's College. On the subject the sources disagree: mechanical engineering or agricultural engineering. He arrived in London in September 1926, he writes himself.

He was already married by then, to a woman his parents had chosen for him. They had a son.

In England he let go of his faith. First he sent his father false statements of his costs and so saved about sixteen hundred rupees. Then he also gave up the outward signs of his faith. He cut his hair and his beard, smoked, drank and bought expensive clothes. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia relates, based on his own

testimony, that he spent the savings of seven months in one month. He called himself an atheist.

It is striking how honest he was about this. In his story he did not make himself look better than he was.

That life did not bring him what he was looking for. Education and civilization did not make the people around him happy, he saw. He thought there was more evil in English society than in India.

A knee on the floor

Then comes the moment he himself saw as the beginning. It happened on August 10, 1928, during a student trip to Canada. In his own testimony it was a service in the first-class dining room of the ship. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia tells it almost word for word the same and writes that he slept through the sermon. He stood up for the singing. When everyone knelt for prayer, he stayed seated.

"I was the only one who remained seated," is how the Dictionary sums up his words. That was because of pride, he said later: national pride, pride in his intellect and pride in his religion. He was hemmed in between those who prayed and could not get away. Out of politeness he finally knelt too.

There, on his knees, he felt a power that was not his own and a great joy. Words of praise for the Lord Jesus came to his mind. He began to repeat the name of Jesus. For the first time he felt equal to the Europeans around him, he writes.

A boy who had torn up a Bible was kneeling because he did not want to disturb the people next to him. I think that is a beautiful beginning. God used something small, almost accidental.

He was not yet a Christian. In November he was back in London. He went to church, but in the faces of the churchgoers he saw no joy like the joy he had felt himself. He stopped going to the Sunday services and sat in empty churches during the week.

Winnipeg, December 1929

In 1929 he moved to Canada to study agricultural engineering at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. He lived at the YMCA. Christianity Today speaks of two friends who gave him a New Testament. According to Our Daily Bread, there were John and Edith Hayward, a Christian couple he visited and who read from the Bible before the evening meal. He had learned to distrust Christianity. Through the friendship with this couple he gained, according to Our Daily Bread, a different picture of a faith he had known as strange and British.

On December 14, 1929, he asked a friend for a Bible. He was given a pocket-size New Testament. He took it to his room and began to read, in Matthew. For three days he read.

At John he got stuck. Jesus says there to Nicodemus: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3). He saw his own guilt, he tells. He was the greatest sinner, he thought, and weeping he believed that only the blood of Jesus could save him. Certainty and peace came.

On December 16, 1929, at half past eleven in the morning, he surrendered to Christ. His craving for tobacco and drink was almost immediately gone, he said, and also for the cinema and the dance hall. The Dictionary gives his words: in less than a second the Lord Jesus took every taste for tobacco and drink out of his heart.

Before Christmas a friend gave him a whole Bible. He read it from beginning to end, starting at Genesis, and finished on February 22, 1930. Then he read it again, and again. At Hebrews 13:8 he stopped:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He prayed on the basis of that verse, and according to his own account he was healed of a chronic cold in the nose and of weak eyes.

The website of his movement also says that in 1929 in Canada he heard God's voice, confessed his sins and received Jesus.

Have you ever read something you had pushed away for years, and discovered that it was exactly about you?

A stammerer with a calling

In Winnipeg there was a policeman, Flynn, a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. After a Sunday service he asked Bakht why he did not go back to India to preach. Bakht did not want to. He had been trained as an engineer. And he stammered; in front of a full hall he did not know what to do. According to his own account he resisted for about two years. He offered God his money. The answer he heard was that God did not want his money, but him.

Moses also said to God: *O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue* (Exodus 4:10). God sent him anyway. The man who stammered would later speak to thousands of people.

On February 4, 1932, he was baptized in Vancouver, on the west coast of Canada. That date is in several sources. He was twenty-eight.

In April of that year he gave a lecture about India. He spoke critically of the work of the missionaries. When he wanted to pray afterward, he could not. He heard a voice, he tells, asking who he was to interfere with God's work. He laid down his plans as an engi-

neer. He would live by faith and ask no one for anything, and he was willing to go to India, or to China, or to Africa.

On April 4, 1932, he accepted the calling. He did so, he said, with three conditions that he received from God. He would lay no claim to his father's property and would make his needs known to no one, only to God. He would join no mission organization or denomination and would serve all Christians equally. And he would make no plans of his own, but let himself be led day by day.

Those three sentences determined the rest of his life. They also explain why his work looked so different from that of the mission organizations in India.

A letter to his father

On October 19, 1932, he wrote his father about his conversion. A missionary explained to the father what the Bible references in that letter meant, and after that his father accepted that his son's conversion was real, so Bakht tells.

Six months later he stood in Bombay, at the turban.

The street was his home

Back to Bombay, April 1933, to the turban at his feet. His family rejected him. According to Christian History Institute his wife left him and took their son with her. About wife and son the sources say almost nothing after that. The Dictionary puts it this way: he was left without parents, wife or son.

He slept in a public night shelter. Then he traveled to Karachi, now in Pakistan, where a sister of his lived. She was angry, so he tells.

In Karachi his first listeners were street sweepers, according to the Dictionary. At four in the morning they came together for prayer

and Bible study, before their work began. In India's caste system, street sweepers belonged to the lowest groups. The son of a rich Sikh read the Bible with them.

In that time, he said later, a Hindu spoke to him about the behavior of Christians. Bakht began to pray for the renewal of God's people. A text that guided him in this came from the story of the loaves and the fishes. After the meal Jesus says to His disciples: *Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost* (John 6:12). Bakht read that as a command to waste nothing: no money, no time, no person.

According to the English-language Wikipedia, he began as an evangelist within the Anglican church and later continued on his own. Other sources say little about this.

His father, Bakht wrote years later, read the Bible in Urdu, the language widely read in the Punjab. He told that his father testified of a light he had seen in a church in Lahore, and of a conversion. His father was not baptized yet. He wanted to wait for Bakht's mother. She was devout, Bakht writes, and was healed of typhoid, according to him, after prayer was made for her. A younger brother was baptized.

Martinpur, June 1937

He traveled through Sind, Baluchistan and the Punjab, areas that now lie in Pakistan. In 1935 he preached in Quetta. According to a later tradition he warned there of a coming "shaking," after which an earthquake followed. The earthquake itself is well documented: on the night of May 31, 1935, it destroyed the city, with tens of thousands dead. For the warning I have found no source from that time.

In June 1937 he came to Martinpur, a village in the Punjab with a Presbyterian congregation. Presbyterians are Protestants who have their church governed by elected elders. According to the Dictio-

nary, the village was known for its bad morals. For thirteen days he preached there, and nothing seemed to happen. Thirteen evenings without visible result, and he kept preaching.

On the fourteenth evening he asked the people to stand up to pray. That was the moment. People fell down, pulled at their hair and wept over their sins. It lasted until three in the morning. Bakht stayed with them to teach them. After that, night prayer meetings and shared meals became normal there.

That there was a revival in Martinpur in which Bakht Singh played a large part is in several sources. The historian Jonathan Bonk later called it one of the most remarkable movements in the church history of the Indian subcontinent. The exact days and hours come from the circle around Bakht himself.

Paul wrote: *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart* (Galatians 6:9). In Martinpur, according to the account, that season came on the fourteenth evening.

That same year he spoke at the large Christian convention in Sialkot, which was organized mostly by Presbyterians and other churches. He preached on Luke 24:5, the question of the angels at the empty tomb: *Why do you seek the living among the dead?* According to his movement, that sermon touched organizers and participants, leaders and ordinary believers. The British revival historian J. Edwin Orr later called him an Indian counterpart of the great Western evangelists. According to the Dictionary, seventy young men from Martinpur walked with him to Sialkot, a journey of about a hundred and fifty miles, and told about Jesus along the way.

A Bible held high

From 1938 he traveled south: Madras, now Chennai, and Kerala. Great crowds came, under the open sky. The writer Dave Hunt wrote later that on one occasion there were as many as twelve thousand people, and that sick people were healed when he prayed for them. According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, he deliberately kept those healings small. He is even said to have prayed that they would stop, so that people would come to Christ for the right reason and not for a miracle. That story comes from the movement itself.

He did not advertise his meetings. He trusted that God would bring people when there was prayer. At the Mukti Mission of Pandita Ramabai, a well-known Indian Christian woman, he led nineteen nights of prayer, according to the same Dictionary. He always prayed on his knees.

Every believer should have his own Bible, he thought. In his meetings he held up his own. Anyone who had none received a rebuke, with Psalm 119 added. During his campaigns the Bible shops are said to have sold out. His processions carried banners with Bible verses and ended with a free shared meal for anyone who wanted to join.

In 1940, according to the Dictionary, about twelve thousand people came to listen to him in Madras. Soon after, a number of ministers in that city refused to have him in their churches any longer, because he criticized the established church. Here begins a tension that would remain throughout his life.

Dave Hunt summed it up this way, in a sentence the movement likes to quote: his coming threw the churches of the city into complete turmoil.

A night on the hill

Many people who came to faith through his preaching did not feel at home in the existing churches. They asked him to start a congregation. Bakht had never wanted to begin a church of his own. According to the Dictionary he fasted twenty-one days before he agreed. Then, with his co-workers, he spent a night in prayer on a hill near the city, according to Wikipedia at Pallavaram, on the edge of present-day Chennai. There, so it is told, he received his picture of churches that were entirely local and rested only on what the New Testament tells about the first Christians.

On July 12, 1941, the first church began in Madras. It was called Jehovah Shammah, Hebrew for "the Lord is there." As their foundation they chose a verse from Acts about the first Christians in Jerusalem: *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers* (Acts 2:42).

No Western mission organization was involved. Indians led the church, and the believers regularly shared a meal together, which they called a love feast. A review of Koshy's biography describes what a Sunday looked like. Early in the morning people were baptized, sometimes as many as fifty in one day. Then came a long time of praise in which everyone prayed aloud, followed by a long message. Who would speak, he did not say beforehand, because that left room for the Holy Spirit. After the sermon came the Lord's Supper, and after that a simple meal of lentils, bread and water. In the evening followed an evangelistic service with a procession to invite people.

In December 1941 the young church held its first Holy Convocation, a gathering of nineteen days. Bakht based it on Leviticus 23, where Israel gathers every year for God's feasts. Later, at such convocations, thousands of people slept in tents, ate simply, prayed and

studied the Bible. The costs were covered with voluntary gifts. No one was asked for money, in line with his first condition. After such gatherings new churches often began.

He read the Bible on his knees and meditated on it for hours. He kept that up until illness no longer allowed it. In 1965 Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Keith Samuel questioned him about it in England, and they were surprised. How did he come to such insight? He pointed to his daily reading and thinking, on his knees. His listeners had the feeling that he knew all sixty-six books by heart. A newspaper he did not read, so it is told, to keep his distance from the world.

It was 1941. India was still a British colony. Six years later the country became independent and was divided into India and Pakistan. Bakht's work shows that the gospel in India had come into Indian hands even before that time.

Hebron

From 1946 he also traveled abroad. According to the website of his movement, he spoke in 1946 in Toronto at a large mission conference for students, where the young Jim Elliot is said to have been present too. In the years after, he went to England, the United States and Australia, among other places, where it led to meetings in Sydney. Later came Washington, where Bob Finley invited him in 1969 and 1970, and the congress in Lausanne in 1974. In Syracuse in the United States, a group around Koshy held its own Holy Convocation from 1974, at his advice.

On September 25, 1950, he moved with his co-workers to Hyderabad, in the south of India. In the mid-fifties they received a new site there, which he called Hebron. Hebron became the center of the movement, with a Bible school, a church and the place for the large convocations. According to Wikipedia, in Hyderabad these drew

up to twenty-five thousand people, but I have not found that number in an independent source. The writer Norman Grubb wrote of the gatherings that here an Indian proved God.

The churches grew. In 2000, Christianity Today wrote that he had founded more than six thousand churches and groups in India, and that his influence continued in about ten thousand churches in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States. In the same report Robert Finley was quoted, the chairman of Christian Aid Mission, an American organization that supports Indian evangelists. He had never met anyone who knew as much of the Bible as Bakht Singh, he wrote. An independent count of those churches I have not found anywhere.

The shadow of a strong man

An honest chapter about Bakht Singh must also show the difficult side. His biographer T.E. Koshy devoted a separate chapter to it, about his human limitations.

The emphasis on separation from the world sometimes made his churches exclusive and judgmental, writes the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia. And because the work rested so strongly on what he heard from God, all major decisions had to pass through him. When his health declined, that caused problems in the leadership.

There was criticism outside his movement as well. The church historian Bharathi Nuthalapati writes that many people saw his churches as splinters from the established churches. Others thought his teaching was too mixed with Indian religion. She herself comes to a different judgment. According to her, his theology remained orthodox, but he spoke the language of bhakti,

the Indian devotion of personal surrender to God. He gave that language a Christian content.

I think both can be true. A man who expects everything from God can build a great deal. The same man sometimes finds it hard to let go of anything.

So he remained a leader who was clearly used by God, and who still wanted to keep deciding everything himself.

Hyderabad, September 2000

Bakht Singh developed Parkinson's disease. According to the Dictionary he lay in bed for his last ten years, cared for by a Christian couple.

About his family he told one more thing later. His father finally became a Christian, he said. We know that only from his own testimony.

He died in Hyderabad, ninety-seven years old. His movement and most reference works give Sunday, September 17, 2000. Christianity Today wrote September 16. His co-workers even noted the time: five past six in the morning. They also tell that around that time there was thunder and an earthquake, and that at his funeral a rainbow and a ring around the sun were seen, with doves above Hebron. That is found only on the website of his own movement.

His body lay in state, and people from all over the world came to say goodbye. On Friday, September 22, he was buried. The procession went from Hebron to the Christian cemetery in Narayanaguda, a walk of about two miles that took about three hours according to his co-workers. They estimate that a quarter of a million people walked along. Christianity Today reported that about six hundred thousand people attended the memorials in Hyderabad. That num-

ber too comes from the circle around Hebron. According to the Dictionary, many people in the procession held their Bibles high.

A follower told Christianity Today that he had been a father to thousands and thousands of people in India.

The boy from the Punjab had once torn up a Bible and kept only the leather cover. On that September day, thousands of people walked through Hyderabad, and above their heads they carried the book, whole.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on June 6, 1903, in the Punjab, in a Sikh family; studies in England from 1926 and in Winnipeg from 1929; conversion in 1929 in Canada after reading a New Testament that friends gave him; baptism on February 4, 1932, in Vancouver; arrival in Bombay on April 6, 1933, and rejection by his family; his role in the Martinpur revival (1937); founding of the first church in Madras in 1941; the annual Holy Convocations; the move to Hyderabad (1950) and the center Hebron; Parkinson's disease; death in Hyderabad in September 2000 at the age of ninety-seven.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the tearing up of the Bible; the dream of the hill and the voice; his dissolute life in England, the false cost statements and the cutting of his hair and beard; the kneeling during the service on August 10, 1928, and what he felt then; the exact date and hour of his conversion (December 14 and 16, 1929); the reading of John 3:3, the Bible from Christmas and the healing of his nose and eyes after Hebrews 13:8; the role of the policeman Flynn; the lecture of April 1932 and the voice; the three conditions of his calling; the letter of October 19, 1932 and his father's reaction; the turban at his feet and his answer to his parents; the

street sweepers in Karachi; the details of Martinpur (thirteen days, the fourteenth evening) and the walk to Sialkot; his prayer that the healings would stop; the conversion of his father, the healing of his mother and the baptism of his younger brother; the Sunday program in Madras (via a review of Koshy's book); the numbers at his funeral and the number of churches (from his movement and from Christian Aid Mission); the thunder, the rainbow, the ring around the sun and the doves (only on the website of the movement).

Unconfirmed: the names of the friends in Winnipeg (the Haywards, according to Our Daily Bread, or the bank manager Owel Hansen, according to the Dictionary); his marriage at the age of twelve in 1915 (one source); the warning about the Quetta earthquake; his start as an Anglican evangelist; the exact date of death (September 16 or 17); the visitor numbers of the convocations in Hyderabad; whether he spoke in Toronto in 1946 when Jim Elliot was there (only the movement says so).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one version):

- *The service of 1928.* Christian History Institute says it happened on board a ship on the way to Canada, the Dictionary mentions the summer of 1928 in Canada. His own testimony mentions the dining room of a ship on a student trip to Canada, and I have followed that version.
- *The friends in Winnipeg.* See above: Haywards or Hansen. His own text speaks only of one friend.
- *The subject in London.* Mechanical engineering (Dictionary) or agricultural engineering (Wikipedia and the movement).
- *The number of visitors in Madras.* Dave Hunt mentions twelve thousand for 1938, the Dictionary for 1940.
- *Date of the funeral.* Christian History Institute mentions September 20, the movement and the Dictionary September 22.

- *Visitors at the bier and in the procession.* Six hundred thousand (Dictionary and Christianity Today, at memorials) and a quarter of a million (in the procession, the movement); the review of Koshy's book mentions three hundred thousand. The amount of sixteen hundred rupees and his arrival in London in September 1926 come from his own writing.

Interpretation: whether his churches were a return to the first Christians or a breakaway from the existing church is a question on which Christians in India judge differently. Nuthalapati sees in him a translator of the gospel into Indian devotion, without the core changing. Whether the joy in Winnipeg and the healings came from God's hand is a question of faith. I believe it with him. The historical sources confirm that he became a Christian, that his churches came into being and that there were enormous crowds in Hyderabad.

Sources for this chapter

1. Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, "Singh, Bakht C." (Philip Malayil)
2. Christian History Institute, It Happened Today, February 4
3. Christian History Institute, Daily Quote, April 6, 1933
4. Christian Post, "This week in Christian history: … Bakht Singh arrives in Bombay"
5. Christianity Today, obituary, September 2000
6. Christianity Today, November 13, 2000
7. Brother Bakht Singh, short biography
8. Brother Bakht Singh, homepage
9. InterVarsity Press, T.E. Koshy, Bakht Singh of India
10. Langham, B.E. Bharathi Nuthalapati, Brother Bakht Singh (2017)
11. Our Daily Bread, "Bakht Singh 1903-2000"

12. Renovaré, Bakht Singh
13. Wikipedia, Bakht Singh
14. Wikipedia, 1935 Quetta earthquake
15. Bakht Singh, How I Got Joy Unspeakable (own testimony, pdf on SermonIndex)
16. A Procession of Saints, Bakht Singh
17. Review of T.E. Koshy, Bakht Singh of India (blog)

Festo Kivengere: the bishop who loved Idi Amin

On February 10, 1973, three men in Uganda stood before a firing squad. They had been convicted of political crimes against the government of President Idi Amin. According to Festo Kivengere, the charge was false. The men came from his diocese, and together with two other pastors he was allowed to speak with them one more time.

He told it later in his book. The men said that in prison they had received Jesus. They asked him to let their families know that they were forgiven. Frederick Quinn writes in his biographical sketch that they looked radiant. One of them thanked the bishop for coming. He had wanted to tell him this.

The execution took place in a stadium in Kabale. About three thousand people watched. Festo turned to the soldiers of the firing squad, so Quinn tells, and translated the testimony of the condemned men for them. The soldiers were so stunned that they forgot to put hoods over the men's heads. The three waved to the crowd, and the crowd waved back. Then the shots rang out.

The bishop would never forget it. Four years later he himself had to flee from the same president. That same year his book appeared, with a title he was asked about again and again: *I Love Idi Amin*. He became one of the best-known preachers of Africa and was given the nickname the Billy Graham of Africa. He himself spoke mostly about the cross.

It began among the cows, in the hills of the southwest.

A cowherd in Kigezi

Festo Kivengere was born around 1919. On the exact year the sources do not agree: 1918, 1919 and even 1921 are mentioned. He grew up in Rujumbura, in the north of Kigezi, a mountainous region in the southwest of Uganda. It lies in what is now Rukungiri District, not far from the border with Rwanda and Congo.

His family was a ruling family among half-nomadic cattle herders, and it was not Christian. As a child Festo herded cows. According to Quinn, he read children's booklets about Jesus while doing so. In those years Uganda was a British protectorate. The British governed the country through local kings and chiefs. Missionaries of the Anglican Church Missionary Society had been founding schools and churches there since 1877. The Anglican church grew out of the Church of England and has bishops and a fixed liturgy.

Around the age of ten, Festo went to a mission school. There he heard about Jesus for the first time, and he was baptized. According to a later biography, it was a disappointment. He had thought he would change after baptism, and he noticed nothing.

According to the Ugandan newspaper Daily Monitor, he went on to Kinyasano, Kigezi High School and Mbarara High School, and between 1938 and 1940 to Bishop Tucker Theological College in Mukono, near Kampala. Soon after the start of secondary school

he left the faith behind. He joined boys who had received nothing from the revival. They sneaked out to the shops after dark, and he drank and smoked heavily, so it says in the short biography by Frank Retief. In his studies he progressed quickly. He got along well with students of every age and had a natural authority, writes Retief, but inside he was empty. In 1938 his mother died.

People who confessed their sins out loud

While Festo was letting go of the faith, something unusual was happening in the churches around him. In the twenties and thirties a movement swept through East Africa that later came to be called the East African Revival. A revival is a period in which many people come to a living faith at the same time and churches come alive again.

It began with two men: a Ugandan layman, Simeoni Nsibambi, and a British mission doctor, Joe Church. They met in 1929 and prayed together. In 1933, at a convention in Gahini in Rwanda, people confessed their sins in public and found forgiveness. The movement spread to Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Its followers were called *balokole*: the saved ones. Mostly they stayed in the Anglican church. They also met in small groups to read the Bible and to tell each other honestly what was going wrong in their lives.

In 1935 the revival reached Kigezi, during a week of Bible study on Rugarama hill near Kabale. In Festo's own region it began, according to Retief, in an ordinary Anglican service, where the reading of a Bible passage turned into weeping. It spread to homes and to groups that met under trees. The churches in North Kigezi became so full that people stood outside.

Not everyone was glad. Festo's uncle Karegyesa paid men to beat Christians. He stopped when the men said they could no longer

sleep at night. Some of them later came to faith themselves, and a few asked their victims for forgiveness. In those years Festo shared his uncle's dislike.

Welcome home, Uncle Festo

When Festo came back to Rujumbura after his studies, he walked through the village past people who were singing hymns in the market. His niece Kyabyarwa greeted him, so Retief tells, by asking whether he loved Jesus too, because she did now. By then he was a heavy drinker. He lived at the school with his stepsister Eva, his niece Kyabyarwa and his stepbrother Jonathan, who was nine. When he came home drunk, the girls became afraid. They kept saying that he needed Jesus. His annoyance grew into anger.

The revival made him angry, just as it made his uncle angry. To his students he was a rebel without a cause. That is how Simonetta Carr puts it in a piece about him: they admired him, and he mocked the faith.

A nine-year-old brother in the chapel

As a teacher at a mission school, Festo had to lead the chapel service one morning. He had nothing to say. He told the boys that he had nothing to give them. His little stepbrother Jonathan, nine years old, stood up with his New Testament and spoke for about twenty-five minutes. According to this story, about twenty boys gave their lives to the Lord.

Festo said later that he should have gone forward, and that he had been too proud. The girls belonged to the revival and prayed for him.

When children in the temple cheered for Jesus, He said: *Yes. Have you never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have*

perfected praise"? (Matthew 21:16). In that chapel it was not the teacher who spoke, but a boy of nine.

A bicycle on the road

Then follows the best-known story from his youth. It comes from his own mouth, through his biographers. In early October 1941 Festo was thinking about suicide. A headmaster's post had become vacant and people mentioned his name, but he walked around with thoughts of suicide. One Sunday his fourteen-year-old niece said in church that God had promised her and Eva that their prayer for Festo would be answered that weekend. Festo walked out angry and spent the rest of the day drinking with his uncle.

That afternoon a friend came toward him on a bicycle. He was also called Festo: Festo Rwamunahe. Three hours earlier, he said, Jesus had become real to him. Then he asked Kivengere's forgiveness for three specific things he had done to him, and asked him where he himself stood.

Festo came home so shaken that he could no longer light his pipe. He went down on his knees and admitted that he was empty and guilty. He asked God to do for him what He had done for his friend.

He saw, so he told later, Jesus on the cross. Not a helpless criminal. In his own words: "I saw my God slaughtered for my sin." He heard Christ tell him how bad he was, and how much He loved him. He protested. He was an enemy, and he did not deserve this. Christ answered that He loved him *that* much. Festo realized that the forgiveness was already waiting and his guilt was gone.

He stood up, full of joy, and began to sing. The songs of his childhood suddenly had a new meaning.

The Billy Graham Museum of Wheaton College puts it down as a conversion during the revival in 1939. Retief gives October 1941. Which year is right, I have not been able to establish. That he came to faith within the revival, and that a friend who asked for forgiveness played a part in it, he told himself.

Asking someone for forgiveness for something small and concrete is hard. Festo's faith began with a conversation like that on a road. It would also become the heart of his preaching.

Jesus said to anyone who remembers at the altar that his brother has something against him: *leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother* (Matthew 5:24). Festo Rwamunahe did that on the day Jesus became real to him.

Twelve years in Dodoma

In 1946 Festo left with the Church Missionary Society for Tanganyika, present-day Tanzania. According to the Daily Monitor, he was a teacher for twelve years in Dodoma, in the middle of that country. Around the same time he married Merab. They stayed married for forty-two years and had four daughters.

In the revival, Africans and Europeans also confessed their distrust of each other. At a commemoration in Kabale in 2025, a Ugandan professor told how Nsibambi and Church had once confessed their fear and suspicion to each other in tears.

In 1959 Festo became assistant inspector of the schools of the Church of Uganda in Kigezi, and from 1961 inspector. At the University of London he earned a teaching diploma. In 1961 he gave a sermon about the revival in Urbana; of that recording I know only the title.

Don't bother to translate literally

Somewhere in these years Festo translated the sermons of the American evangelist Billy Graham into Swahili. According to Frederick Quinn, in his book *African Saints*, Graham told him that he did not need to translate literally. "Don't bother to translate literally." He knew what Graham meant, and that was what had to come across. The two remained friends for life.

It is a small story. I like it because it shows that Festo was a preacher with a voice of his own early on.

His way to the ministry did not go by itself. According to the historian Louise Pirouet, he was first rejected in Uganda for ordination as a minister. In the United States he was ordained deacon, and at Pittsburgh Seminary he earned a theological degree. In Uganda he became a priest: Pirouet gives 1967, the Daily Monitor 1965. Christianity Today wrote in the seventies that he had been traveling the world as an evangelist since 1962.

In 1969 the South African evangelist Michael Cassidy invited him to build a team in East Africa for his organization African Enterprise. Around 1971 this grew into African Evangelistic Enterprise, with Festo as leader in East Africa. The aim was to spread the revival across the whole continent. A white South African and a black Ugandan working together was seen in those turbulent years as a powerful testimony.

A bishop in the days of Amin

In 1971 General Idi Amin seized power in Uganda in a military coup. He was a Muslim and allowed the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches to work only under his supervision. How many people were murdered under his rule, nobody knows exactly. African Enterprise mentions an estimate of 400,000.

In November 1972 Festo was consecrated bishop of Kigezi, with his seat in Kabale. He remained an evangelist and kept his work for African Enterprise. From the pulpit he spoke out against injustice, even when that was dangerous, and he forbade his clergy to meddle in party politics.

Then came February 1973, and the three men before the firing squad. Quinn writes that Festo had been to see Amin to protest against the killings.

Meanwhile he kept speaking about the revival. On July 21, 1974, he stood at the great congress on world evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. The transcript has been preserved. He described a church that was dry and divided by tribe, race and doctrine. Each man was like a balloon, he said. People bumped into each other and flew apart again. Pastors, bishops, spouses, white Christians, all had their pride. When the revival came, a pastor wept before his congregation and a husband knelt before his wife. "The theme of the East African revival was the cross, and we needed it!" Then he asked the East Africans in the hall to come forward to sing, in Luganda, Swahili and English, a song about cleansing from sin by the blood of Jesus.

Waiting outside the building

In 1977 the Church of Uganda celebrated that the gospel had reached the country a hundred years earlier. It was a strange year. Imprisoned church leaders sang and told their testimony. At large gatherings people came to faith. Catholic and Protestant clergy who had been estranged for years celebrated together. And Christians were being murdered. Tim Stafford writes in Christian History that Ugandan Christians knew the stories of the martyrs of the nineteenth century, boys at the king's court who refused to

deny their faith and were burned alive. That is how they learned to look at Amin.

According to Christian History, Festo gave a sermon in January 1977 on the value of life, in which he denounced the violence.

In February the Anglican bishops wrote Amin a letter of protest about murders and arbitrary rule. Archbishop Janani Luwum stood behind it, and Festo signed along. According to the Daily Monitor he had even drafted the letter and led a procession of clergy from Namirembe Cathedral to the president's office, but that paper presents this as something that is said. A different chapter of this book is about Luwum himself.

On February 16, 1977, Luwum and the other bishops were summoned to a meeting in Kampala. Luwum was arrested, together with two ministers. According to Tim Stafford in Christian History, Festo was one of the last to see him alive. He waited outside the building where Luwum was being questioned, until guards sent him away under threat of their weapons. The next day the government reported that Luwum and the ministers had died in a car accident. Later it turned out that he had been shot.

Over the hills by night

Festo was told that he would be next. Christians around him urged him to leave. According to a Canadian report from 2025, he first refused, because he did not want to abandon his congregation. They kept urging him, and he gave in.

He and Merab drove as far as they could. Then they walked at night along forest paths through the mountains to Rwanda, where they were warmly received. On the route the sources do not fully agree: a few mention Kenya or Tanzania as the country of flight. Probably Rwanda was the first step and they ended up in Nairobi, in

Kenya. At the memorial service for Luwum, which according to reports drew about four and a half thousand people, he could no longer be present.

Later he heard what had happened behind them: Christians who stayed, families falling apart, plundered homes, and also stories of people who forgave their persecutors and prayed for them. He knew families, he wrote, where the father left every day without anyone knowing whether he would come back, and where yet a peace reigned that was not of this world.

In Nairobi he found the office of African Enterprise full of Ugandan refugees. Together with colleagues he started RETURN, a relief program for Ugandan refugees. According to African Enterprise itself, it paid for more than three hundred scholarships at universities abroad. Contact with people in Uganda he did not have in those days. A letter or a phone call could put them in danger.

Good Friday in London

On the way to the African Enterprise office in California, Festo and Merab traveled via London. On Good Friday they went to All Souls Church at Langham Place, the church of the well-known British preacher John Stott. The sermon was about the words of Jesus on the cross: *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do* (Luke 23:34).

What happened inside him we know from his own book. In those weeks he preached in churches about forgiveness, but he noticed that he had become hard and bitter. The Holy Spirit showed him, he wrote, that this threatened his service of God's love, and that he must ask for grace to love Amin more. In the church he understood the Word of the Lord this way: if Amin had stood in the circle of soldiers who crucified Jesus, would He have asked forgiveness for

him too? According to Christian Today he prayed there: "Lord, I am here and now forgiving Idi Amin." There came, so he told, a freedom in his heart and a stream of joy and peace. In a later book he wrote that he got up that day with a liberated heart.

He wrote that toward Amin he could not do less than Jesus had done on the cross, however evil Amin was. That is what the book says, according to Quinn.

Look at the order. He did not forgive because it was over. Amin was still in power. His friend had just been murdered, his diocese was unsafe, and he did not know whether he could ever go back. How do you forgive someone who is still carrying on?

Still in 1977 his little book *I Love Idi Amin* appeared, written with the retired missionary Dorothy Smoker. At press conferences people asked him how he could mean that. According to African Enterprise, he answered that he might not like Amin, but that as a Christian he was obliged to forgive him and wish him the best. Someone asked what he would do if he stood facing Amin and was handed a revolver. He said he would hand the weapon back. "My weapon is love."

The book was not a plea to look away. It described the persecution, the imprisoned church leaders who sang, and the Catholic and Protestant clergy who found each other. He wrote that a living church cannot be destroyed by fire or guns, here told in my own words, since I could not find the original wording. At a conference in Germany he said it more briefly: "A bullet can kill, but a bullet cannot heal."

In Germany he also got a sharp question. How did his attitude relate to that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the men who plotted an attack on Hitler? Festo did not condemn them, writes Carr. For Uganda, he said, God did not need bullets. He could make Amin

stop with a heart attack or in some other way. Violence brings quick change, but God seeks lasting change.

Anyone who finds that too naive should know that in those same years he worked with Ugandan exiles who wanted Amin gone. The Ugandan lawyer George Kanyeihamba, then a lecturer in England, said that Festo had him asked in 1977 to help get rid of Amin. That request came, among others, through one of his daughters. For Festo, forgiving went together with resisting injustice. What he refused was hating.

Paul wrote: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:21). For Festo that did not mean silence. He named evil by name, helped refugees and refused to hate.

Back to Rugarama

In 1979 Amin was driven out. Festo returned to Kigezi and his diocese. He was now internationally known, traveled to America, Australia and Great Britain and became a spokesman for the church of Uganda. In the years of exile he had raised money for Uganda with Michael Cassidy, through offices of African Enterprise in Australia and Great Britain. According to African Enterprise Australia, the two traveled together through, among other places, the United States, Canada, Australia, Egypt, Liberia and South Africa.

He was no more silent toward the new rulers. Under the second government of Milton Obote, human rights were violated again, and Festo said so out loud. When in 1982 thousands of Rwandan refugees in Uganda were driven from their homes, he organized help. Pirouet calls that unpopular and dangerous. He also warned that Obote favored the Anglican church and so set Catholics and Protestants against each other.

In 1983 he did something that the Anglican world officially opposed. In the cathedral at Rugarama he ordained three women as priests. The first was Grace Ndyabahika. According to a Ugandan historian, Festo said in a meeting that waiting for the Church of England would last until the end of time. His diocese stood behind him. Seven years later the Church of Uganda unanimously accepted the ordination of women.

You may think differently about that than he did. I mention it because it fits who he was: here too he did not wait until London approved.

In September 1986 he addressed, from Kigezi, the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, who had announced that his Islamic organization would start working on Uganda and the surrounding countries. Festo asked him not to use Uganda as a springboard to change a Christian country. According to the Daily Monitor, his reaction was discussed for days in the letters to the editor in Kampala.

A coffin in a chartered plane

Festo developed leukemia. According to the Daily Monitor he died on May 18, 1988, in Nairobi Hospital in Kenya, sixty-nine years old. Michael Cassidy, his friend and co-leader of African Enterprise, saw him one last time in the hospital.

With a chartered plane, Cassidy and other leaders of African Enterprise brought the coffin to Uganda. In Namirembe Cathedral in Kampala a service was held, at which Cassidy spoke. The government wanted to bury him in the cemetery for national heroes in Kampala. The family chose Kabale, in Kigezi. According to the Daily Monitor the funeral was in the church on Rugarama hill, on May 29, 1988.

In the Billy Graham Museum in Wheaton hangs a banner for him, with a red field for the years of persecution and a sentence from himself: "The Cross is the flesh and bones, the heartbeat of evangelism."

Quinn names forgiveness, reconciliation and proclamation as the three pillars of his ministry. All three are in this story.

I think of those three men in February 1973. They died while three thousand people watched, and they wanted their families to know they were forgiven. The bishop who had spoken with them carried that message for the rest of his life. He took it to Lausanne, to London, to Nairobi and back to Kabale.

In Kabale, where in 1935 a week of Bible study began on Rugarama hill, he is buried.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Kigezi, southwest Uganda, in a non-Christian ruling family; conversion within the East African Revival; work as a teacher and then in Tanzania; marriage to Merab and four daughters; degree from Pittsburgh Seminary; the invitation of Michael Cassidy (1969) and leadership of African Enterprise in East Africa; bishop of Kigezi from 1972; the execution of three men from his diocese in February 1973; his address in Lausanne on July 21, 1974; the protest letter of the bishops and the death of Janani Luwum in February 1977; his flight to Rwanda in 1977; the Good Friday service in All Souls, London, and the book *I Love Idi Amin* (1977); return after 1979; criticism of the Obote regime; help for Rwandan refugees in 1982; the ordination of three women in 1983; death from leukemia in 1988.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his disappointment after baptism; his children's booklets about Jesus among the cows

(Quinn); the appearance of his little brother in the chapel; the conversion after the conversation with Festo Rwamunahe and the vision of Jesus on the cross, including the pipe he could not light and the singing afterward; the words of Billy Graham about translating; the conversations with the three condemned men, the translation for the soldiers and the forgotten hoods (Quinn, based on Festo's book); his inner struggle and the prayer on Good Friday; the answers at press conferences; the conversation about Bonhoeffer in Germany (Carr); the number of more than three hundred scholarships (from African Enterprise itself); the families with the father who left every day (from Festo's book, via Stafford).

Unconfirmed: the year of birth (1918, 1919 or 1921); the year of his conversion (1939 or 1941); the year of his ordination as priest (1965 or 1967); the exact route after Rwanda (Kenya or Tanzania are also mentioned); that he drafted the protest letter and led the procession to the president's office (the Daily Monitor says "reportedly"); the exact date of death, May 18, 1988, and the date of the funeral, May 29, 1988 (only the Daily Monitor); the Gaddafi story of September 1986 (one source); the sermon in Urbana in 1961 (only the title seen).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one version):

- *The day of the conversion.* Retief mentions a Sunday in early October 1941 and a date that did not fall on a Sunday, and says in the same text that the niece spoke in church the next morning. I left out the date and had the niece speak in church on the same day.
- *The boy in the chapel.* Retief calls him stepbrother Jonathan; Carr and Retief in other passages speak of his little brother of nine. I used the name from Retief.

- *The year of the protest letter.* African Enterprise and Christian Today place the letter in 1980, the rest of the sources in February 1977. I follow 1977, because Luwum died in that year.
- *The place of the execution.* Quinn mentions a stadium in Kabale; other sources mention no place.
- *The escape route.* See above.
- *His age.* At his death he was sixty-nine according to the Daily Monitor, which fits 1919.

Interpretation: some sources, Christian ones too, contain errors: for example, he is once called archbishop and the protest letter is placed in 1980. I have not relied on that in this chapter. Whether Festo really saw Jesus at the cross and heard the voice of the Lord is a question of faith. I believe it with him. The sources do confirm that he went from a heavy drinker and scoffer to a preacher, and that he forgave Amin publicly.

Sources for this chapter

1. Dictionary of African Christian Biography, Frederick Quinn, "Kivengere, Festo"
2. Dictionary of African Christian Biography, M. Louise Pirouet, "Kivengere, Festo"
3. Boston University, History of Missiology, "Kivengere, Festo (B)"
4. Frank Retief, "Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda", Evangelical Times, 2013
5. Simonetta Carr, "Festo Kivengere and His Message of Forgiveness", Place for Truth, 2022
6. Daily Monitor, "When Bishop Kivengere dared Idi Amin, Gaddafi"
7. Daily Monitor, "Kivengyere was a shining star of Kigezi, says Kanyeihamba"

8. Daily Monitor, “Janani Luwum’s final hours”
9. Maaike VanderMeer, “The ‘Billy Graham of Africa’ ”, Christian Courier, 2025
10. Tim Stafford, “Costly Love, Radical Forgiveness”, Christian History 94
11. Emma Wild-Wood, “Your clan is Salvation”, Christian History 153
12. Christian History Institute, It Happened Today, January 27
13. Christianity Today, “The Revival That Was and Is”
14. Billy Graham Center Archives, transcript Lausanne, July 21, 1974
15. Wheaton College, Billy Graham Museum, “Festo Kivengere”
16. African Enterprise Australia, “Overcoming challenges as seen in the experiences of Festo Kivengere”
17. Marieke Kleynhans, “I Love Idi Amin”, Christian Today, 2022
18. ATLA Digital Library, collection of sermons of Bishop Festo Kivengere
19. Wikipedia, “Festo Kivengere” (starting point)

Óscar Romero: the bishop who spoke the names on Sunday

On Sunday, March 20, 1977, the churches of the Archdiocese of San Salvador were closed. In the whole city and in the villages around it, no Mass was celebrated that morning, except one. That one Mass was held on the square in front of the cathedral of San Salvador. According to the Romero Trust, which preserves his life and sermons, about a hundred thousand people stood there.

The man at the altar had been archbishop for only a few weeks. Eight days earlier his friend, the Jesuit Rutilio Grande, had been shot dead. Óscar Romero had canceled all the other Masses for that Sunday.

Three years later he himself was dead. In those three years a conservative priest became the best-known voice of El Salvador. Every Sunday a large part of the country listened to his sermon on the radio. He named the names of people who had disappeared, been tortured or been killed. On March 24, 1980, he was shot while celebrating Mass. In 2018 the Roman Catholic Church declared him a saint.

Anyone who knew him in his younger years would not have predicted it.

An apprentice in the workshop

Óscar Arnulfo Romero was born on August 15, 1917, in Ciudad Barrios, a town in the mountains of eastern El Salvador. He was the second child of Santos Romero and Guadalupe de Jesús Galdámez. The Romero Trust speaks of eight children, Westminster Abbey of seven. There was little money in the family.

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, between Guatemala and Honduras on the Pacific Ocean. The great majority of the population was Roman Catholic.

As a boy, Óscar learned the trade of carpenter. According to the Romero Trust he was apprenticed to a carpenter in the village. Other sources say his father taught him the trade. He was good at it. But in 1931, when he was thirteen, he left the workshop behind. He went to the minor seminary in the city of San Miguel, a school for boys who wanted to become priests, run by the Claretians, a Catholic order. When his mother fell ill, he left the seminary for three months to help his family. He worked with two brothers in a gold mine near Ciudad Barrios, so Wikipedia tells, which serves here as a starting point.

In 1937 he went to the major seminary in the capital, San Salvador. That same year he was sent to Rome, where he studied at the Gregorian, the pontifical university of the Jesuits.

On April 4, 1942, Romero was ordained a priest in Rome. His family was not there. There was war in Europe, and the journey across the ocean was not possible for them. In his diary he wrote on February 4, 1943, that in the last days the Lord had awakened in him a great desire for holiness; I give this in my own words, since I could not

find the original wording. He began a doctorate, but in 1943 he was called back to El Salvador. On the way home he was detained in Cuba, according to the Romero Trust for three months. Together with a fellow traveler he ended up in an internment camp, probably because they came from Mussolini's Italy. In December he came home.

On January 11, 1944, he celebrated his first Mass in Ciudad Barrios. Then he became pastor in Anamorós, a village in the east. Soon he was called to San Miguel. He stayed there for more than twenty years, as pastor and as administrator of the cathedral. According to his biographers he started a group of Alcoholics Anonymous there and helped with the building of the cathedral.

In 1966 he became director of Orientación, the weekly paper of the archdiocese. Under his leadership it was a conservative paper. In 1967 he moved to San Salvador, as secretary of the bishops' conference. There he met a Jesuit named Rutilio Grande. They became friends.

To think and feel with the Church

On June 21, 1970, Romero was consecrated auxiliary bishop of San Salvador. Rutilio Grande was master of ceremonies at the consecration. As his motto Romero chose the Latin words Sentire cum Ecclesia, an expression from the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. The Romero Trust translates them as "To think and feel with the Church".

That motto fits how he was then. He wanted to be faithful to Rome and to the teaching of the church. He was careful and afraid of unrest. In 1972 he defended, on behalf of the bishops, a military raid on the national university. A priest from a working-class neighborhood later told how parishioners confronted him about it during a

Mass. It ended in shouting, and the priest took off his vestments and ended the service. Years later, as archbishop, Romero came back to that parish and admitted, so a nun who was there tells, that he had been wrong and the people had been right. Parishioners wept and applauded. In 1973 he came into open conflict with the Jesuits. He accused their high school of spreading Marxism with what they called "liberating education." A priest remembers what Grande said about him: he is conservative, but honest, and you can work with him.

According to the Romero Trust, in 1971 he sought help for scrupulosity, an anxious tendency to keep doubting whether you have done well enough. Wikipedia mentions a retreat in January 1966, after which a psychiatrist diagnosed a compulsive personality. I mention this because it makes him human. The man who later seemed to give way for no one struggled with fear and doubt.

In the prophet Isaiah it says of the Servant of the LORD: *A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench* (Isaiah 42:3). The anxious auxiliary bishop of 1971 later became the voice of his country.

Five farmers at Tres Calles

In 1974 Romero became bishop of Santiago de María, a poor rural diocese where coffee was grown.

In 1975 the National Guard, a military police force, killed five farmers at Tres Calles. The Romero Trust writes that it shocked him deeply. Romero protested with a letter to the president. So something was already changing, before the events that would make his name known. At the end of 1976 the National Guard held two teenage catechists in his home region. A nun tells that Romero went

there at once, demanded their release and later listened to their story of the torture.

To follow these events, you need to know something about the country in the seventies. Political violence was increasing. Armed groups of the left arose, and there were death squads: groups that kidnapped and killed people without any trial. According to the later Truth Commission of the United Nations, those squads were often led by military men and supported by businessmen, large landowners and some politicians.

In the same years liberation theology arose in Latin America. According to this movement, God stands on the side of the poor, and faith must also do something about poverty and injustice. Some saw in it an honest reading of the Gospels. Others thought it came too close to Marxism.

On February 3, 1977, the pope appointed Romero archbishop of San Salvador. On February 22 he was installed. The government welcomed the appointment. Many priests were disappointed. They knew him as the conservative bishop who had attacked the Jesuits. At a meeting of priests shortly after, Romero sat, as an American priest remembers, visibly moved beside him. When Romero spoke, that priest decided to stay in El Salvador.

The road to El Paisnal

On March 12, 1977, not yet three weeks later, Rutilio Grande drove from Aguilares to the village of El Paisnal. In the car with him were Manuel Solórzano, an older catechist, and Nelson Rutilio Lemus, a teenager. According to the Romero Trust, Grande was on his way to celebrate Mass. Vatican News writes that he was on his way to a novena, a series of prayer services. A death squad stopped them and killed all three.

Grande worked in the region around Aguilares. Among the poor he had set up groups that learned to care for themselves.

A nun who had come to Aguilares told later what she saw that evening. She sat by Grande's body and wiped up, with a towel, the blood that kept seeping from the body. Romero came in. He stood for a time in silence before the body. Then he said that if they did not change now, they would never do it. I give this in my own words, as the nun's account is only known to me in translation. The Jesuit Jon Sobrino, who was in the parish, opened the door for him that night.

Later, writes the New York Review of Books, Romero said that seeing that body had changed him. He said: "If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path."

Romero led the funeral Mass for the three men. Then he made an unusual decision: on Sunday, March 20, all the churches of the archdiocese would be closed, and there would be one Mass, in front of the cathedral. Shortly after, he traveled to Rome and told Pope Paul VI what was happening in his country. On July 1, 1977, he stayed away from the inauguration of the new president, in protest at the failure to investigate the murder of Grande.

The sources see the death of Grande as the turning point in his life. America Magazine writes that through this murder Romero understood where his own road would lead. How sudden that change was, biographers judge differently. The letter about Tres Calles shows that he had begun earlier to see what was happening in the country.

There are moments when someone can no longer look away from something he has known for a long time. For Romero the murder of his friend was such a moment.

Every Catholic must be a martyr

In May 1977 another priest was killed: Alfonso Navarro, on May 11, together with a boy from his parish, Luis Torres. A week later the army occupied Aguilares, Grande's village. It used the parish church as a barracks, and the Blessed Sacrament was desecrated.

In 2018 Pope Francis recalled a line from one of Romero's sermons of 1977, that every Catholic must be a martyr; I give it in my own words, since I could not find the original wording. Romero meant the word in its old sense: a martyr is a witness. Whoever is a witness of Christ must be willing to lose something for it.

The archbishop began to tell in his sermons what had happened that week. Who had disappeared. Who had been found dead. Who had been tortured. Every week he did it again.

In Proverbs it says: *Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die* (Proverbs 31:8). Romero did that every Sunday. He spoke on behalf of people who could no longer say anything themselves.

He also went to the people himself. A nun tells of a village where the residents performed a play about Bible parables and asked him what they meant. Romero said he could add nothing. He had learned more about the Bible that day than in Rome. People had never seen a bishop come to them like that, she says: greeting everyone, answering every question. After Mass on Sunday he stood outside by the cathedral and shook hands with thin farmers who had walked for hours. When they tried to say what he meant to them, he bowed his head and looked away, writes a journalist who interviewed him a few times. He seemed to say that the honor was not his.

A voice on the radio

The archdiocese had its own radio station, YSAX. Every Sunday it broadcast the sermon of the archbishop. His sermons often lasted hours. According to listener surveys from those years, about three quarters of the people in the countryside and about half of the people in the city listened to him regularly. It was the most listened-to program in the country. The American embassy listened along too.

For many people it was the only place where they heard what was really happening. The newspapers and the other stations were silent or told it differently. CathNews writes that Romero refused to be censored. Farmers gathered around the radio, and the army listened too.

The station was jammed. The office was bombed. His sermons went on the air every week, except when a bomb had silenced YSAX. In 1990 the archdiocese published all the texts of his sermons, together with an elaboration of his diary, which he spoke onto tape.

Here you see something I admire. Romero did not look for a stage. He had worked in a parish for more than twenty years and run a church paper. He used what he had: a pulpit and a weak transmitter. And he persevered.

His opponents saw in him a politician in a priest's robe. They linked him with liberation theology and with the leftist guerrillas. He himself told a journalist that he agreed with the Catholic view of liberation, and not with a materialist one. He said that he was with Pope Paul VI.

In February 1978 he received an honorary doctorate from the American Georgetown University. In June 1978 he traveled to Rome again, where he got cool receptions at the Curia, the pope's officials, but where Paul VI once more strongly supported him. In November

1978, 118 British members of parliament and of the House of Lords nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize of 1979. In January and February 1979 he traveled to Puebla in Mexico, to the conference of the Latin American bishops, without an official role. His presence became a conversation in itself. In May 1979 he gave Pope John Paul II seven files on the injustice in his country, so Westminster Abbey reports. The conversation was difficult, but Romero was content with it. While he was in Rome, on May 8 the police fired on a peaceful demonstration in front of the cathedral, in which twenty-five people died and seventy were wounded. In February 1980 the University of Leuven in Belgium followed with an honorary doctorate.

A letter to the White House

On October 15, 1979, a revolutionary government junta came to power in El Salvador, a group of military men and civilians. The violence did not diminish. The country slid toward the civil war that would last from 1980 to 1992.

On February 17, 1980, Romero wrote an open letter to the American president Jimmy Carter. He asked him not to give any more military aid to the Salvadoran security forces. That aid would, in his view, only make the injustice and the oppression worse. Carter did not answer himself. His Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, sent a telegram. Whether Romero ever received it is not known.

In the newspapers he was called a demagogic and violent archbishop who preached terrorism from his cathedral. On Sunday, March 9, 1980, a case of dynamite was found behind the altar of the basilica where he was going to preach. It had not exploded. A papal envoy had warned him that he was in danger. Romero brushed aside the worries of others.

During his last retreat, a few days of silence and prayer, he wrote notes about the possibility of a violent death. He wrote that it was not easy to accept it. And he wrote that if it came to this, "I shall feel God very close as I draw my last breath." His spiritual director helped him with the thought that a life surrendered to God says more than the way it ends. America Magazine adds that he loved life and his people. He did not long to leave.

Sunday, March 23, 1980

On Sunday, March 23, Romero preached on a Sunday for the last time. The sermon went out over YSAX into the country. A foreign station, Radio Noticias del Continente, broadcast it too.

At the end he addressed the soldiers, the National Guard and the police. They were brothers, he said, of the same people they were killing. No soldier was obliged to obey an order that goes against the law of God. Then came the sentence that would become famous. He begged, asked and ordered them in the name of God: "Cease the repression!"

According to America Magazine, the applause in the church was so loud that the radio technicians at first thought the sound was feeding back.

What do you do when you know what it may cost you, and you say it anyway? I have no easy answer to that question. Romero did not make big words of it. The next evening he simply celebrated Mass again.

The grain of wheat

Romero lived at the Hospital of Divine Providence, Divina Providencia, a hospital for people with cancer in San Salvador, run by Carmelite sisters. On Monday, March 24, 1980, at about six in the

evening, he celebrated Mass in the chapel of that hospital. It was a Mass in memory of Sara Meardi de Pinto, who had died a year earlier. Her son Jorge Pinto published the weekly El Independiente, one of the few papers that wrote about human rights. The sisters had left the doors of the chapel open to the air.

One of the readings came from the Gospel of John, the words of Jesus about the grain of wheat: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain* (John 12:24). Romero preached on it. A sound recording of that sermon exists. The Jesuit James Brockman, his biographer, later listened to the recording again and translated it. The last words were an invitation to pray together: "Let us, then, join together intimately in faith and hope."

Right after the sermon a shot rang out. It came from a car that stood in front of the chapel, a red Volkswagen Passat, so the driver of the car told later. Romero was hit and died in the chapel. The sisters and others who were at the Mass went to him, but he was already dead. According to the Romero Trust it was 6:26 p.m. The recording of the Mass captured the shot.

The sentence about the grain of wheat he had not chosen himself. It was the reading of that evening.

Palm Sunday 1980

Six days later, on Palm Sunday, March 30, 1980, the funeral Mass was held on the square in front of the cathedral. According to Wikipedia more than two hundred and fifty thousand people came. During the service bombs exploded and shots were fired. People fled through the unfinished cathedral and lost shoes, glasses and other belongings. In the panic and through the shots dozens of people died. The Romero Trust speaks of about forty dead, official

sources then mentioned thirty-one. Who fired has never been established.

At the funeral Mass at the Jesuit university (the UCA), Ignacio Ellacuría said that God had passed through El Salvador in Archbishop Romero. Jon Sobrino remembers that people immediately called him a saint.

That same year the civil war began. On one side stood the government army and the death squads, on the other the leftist guerrilla movement FMLN. In twelve years more than seventy-five thousand Salvadorans died. In June 1980 the Italian Franciscan Cosme Spessotto was also shot dead, a priest who, like Romero, had spoken out about injustice.

On January 16, 1992, peace was signed in Mexico City, the Chapultepec Accords.

What the Truth Commission found

As part of the peace agreement the United Nations set up a Truth Commission. On March 15, 1993, its report appeared. The commission spoke with about two thousand witnesses and collected information about many thousands of victims. The great majority of the violence it investigated, it found, was the responsibility of the armed forces and the groups connected with them. It also named hundreds of murders and disappearances by the FMLN.

On the murder of Romero the commission was clear. Major Roberto D'Aubuisson had given the order. He had already died by then. According to the report a few other men also played an active role, among them a former army captain.

Five days after the report, parliament passed an amnesty law. In 2004 a judge in the United States held that former captain liable for

the murder in a civil case. He went into hiding. In 2016 the Supreme Court of El Salvador declared the amnesty law unconstitutional. For the murder of Romero no one has ever been criminally convicted.

I write down this name because the Truth Commission established it. About the civil war itself, opinions in El Salvador are still divided, and I leave that judgment to the Salvadorans. What happened in that chapel has been established.

In 2010 the United Nations proclaimed March 24 the International Day for the Right to the Truth, in memory of Romero.

St. Peter's Square, October 14, 2018

In 1990 his successor, Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas, opened the process to declare Romero blessed. It went slowly. Around 2000 it stood still, and in Rome it was examined whether his teaching was sound. Some in the church thought he had been killed for political reasons, and not for his faith. In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI said, according to the Romero Trust, that he had no doubt that Romero deserved to be declared blessed as a person; the Vatican website later removed those words from the transcript.

In 2013 Pope Francis released the process again. In 2014 he had said that for him Romero was a man of God. On February 3, 2015, he recognized Romero as a martyr, killed in odium fidei, out of hatred for the faith. On May 23, 2015, he was beatified in San Salvador, on the Salvador del Mundo square. On March 6, 2018, the pope recognized a healing as a miracle: that of Cecilia Maribel Flores, a pregnant woman. In the Catholic Church a miracle is a requirement for canonization. Whether it was a miracle is a question of faith. The church has investigated and recognized it.

On October 14, 2018, Óscar Romero was canonized in St. Peter's Square in Rome. A day later the pope spoke with pilgrims from

El Salvador. He called Romero a shepherd who gave his life for his sheep.

Those words go back to Jesus Himself: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep* (John 10:11). Romero loved life and did not long to leave. Yet he stayed with his people.

In January 2022 his friend Rutilio Grande was also beatified, together with Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus, who were in the car with him, and with Cosme Spessotto. It happened in San Salvador, on the same square where Romero had been beatified seven years earlier.

The Anglican church also remembers him. Westminster Abbey in London, where an Anglican congregation gathers, unveiled on July 1, 1998, ten statues of martyrs of the twentieth century. They stand in a row above the west entrance. One of those stone figures is the archbishop from San Salvador, struck down that evening in the chapel, right after he had preached about a grain of wheat that falls into the ground.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on August 15, 1917, in Ciudad Barrios; ordination as a priest in Rome on April 4, 1942; a long period as a priest in San Miguel; auxiliary bishop in 1970 and bishop of Santiago de María in 1974; appointment as archbishop in February 1977; the murder of Rutilio Grande, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus on March 12, 1977; the one Mass in front of the cathedral; the Sunday sermons over YSAX and the attacks on the station; the letter to President Carter in February 1980; the last Sunday sermon on March 23, 1980; the murder during Mass on March 24, 1980; the dead at the funeral; the conclusion of the UN

Truth Commission (1993); the civil ruling against Saravia (2004); beatification (2015) and canonization (October 14, 2018).

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his notes from the last retreat about a violent death (own notes, quoted by America Magazine); his diary entry of February 4, 1943 (Wikipedia); his treatment for scrupulosity in 1971 (Romero Trust, based on biographers); the details of his training as a carpenter, on which the sources differ; the three months in the gold mine (only Wikipedia); the words of Romero at the body of Grande and the sentence about the road he had to walk (testimony of a nun in Aguilares, and an American review); the words of Romero in the village with the play, the apology in the parish and the visits to the catechists (testimonies of a nun and of priests in ReVista, Harvard); the handshakes after Mass (a journalist); the words of Ellacuría and the memory of Sobrino (ReVista).

Unconfirmed: the exact number of dead at the funeral (the sources range from about thirty to fifty); the precise purpose of Grande's last drive (Mass or novena); the well-known saying that after his death he would rise in the Salvadoran people, whose origin is disputed and which I therefore do not quote.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one version):

- *Number of children.* Eight (Romero Trust) or seven (Westminster Abbey).
- *Who taught him carpentry.* A carpenter in the village (Romero Trust) or his father (Wikipedia).
- *The time of the murder.* 6:26 p.m. (Romero Trust); about 6:30 p.m. in another review.
- *The moment of the shot.* Right after the sermon (Romero Trust and the New York Review of Books), during the consecration

(America Magazine) or at the offertory (Hitchhiker's Guide). I follow the first version.

- *His condition.* The Romero Trust mentions help for scrupulosity in 1971; Wikipedia a retreat in January 1966 after which a psychiatrist diagnosed a compulsive personality.
- *Where in the car the gunman sat.* Differs per source; in the story I mention only the car.
- *Date of the case of dynamite.* America Magazine says "about two weeks before his death," the Romero Trust March 9, 1980. I follow the Romero Trust.
- *The death toll at the funeral.* See above.

Interpretation: whether Romero was killed mainly for his faith or mainly for political reasons was for years a discussion in the church; the pope chose the first in 2015. The course and causes of the civil war are still a sensitive subject in El Salvador. How abrupt his change was after the death of Grande is seen differently by biographers. Whether the healing that led to his canonization was a miracle is a question of faith; the church has recognized it, and I leave that judgment to her.

Sources for this chapter

1. Romero Trust, "The Century of Romero: 1917-2018"
2. Romero Trust, "The Final Homily of Archbishop Romero"
3. America Magazine, "The homily Oscar Romero was delivering when he was killed" (translation James R. Brockman)
4. America Magazine, "Death comes for the archbishop", March 11, 2015
5. Holy See Press Office, address of Pope Francis to pilgrims from El Salvador, October 15, 2018
6. Vatican News, "Church in El Salvador celebrates beatification of four martyrs", January 2022

7. United Nations, International Day for the Right to the Truth
8. Summary of the report of the Truth Commission for El Salvador (Creighton University)
9. Center for Justice and Accountability, Doe v. Saravia
10. CathNews New Zealand, "Archbishop Romero, trusted news source", March 23, 2015
11. Diario El Mundo, on Romero's last Sunday sermon, March 24, 2025
12. Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, on the canonization, October 2018
13. Wikipedia, "Óscar Romero" (starting point)
14. Wikipedia, "Truth Commission for El Salvador" (starting point)
15. Westminster Abbey, "St Oscar Romero"
16. ReVista (Harvard), "Remembering Romero", February 2016
17. The New York Review of Books, "Remembering Romero: the murder that ruptured El Salvador", April 22, 2010
18. Hitchhiker's Guide to Religion, "Oscar Romero's last Mass"

Luis Palau: the bank clerk who preached to Latin America

At a summer camp in Argentina, a twelve-year-old boy wrote down a short sentence. According to a biography published at his death, that evening he wrote that on February 12, 1947, he had accepted Jesus Christ; I give it in my own words, since I could not find the original wording. February is high summer in Argentina. A camp counselor, whose name the sources have not kept, had talked with him. There was no more drama than that. Later he wrote in his memoirs that with a conversion, all that matters is that it is real. You do not need a spectacular story. It just has to be your own.

That boy was Luis Palau. He would grow into the evangelist whom newspapers called "the Billy Graham of Latin America." According to his own organization, he spoke to thirty million people in his lifetime, in seventy-five countries. His radio programs in Spanish and English ran on thousands of stations. When he died in 2021, someone in the Argentine parliament submitted a proposal to officially express mourning.

But in February 1947 he was a boy without a father, in a family that had become poor.

A Bible from a British oil executive

Luis Palau was born on November 27, 1934, in Ingeniero Maschwitz, a small town north of the city of Buenos Aires. He was the only son among seven children. His father, also Luis, was a businessman in construction. His grandparents on his father's side had come from Spain after the First World War. His mother, Matilde Balfour de Palau, had Scottish and French family. Luis grew up bilingual, in Spanish and English.

In those years Argentina was a Roman Catholic country. The Palau family came from that world too, it says in a proposal of the Argentine parliament from 2021. Protestants were a small minority. How the family became evangelical, several sources tell in the same way. A British oil executive, Edward Rogers, gave Luis's mother a Bible. She and her husband came to faith. Rogers remained a spiritual friend of the family and later helped it financially as well.

They went to a gathering of the Brethren, in the Netherlands often called the Vergadering van gelovigen (the Assembly of Believers): small congregations without a pastor, where the brothers lead the service together. In an interview from the early eighties, Palau told that such a gathering sometimes consisted of twelve people. Seven of them belonged to his own family.

It was also a lonely childhood, Palau said in that interview. In a country where nearly everyone was Catholic, you learned at a young age which subject you had better leave alone. A child from an evangelical family carried his faith along as something others did not want to hear.

Luis went to British schools, first a boarding school and later the Anglican San Albano in Buenos Aires. Then a hole fell in the family.

With Jesus, which is better by far

Luis was ten when his father died. According to a later biography it happened in 1944, within a few days of pneumonia. That year and that cause I have found in only one source.

How his father died, Palau told himself, in his memoirs and in interviews. On his deathbed his father sang and clapped his hands, and he pointed upward. His last words were, according to his son: "I am going to be with Jesus, which is better by far." It is almost literally what the apostle Paul wrote: *For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better* (Philippians 1:23). Palau himself was not yet officially a Christian, he told, but he understood that his father was with the Lord. He said later that this deathbed had shaped his faith in eternal life. We know the scene only from his own memory.

What came next is in many sources. The family lost its prosperity, from well-off to almost nothing in three years' time, so he told. According to the English-language Wikipedia, which relies on a 2003 portrait in The Oregonian, relatives dealt badly with what was left. Palau told the news agency AP a detail he never forgot: his mother cut one steak into eight pieces, so that everyone at the table had something.

What she did left a mark on his life. His memoirs begin with her story. She taught him to sing, to recite Bible verses and to pray on his knees. She never spoke ill of God and showed no anger, he wrote. To comfort the children about their father, she read to them from John 14. She believed that God would provide, and somehow He did.

In Psalm 146 it says: *He relieves the fatherless and widow* (Psalm 146:9). At the table of the Palau family sat a widow and seven children with-

out a father. One steak in eight pieces was not much, but everyone had something.

The camp in summer

Two years after his father's death, Luis went to a summer camp. There a counselor talked with him, and he chose to follow Jesus. On the year the sources differ: the archive of Wheaton College and the Argentine parliament mention 1946, Christianity Today and the diary note mention 1947. The note with the date of February 12 makes 1947 the most likely.

A boy of twelve, without a father, at a summer camp. I do not know what you thought about God at twelve. Luis wrote it down, date and all.

In those years he dreamed of studying law. According to the Argentine parliament, he wanted to become a lawyer so that he could help widows like his mother. It turned out differently. Around the age of eighteen he had to go to work, because the family needed the money.

A job at the Bank of London

Luis found work at a branch of the Bank of London, a British bank. Where that branch was is less certain than it seems. Two sources mention Córdoba, the large city in the interior. A report from the news agency AP mentions Buenos Aires. Maybe he worked in both cities. I have not been able to find out.

In 1952 he heard an American evangelist preach on the radio: Billy Graham. It set him in motion. According to his own organization, he prayed then that God would make him an evangelist, like Graham. He also read a book by Graham about a campaign in the area of Los Angeles, with some three thousand people every evening. It

was a campaign that lasted nine weeks, he wrote later. Those numbers encouraged him.

The beginning was difficult. He gave his first sermon in a little church in the hills, for about thirty-five people. He imitated Graham, with a loud voice and swinging arms, without a microphone. It was a disaster. In his memoirs he later wrote that he made a fool of himself, here in my own words.

Somewhere in that time he told his mother that he was waiting for a calling. She pointed him to a village in the hills where there was no Bible-believing church. In an interview from 2018 he gave her answer: that calling had gone out two thousand years ago and the Lord was waiting for his answer.

Her answer refers to the command that Jesus gave His disciples: *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15). That command applied, according to her, to a village in the hills without a church too.

A Spanish Bible from 1953

In the Museum of the Bible in Washington lies a small Spanish Bible, printed in 1950. Palau bought it in 1953 in Buenos Aires. It has notes in it and sermon outlines from his first years. The museum received it in 2018.

Those were the years in which he led two lives. During the week he worked at the bank. On weekends he preached, on the street too. At nineteen he had his own Christian radio program. When he was twenty-two, he organized tent meetings and an evangelical radio program in Buenos Aires with friends.

He was a bank clerk with a microphone.

An American at a Bible study

In Argentina Luis attended a Bible study led by the American pastor Ray Stedman. Stedman encouraged him to get training in the United States, and in 1960 he went. For a time Palau lived with him, in the San Francisco area.

Then he followed a one-year program at Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon. It became a difficult year. Palau was twenty-five and looked promising from the outside, but he struggled with pride, he told later. In a lesson by the British speaker Major Ian Thomas, something fell into place. Thomas reminded the students that it is not we who live, but Christ in us. For Palau that turned from imagery into reality. He understood, he said himself, that Christ really lived in him, and that God uses ordinary people. He later called it the revolution he needed without knowing it.

Paul put it this way: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20). A few years earlier he had still been imitating Graham, with a loud voice and swinging arms. Now it was no longer about the voice of someone else, but about Christ in him.

At Multnomah he met his wife. They married in 1961. In 1962 he became an American citizen, and that same year he did an internship at a campaign of Billy Graham in Fresno, California, where he also translated. The man he had heard on the radio ten years earlier now stood beside him. When Graham asked what he himself wanted, Palau said he wanted to lead campaigns like Graham. In the years after, Graham gave him more and more opportunities. He admired him for something small: Graham never let an opportunity pass to share the gospel, not even at a blessing at a prayer breakfast. Palau laughed about it: that man has no shame, he said.

Overseas Crusades: Colombia and Mexico

In 1961 Palau joined Overseas Crusades, an American mission organization that was called SEPAL in Latin America and is now called OC International. With his wife he lived briefly in Detroit and then in Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico.

There is a tension in his story here that I do not want to smooth over. Palau was an Argentine who preached in Latin America, but his base was in the United States and he worked for an American organization. According to AL DÍA he translated for Graham for some twenty years at Spanish-language campaigns. In 1970 Graham helped him with start-up money. The New York Times wrote at his death that he worked mostly outside the United States for his first twenty years, partly out of respect for the place Graham had there.

In 1964, at a campaign in Colombia, he began the radio program *Luis Palau Responde*, "Luis Palau Answers." Listeners came with questions from their daily lives. He listened and answered from the Bible, while others listened along. The archive of Wheaton College still keeps recordings. He said he preferred going to the poor, because they feel rejected and useless.

Around 1966 he held his first big campaign in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. A year later he became director of SEPAL for Latin America. In the last two years he was president of the whole organization.

A twelve-minute meeting

In the seventies his work grew fast. He bought airtime on television, at the best hours, and invited viewers to come with their doubts. In 1974 in Guatemala he had an appointment of twelve minutes with

President Carlos Arana Osorio. According to Christianity Today the conversation lasted an hour, and the president accepted a Bible.

The relationships between Christians also cost him effort. In 1976 he called off a campaign in Chicago for Spanish-speaking Christians, because Pentecostal churches and other evangelical churches could not agree. Pentecostals strongly emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and prayer for the sick. A campaign asked for cooperation of the churches in a city, and that did not always happen.

In 1977 he addressed more than sixty thousand people in Wales in one month. In October 1978, with the support of Graham, he started an organization of his own, the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association, with a head office in the Portland area.

His way of working was fixed. A campaign began about eighteen months in advance, in the local churches. First he spoke with the pastors about cleansing of their own hearts, then he called the believers to teaching about Christ living in them, and then they were equipped and sent out. The goal, he said in an interview, was to reach everyone, from the president to the poorest. About the student week in Madison in the United States, he said the turnout was disappointing, because the organizers had kept quiet. Whoever wants the attention of forty thousand students has to make a lot of noise.

In the Spanish world people listened along. His mother wrote him in a Christmas letter of 1976 that all of Buenos Aires had listened to the broadcasts of his campaign in Managua in Nicaragua. He also presented a television program, *Night Talk with Luis Palau*. In 1970 he wrote a four-page letter to the then president of Overseas Crusades, Dick Hillis, in which he expressed his frustration at being obstructed by the leadership of the organization. He remained con-

nected to that organization for another eight years, so the Wheaton archive tells.

He defended the big gatherings, even when there was criticism of them. It is not about the method, he thought: the Bible does not speak about that. He compared it to a car. The problem is the driver.

Guatemala, 1982

One campaign from those years belongs honestly in this chapter. In 1982 Palau held a big celebration in Guatemala, *Gratitude '82*. General Efraín Ríos Montt, who had come to power shortly before in a coup, was there. Palau estimated the number of those present at half a million. He had dreamed since 1962 of a crowd of fifty thousand, he told Christianity Today. Now eight columns walked to the grounds, among them a group of about forty thousand people from the west of the country, who had come by bus. Some of his team were crying, he said. The president came with a procession of cars, while everyone had expected a helicopter, and deliberately was not on the program. Drivers and cleaning women told visiting journalists that he was evangelical and they were Catholic, but that he was the best thing that had happened to them, so Palau told.

In the same months, reports came out about violence by the army against the population. The National Council of Churches in the United States reported atrocities. In an interview with Christianity Today, Palau said his team had heard conflicting stories. The New York Times wrote at his death that he received criticism for this cooperation.

I do not judge here the heart of a man I did not know. I do note that an evangelist who gets a full grandstand thanks to a ruler also takes on the shadow of that ruler. Palau wanted, by his own account, to stay out of politics. In Guatemala that did not entirely succeed.

In the same interview the other side of politics also came up. In those years liberation theology was strong in Latin America, especially in the Roman Catholic Church. It read the Bible from the struggle of the poor against injustice and oppression. Palau turned against it. He saw in it a different understanding of sin, salvation and new birth than he read in the Bible. He also told about Uruguay. There the security services distrusted Protestants, and shortly before they had expelled Protestants from the country on suspicion of hiding weapons. At the airport a security man even came to apologize to him for the cool reception, from higher up. In Paraguay he got more help and freedom than he had dared to hope. An evangelist who moved from country to country on that continent had to explain again and again who he was and who he was not.

About London he told that he himself had longed for church services there, as a boy at a British boarding school. He hoped to see revival there, he said.

His view reached far beyond Latin America in those years. He was one of the few Western preachers allowed to speak in the Soviet Union. Then followed a long campaign in London, which ran until the summer of 1984. In 1986 there were six evenings in the national stadium in Singapore. According to the figures of the campaign itself, 337,500 people came, and 11,902 people registered a response. Shortly before, there had been a gathering for children in the same stadium, with about ten thousand children.

In 1987 he received a ceremonial welcome from Maori representatives in New Zealand. In 2001, shortly after the attacks of September 11, he was invited to the White House. He was not welcome everywhere. In 2005 the city of Cardiff in Wales canceled a reception for him, because of what the city called his extreme evangelical views. In the United States The New York Times in 1999 called him precisely the first candidate to succeed Billy Graham.

From crusade to festival

In English such campaigns were called *crusades*. In the nineties his sons urged him to drop that word. According to Evangelical Focus the idea came from his son Andrés, who later became an evangelist himself. His son Kevin became president of the organization. Palau resisted at first. Then he came around.

From 1999 he held *festivals*, in city parks instead of sports stadiums. There were Christian bands, skate parks, activities for families, and the churches of the city did volunteer work together. He still preached there, with an invitation to follow Jesus. He told AP in 2003: "It revolutionized everything we do."

The festivals also returned to the continent where he had started. In Lima, Peru, in 2004 an estimated seven hundred thousand people listened. In March 2008 he stood in Buenos Aires at the Obelisco, the well-known monument in the center. The Argentine parliament speaks of more than a million people, Evangelical Focus of press releases with that estimate on the second evening. In 2008 a Season of Service followed in Portland alongside the festival. In 2015 he held a festival in New York for a week, ending with a gathering in Central Park where, according to CBN News, some sixty thousand people came.

Long before, he had become friends with an Argentine Roman Catholic priest, Jorge Bergoglio. When he became Pope Francis in 2013, Palau reacted with joy. It says something about him. The son of a Brethren family called the new pope a friend.

Fifteen years away from home

Such a life has a price. Palau calculated himself that in fifty-seven years of marriage, through all the travel, he had been separated from his wife and sons for about fifteen years. After dangerous ex-

periences abroad, his wife and he had decided that she would stay in Oregon with the four boys. She had wanted to go to the mission field at the age of fifteen. He said of her that she had paid the greatest price; I give this in my own words.

He had no regrets, he told Christianity Today. But he spoke openly about it. How much are you willing to miss for what you believe God asks of you? Palau gave an answer, and his family carried it with him.

His last big festival he held in 2019 in Madrid, with about eighty-five thousand people. That same year his life story appeared, *Palau: A Life on Fire*. There was also a feature film about his youth in Argentina, *Palau*, with the Argentine actor Gastón Pauls.

January 2018

In January 2018 Palau announced in a video that he had lung cancer, stage four. He was eighty-three. Everything was ready, he said, if the Lord wanted to take him home. According to Salt&Light he added that whoever reads the Bible knows there comes a time to go.

He lived on for more than three years. In November 2018 he told a local newspaper that the illness was stable for the time being. In a conversation about his memoirs, in his eighties in Portland, he said, in my own words, that he was still on fire, praise the Lord. In February 2021 he was admitted to the hospital, and after that he stopped treatment.

On Thursday, March 11, 2021, Luis Palau died at home in Portland, eighty-six years old. His family wrote that morning that he had gone suddenly, and very peacefully. He left behind his wife, four sons and twelve grandchildren.

In Argentina a member of the Chamber of Deputies submitted a proposal to express mourning and recognize his work. The boy from Ingeniero Maschwitz, who had preached on weekends as a bank clerk, had not been forgotten in his own country.

Evangelical Focus quoted him at his death: "If I was given a thousand lifetimes, I would dedicate them all to the same calling."

You can argue about his methods, about the big stadiums and the television airtime, about Guatemala. But it did not begin in a stadium. It began in a house where a father died singing, and at a table where one steak was cut into eight pieces.

And at a summer camp in February, where a boy of twelve wrote down a sentence, with the date above it.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on November 27, 1934, in Ingeniero Maschwitz; only son among seven children; the Bible from Edward Rogers and the conversion of his parents; British schools; the death of his father when Luis was ten and the poverty afterward; conversion at a summer camp around the age of twelve; work at a bank and the radio broadcast of Billy Graham around 1952; his own radio program around 1953; the invitation of Ray Stedman and Multnomah (1960-1961); marriage in 1961; Overseas Crusades from 1961; *Luis Palau Responde* (1964); his own organization in 1978; Guatemala 1982 with Ríos Montt and the criticism of it; the switch to festivals around 1999; friendship with Jorge Bergoglio; lung cancer (2018); death on March 11, 2021, in Portland.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the last words of his father; the steak in eight pieces; what his mother did and said (memoirs); the diary note of February 12, 1947; the failed first sermon; his

mother's answer about the calling; the lesson by Major Ian Thomas; the conversations with Graham in Fresno and the prayer breakfast (memoirs); the Brethren gatherings of twelve people; the hour with President Arana Osorio; the fifteen years away from home.

Unconfirmed: the year 1944 and pneumonia as the cause of his father's death (one source); the year of his conversion (1946 or 1947); the city of the bank (Córdoba or Buenos Aires).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one version):

- *The family.* The Argentine parliament speaks of a Catholic family, Christianity Today of parents who were already evangelical; I have told both as successive (Catholic background, then conversion).
- *The children.* Seven children with one son (Christianity Today, Museum of the Bible); Wikipedia mentions five sisters and a brother.
- *The radio broadcast of Graham.* 1952 according to most sources, 1950 according to Wikipedia; the Museum of the Bible catalog even mentions his twelfth year. I follow 1952.
- *The length of the conversation in Guatemala.* Twelve minutes (appointment) or an hour (Christianity Today).
- *Number of visitors.* All stadium figures come from the organization itself or from press releases.

Interpretation: the numbers (thirty million listeners, the stadium figures, registered responses) come from his own organization, from the campaigns themselves or from press releases. They were not counted independently. About his family I mention only what is public: his wife, his sons as a group and the son who became an evangelist himself.

Sources for this chapter

1. Christianity Today, “Died: Luis Palau”, March 11, 2021
2. OPB (AP), “Evangelical pastor Luis Palau dies at 86 in Portland”, March 11, 2021
3. Christian Century (AP), 2021
4. Evangelical Focus, “Luis Palau (1934-2021), from Argentina to the world”
5. Museum of the Bible, “Luis Palau’s life reflected his mission of conversion”
6. Museum of the Bible, collection: The Luis Palau Bible
7. Wheaton College Archives, “Luis Palau Responde”, 2023
8. Cámara de Diputados de la Nación Argentina, proyecto 0589-D-2021
9. Salt&Light, “Evangelist to millions Luis Palau called home to the Lord at 86”
10. Bible Gateway Blog, interview about Palau: A Life on Fire
11. Christianity Today, about Palau: A Life on Fire, June 2019
12. Christianity Today, “Luis Palau: Evangelist to Three Worlds” (interview, ca. 1982)
13. GetReligion, about the obituary in The New York Times, March 17, 2021
14. AL DÍA News, 2021
15. Christianity.com, “What Can We Learn from Evangelist Luis Palau?”
16. Wikipedia, “Luis Palau” (starting point)

Afterword

A boy from the slave ship who became a bishop. A student who moved into the slums on Christmas Eve. A pastor who would not bow. The night watchman of Shanghai. A Sikh who tore up the Bible. A bishop who loved his enemy. An archbishop who read out the names on Sunday. A bank clerk who spoke to a continent.

With this second volume, sixteen people from eleven countries are in this book. They differed in almost everything: in language, in church, in how they prayed and how they spoke about the Bible. Some of them would have disagreed with each other. What they shared was that they stayed, even when it cost them.

There are many more. Behind every name in this book stand others whom no one wrote down: parents, friends, interpreters, church members who stayed. They too belong to that great multitude.

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)