HEROES OF FAITH AMONG WOMEN

VOLUME 1

Women of God

Eight women who followed God, from Teresa of Ávila to Johanna Veenstra

The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it.

Psalm 68:11

WIM KAMPHORST

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Women of God. Heroes of faith among women, volume 1

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

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

Introduction: a great company

Psalm 68 has a line that is easy to read past: *The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it* (Psalm 68:11). In Hebrew the word for those who proclaimed it is feminine. The Herziene Statenvertaling, a modern Dutch Bible translation, makes that visible with a feminine word: women who bring good news.

This book is about eight of them. Women who followed God, in different centuries, countries and churches. A Spanish nun who founded convents and wrote books about prayer. An English minister's wife with a large family, who opened the rectory on Sunday evenings. A blind American woman who wrote thousands of songs in her head. An Englishwoman who began to preach when that hardly happened anywhere, and who started the Salvation Army with her husband. An American evangelist who preached in tents to thousands of people and was attacked by doctors and newspapers. A Scottish factory worker who went up the river in Nigeria. A woman from Northern Ireland who made a home for children in India. And a typist from Paterson, New Jersey, the child of Dutch parents, who went to Nigeria as a missionary.

Why a book about women?

There are women in the other books of this series too. Yet in the history of the church they often stay in the shadow of men: their father, their husband, their son or their organization. I wanted to tell their own story.

Some of these women met opposition because they were women. Some of them preached, which was unusual in their time and in many churches, and which still does not happen in every church today. This book is not a plea for or against women in the pulpit. Readers from every church should be able to read it. I tell what these women did and how others responded.

Facts first

Some stories about these women are more beautiful than what the sources say. So after each chapter you will find what is certain, what is known only from their own words or from later tradition, and what is uncertain or disputed. The sources are listed too, so that you can look further yourself.

The women in this book belong to very different churches: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, the Salvation Army, the early Pentecostal movement, Presbyterian and Reformed. They are in order of time, from the sixteenth century to the twentieth.

How you can read this book

Each chapter stands on its own. Start wherever you like. Read it with a question in the back of your mind: what did God ask of her, and what is He asking of you? None of these women knew at the start where it would end.

Teresa of Ávila: the nun who could not sit still

It was Lent in 1554, in a convent in the Spanish city of Ávila. A Carmelite nun of thirty-nine walked into the prayer room, where a painting had been set out for a feast day. It showed Christ with heavy wounds. She stopped.

That is how she told it herself later, in the book about her life. She looked at those wounds and realized how much He had given and how little she had thanked Him for it. She wrote that her heart seemed to break (my translation). She threw herself on the floor beside the painting and wept. She asked Him to make her strong, so that she would never hurt Him again. She told Him, she wrote, that she would not get up until He had answered her prayer. By then she had been a nun for almost twenty years. She prayed, she sang in the choir, she kept the rules. But all those years she had kept God at a distance, or so she saw it looking back.

After that day something changed that she never lost again. The woman who lay there on the floor would found seventeen convents, travel all over Spain, write books on prayer that are still read today, and come through an investigation by the Inquisition. Almost four

hundred years after her death she became the first woman whom the Roman Catholic Church called a Doctor of the Church.

Her name was Teresa de Ahumada. Her story begins in the same city, thirty-nine years earlier.

A yellow robe in Toledo

Teresa was born on March 28, 1515, in Ávila, a walled city on the high plateau of Castile, west of Madrid. Her father was Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, her mother Beatriz de Ahumada, his second wife.

In those years Spain wanted to be a completely Catholic country. In 1492 the Jews who refused baptism had been driven out of the country. Anyone who had been baptized, or who descended from baptized Jews, was called a converso. Such families stayed under suspicion. The Inquisition, a church court that tracked down heresy, kept an eye on them. Later came rules about "purity of blood," which barred descendants of conversos from offices and higher education.

Teresa came from such a family. In 1485 her grandfather, Juan Sánchez de Toledo, stood trial before the Inquisition in Toledo. He was accused of secretly returning to Judaism. For six weeks he had to walk in processions wearing a sanbenito, a yellow penitential robe. After that the robe was hung in the cathedral, so that everyone could see which family had confessed guilt here.

Her father later moved to Ávila and tried to leave that background behind him there. Teresa herself never wrote about it in her books. Historians found it in the archives only much later.

You can wonder what it does to a child to grow up in a house where such a past was hidden away. She never wrote about it herself.

Forever, ever, ever

Teresa grew up with the lives of the saints. The stories of the martyrs especially made an impression on her.

In the story of her life she describes how, as a child, she and one of her brothers decided to go to the land of the Moors. That was what Spaniards called the Islamic lands of North Africa. There they wanted to be killed for their faith, so that they would be with God at once. The two of them liked to repeat together the words "forever, ever, ever," she writes, because eternity seemed so great to them. According to Pope Benedict XVI, who spoke about her in 2011, she told her parents that she wanted to see God.

The plan came to nothing. We know the story only from her own book. A nineteenth-century timeline of her life places it in 1522, when she was seven.

Around the age of thirteen she lost her mother. According to Benedict XVI, the girl then asked Mary to be her mother. In the years that followed Teresa also read tales of chivalry, stories about heroes and ladies at court. She said later that a cousin led her in the wrong direction in that time. She wrote about it with the strictness of someone looking back.

Early in the morning

In 1531 her father took her as a boarder to the Augustinian nuns of Santa María de Gracia in Ávila. She stayed there about a year and a half, until she fell ill. After that the decision to become a nun slowly ripened.

Her father did not want it. Friends pleaded for her, but he would not give in. The most she got from him, she wrote, was that after his death she could do as she wished. She did not wait. On November

2, 1535, very early in the morning, she left the house with one of her brothers, whom she had persuaded to enter as well. He went to the Dominicans. She went to the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation, the Encarnación. She was twenty. Leaving her father's house hurt so much, she wrote later, that she thought dying could not be worse.

The nuns let her father know. He agreed at that point, she says, and accepted the sacrifice.

The Carmelites are a religious order named after Mount Carmel in Israel, where hermits lived together in the Middle Ages. Over the centuries their original strict rule of life had been relaxed. Teresa took the name Teresa of Jesus. In November 1537 she made her vows, the promises by which a nun binds herself for life to God and to her order.

Four days as if dead

Soon after that she became seriously ill. What exactly she had, we do not know. Her father took her to the village of Becedas for treatment. She waited for that treatment with her sister María, in the countryside near Castellanos de la Cañada. On the way, at the house of an uncle they passed, she was given a book that would set the direction of her life: the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* by the Franciscan Francisco de Osuna. It was about inner prayer, a quiet prayer in which you are not mainly reciting words, but being with God with your full attention.

The treatment made her worse. Back with her father in Ávila, in August, after a feast day of Mary, she had a seizure. For about four days she lay unconscious, she wrote. She was given the last rites. When she came to, there were drops of candle wax on her eyelids. In her convent a grave had stood open for her for a day and a half.

After that she was paralyzed for about three years. She thanked God when she was able to crawl on her hands and knees. She attributed her recovery to the intercession of Joseph, the husband of Mary. In the Roman Catholic tradition believers ask saints to pray for them, the way you would ask a friend for prayer. Joseph made it possible for her to get up and walk again, she wrote. We know of that healing only from her own testimony.

You would expect such an experience to bring her closer to God. It went differently. In the years that followed she gave up inner prayer for a time, she wrote later. She thought she was too wicked for it. In 1543 her father died. Her brothers left for America.

So almost twenty years went by. I find this one of the most honest parts of her book. She does not make herself look better than she was. Do you know years like that, when you are not running away from God, but you are not really going toward Him either?

The image and the book

Then comes the moment this chapter began with. During Lent in 1554 she stood before the painting of the wounded Christ. She tells us that she pictured Christ as a Man, alone and in distress, above all in the garden of Gethsemane. She wanted to wipe the bloody sweat from His face. Reasoning did not get her far, she wrote, but with an image it worked. That is why that painting had such power.

In the same period she read the *Confessions* of Augustine, the church father who described in the fourth century how he came to God after years of searching. The book came into her hands unexpectedly. She recognized herself in him. She wrote that she thought she saw herself described there (my translation). When she read how Augustine heard a voice in the garden, it was for her as if the Lord had let that voice sound for her too. She wept for a long time. Augus-

tine had been changed by God, and she had fallen back so often. She never doubted God's mercy, she wrote, but she did doubt herself.

According to Benedict XVI, she describes in that time a sudden awareness of God's presence, so strong that she could not doubt that He was within her.

From then on Jesus as a Man stood at the center of everything she would say about prayer. For her, the Christian life was a personal friendship with Him. She later described prayer as a friendly exchange with God.

The prayer to the Holy Spirit

There was something she found hard. She had friendships she could not break free from. They were not bad, she wrote, but it was natural affection, and she did not want to be ungrateful. A Jesuit she had chosen as her confessor forbade nothing. He told her to pray about it for a few days and to recite the hymn *Veni Creator* while doing so, the ancient plea for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

While she was praying that hymn, her first rapture came. She felt herself carried out of herself. Deep in her soul she heard words, which she gave as: I do not want you to talk with people, but with angels (my translation). She was alarmed. At the same time a comfort remained after the fear had passed.

That is how she told it herself, and she adds that the words came true. From that moment she could no longer find friendship with people who did not love God. It cost her no pain anymore, she wrote, because God had done it, not she. For years she had tried, to the harm of her health. Her confessor had waited.

In those years Jesuits came to Ávila, members of the young order of Ignatius of Loyola. One of them became her confessor. She also

spoke with Francisco de Borja, a well-known Jesuit who had let go of his wealth. When he had heard her account of her prayer, he said that it was the work of the Spirit of God, as she related it. He advised her to resist no longer, and to begin her prayer with the suffering of Christ. The Franciscan Pedro de Alcántara also said that her experiences came from God. She needed that, because what was happening inside her was hard for outsiders to make sense of.

An angel with a golden arrow

Around 1556 the experiences began that would make her famous and suspect. She said that she heard words from the Lord inwardly, and that at times she was caught up in rapture. A few years later, she wrote, she had a vision of hell.

She describes the best-known vision in chapter 29 of the story of her life. She saw an angel, close to her, on her left side, in bodily form. That seldom happened, she writes. He was small and very beautiful, and his face seemed to burn. In his hands, she writes, was a great golden arrow, with something like a small fire at its iron tip (my translation). It seemed to her that he thrust it into her heart and drove it through her innermost being. When he drew the arrow out, she was set on fire with a great love for God.

The pain made her moan, she wrote. But the sweetness was so great that she did not want to be free of it. For the days that followed she walked about as if outside herself. She wanted to see no one and speak to no one, and only to cherish her pain, which she valued more than anything else there was to enjoy. It was not a pain of the body, she said, but the body shared in it amply. The Discalced Carmelites call this the transverberation, the piercing, and remember it on August 26. An old timeline places it in 1559.

She wrote just as precisely about the vision of hell. She was at prayer, she tells us, and suddenly, without knowing how, found herself in hell. God wanted to show her the place the devils had prepared for her because of her sins. She describes a low, dark passage like an oven, with filth and vermin, and at the end a hollow in the wall where she was shut in. The worst was not pain of the body. It was a fire in her soul and a despair she could not put into words, and the knowledge that it would never end. Everything she had read about hell before seemed like a painting next to it.

She called it one of the greatest mercies God gave her. It took away her fear of opposition and hardship, she wrote, and it gave her sorrow for lost souls. She would gladly die many times to save one.

I tell these visions as she told them. There were no other witnesses to what happened inside her. What is certain is that she laid her experiences before people she trusted, such as Borja and Pedro de Alcántara. She had the story of her life read by Juan de Ávila, a priest known as a teacher in spiritual matters. Her confessors were not always so kind. One of them thought her visions came from the devil and forced her to answer them with an insulting gesture. She found that painful, she wrote, and she prayed that God would not let her go astray. The Lord reassured her: she did well to obey, and He would show her confessors the truth.

Teresa's Spain grew more and more distrustful in those years. In northern Europe the Reformation had split the church. In 1559 the Inquisitor General, Fernando de Valdés, issued a list of forbidden books. On it were works by Erasmus, but also by Luis de Granada, Francisco de Borja and Francisco de Osuna. The book with which Teresa had learned to pray could no longer be read.

For women the room was even smaller. A woman who said that God spoke to her quickly came under suspicion. In those years

the Inquisition was bringing cases against the so-called alumbrados, the enlightened ones, people who appealed to inner inspirations. In 1574 Teresa's name appeared for the first time in the records of the Inquisition, in a case connected with that suspicion.

Protestant readers may need to shift gears here. Teresa stood on the other side of the sixteenth-century divide, and all her life she stayed loyal to the Roman Catholic Church. She came under suspicion for something many Protestants will recognize: she believed that an ordinary person can know God personally.

A small house for San José

After the vision of hell she could no longer live her life in the large convent without unease. The convent of the Incarnation was large and poor, the nuns often went outside, and that troubled her. Around 1560 Teresa and a few friends talked about a new convent. One of them was the widow Guiomar de Ulloa. They wanted to go back to the original, strict rule of the Carmelites: a small house, poverty, much time for prayer.

Teresa hesitated. She loved her familiar home. After communion, she wrote, she received a command from Christ Himself: she was to work with all her strength on that foundation. He promised that the convent would come, that it would be called San José, and that He Himself would dwell in the midst of it. Inwardly she resisted, because of all the worries it would bring. Still she believed the command came from God. She wrote everything down for her confessor.

The opposition came quickly. The provincial of the order withdrew his support. Her friend was pressed to give it up. Teresa asked advice from the learned Dominican Pedro Ibáñez. After some thought

he judged that this work served God and that she should go on. More helpers came. They bought a small house.

Teresa pushed the plan through, with help from her sister Juana, with money a brother sent from America, and with the support of Bishop Álvaro de Mendoza. A papal document reached Ávila in July 1562, on the night she returned. Pedro de Alcántara had convinced the bishop. On August 24, 1562, the small convent of San José was opened, the first house of what would later be called the Discalced Carmelites. Discalced means unshod: in sandals, as a sign of poverty.

There was unrest in the city that lasted until February 1563, and Teresa was sent back to the convent of the Incarnation. Only in 1563 was she allowed to go and live at San José, with three companions. Later she called the years there the most peaceful of her life.

In those years, at the command of her confessors, she wrote the book about her life. One of them, Father Ibáñez, had asked her to write it down. She wrote it in stolen hours and complained that the writing kept her from spinning (my translation). In 1566 came *The Way of Perfection*, written for the twelve novices of San José. It is a book about prayer, with an explanation of the Lord's Prayer as an example of how you can pray.

Fifty thousand kilometers

In 1567 the general of the Carmelites, Giovanni Battista Rossi, came to Ávila. He gave her permission to found more convents, for men as well. On August 15 of that year she opened a convent in Medina del Campo. Around that time she met a young Carmelite of twenty-five, Juan de Yepes. He would become known as John of the Cross. He too came from a converso family. On November 28, 1568, he and

a fellow friar began the first men's monastery of the reform in the hamlet of Duruelo.

Teresa came to see it herself. The businessmen who escorted her from Medina were shocked by the crosses and skulls in the poor little house, and one of the friars was sweeping the porch. She had to laugh. She often laughed at herself, and she wrote that down too. When others advised her to rest, she wrote that she did not need rest, but crosses.

After that the foundations followed one after another. Malagón and Valladolid in 1568. Toledo and Pastrana in 1569. Salamanca in 1570. Alba de Tormes in 1571. Segovia in 1574. Beas and Seville in 1575. Later Villanueva de la Jara, Palencia, Soria and, in the last year of her life, Burgos. Her brother Lorenzo, who had worked in Quito, at that time part of the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru and now the capital of Ecuador, helped pay for the convent in Seville. She wrote about what happened to her on the road in the *Book of the Foundations*.

In it there is a sentence you can remember when you are doing the dishes at home. She writes to her nuns about the one who would rather be alone with God and ends up in the kitchen through obedience. If you work in the kitchen, she writes, the Lord walks among the pots and pans, and He helps you there, inwardly and outwardly (my translation). That is how she saw her own life too: God was there in the working, the traveling and the negotiating.

The Vatican website calculates that she traveled more than fifty thousand kilometers, about thirty thousand miles. The source does not say how that figure was worked out. In all she founded seventeen convents for women.

In 1571, against her will, she had to become prioress, the superior, of the convent of the Incarnation, the large house she had once entered. She stayed there until 1574.

A restless, wandering woman

The more convents there were, the greater the resistance. The Carmelites who kept to the relaxed rule, the Calced, saw the reform as a threat. In 1575 a meeting of the order in Piacenza, in Italy, decided that Teresa had to stop founding convents.

In February 1575 the Inquisition called in the manuscript of the story of her life. It went to the court in Valladolid and then to Madrid. The Dominican Domingo Báñez was given the task of examining it. On July 7, 1575, he signed a favorable judgment. The Inquisition did keep the manuscript in custody until after her death. In Seville, sisters from one of her own convents reported her twice. Twice she was cleared.

There was headwind from higher up too. Filippo Sega, the pope's envoy in Spain from 1577 to 1581, was one of her fiercest opponents, according to a reference work on the cardinals. He arrived in Spain at the end of August 1577, already badly informed about her in Rome. He called her, as the Vatican website sums it up, a restless, wandering woman who taught, against the command of the apostle Paul. In later books and articles his remark appears in Spanish: "fémina inquieta, andariega, desobediente y contumaz," a restless, wandering, disobedient and stubborn woman. In 1578 he placed her convents under the authority of the Calced. In October 1577 an election for prioress at the Incarnation got out of hand: nuns who had voted for her were excommunicated. John of the Cross had already been seized and imprisoned by Calced friars in December 1577. Teresa protested to King Philip II the next day. On Christmas Eve that year she broke her arm.

She wrote letters, also to the king. In 1579 the cases against her and her supporters were dropped and Sega withdrew his measure. In

1581 the Discalced Carmelites became a separate province within the order.

In the middle of that storm, in 1577, she wrote *The Interior Castle*. She describes the soul as a castle with seven rooms. The book follows the way inward, room by room. In the seventh room she uses the language of the Song of Songs, of bride and Bridegroom. She also uses the image of a silkworm that dies and rises again as a butterfly. She wrote it in a year when her work was almost brought to a halt.

Her health did not hold up. In March 1580 a paralysis struck her in Toledo, and that year she fell seriously ill again in Valladolid. She kept writing and founding.

The night of the new calendar

In the spring of 1582 Teresa founded her last convent, in Burgos. She was sixty-seven and ill. On the order of her provincial, Antonio de Jesús, she traveled to the Duchess of Alba and arrived on September 20 in Alba de Tormes, at the convent she had founded there eleven years earlier.

She died on October 4, 1582. It was the night in which Spain switched to the new calendar of Pope Gregory XIII. Ten days were skipped, and the next day was October 15. She is still remembered on that date.

According to tradition her last words were that she was dying as a child of the Church, and then, in her own words as handed down: My Bridegroom, the hour I have longed for has come. It is time for us to meet (my translation). In a shorter form it is also passed down as: My Lord, it is time to go. What happened to her body after that belongs to the Roman Catholic veneration of saints. According to later accounts it was found incorrupt. Parts of it are kept in sev-

eral cities. Protestant readers will see that differently, and that is all right.

A title no woman had ever received

In 1586 one of her sisters, Ana de Jesús, recovered the manuscript of the story of her life. In 1588 it was published in Salamanca, edited by Luis de León. Pope Paul V declared her blessed on April 24, 1614. On March 12, 1622, Pope Gregory XV declared her a saint.

On September 27, 1970, Pope Paul VI named her a Doctor of the Church. That title is given to saints whose teaching, the church says, is of value for the whole church. She was the first woman to whom the Church gave this title, the pope said (my translation). That same year Catherine of Siena received the title as well.

In his homily the pope addressed the objection Sega had raised four hundred years earlier: the words of Paul that women should keep silent in the churches. According to Paul VI that command was not broken, because the title does not carry a leading office in the church. So the woman who had once been dismissed as a wandering woman was recognized as a teacher of prayer.

Seven rooms

Teresa of Ávila could not sit still. She traveled, negotiated, wrote letters to the king. The work she did always began in silence. She founded small houses where women had time to pray.

What moves me most in the story of her life are not the angels and the raptures. It is the twenty years before. A nun who did everything right and still did not come close. Who gave up prayer because she thought she was too wicked for it. And who one day saw a wounded Christ, and stayed where she stood.

Maybe you are in years like that yourself. You believe, you take part, but the door inward stays shut. Teresa wrote her last great book for people who want to go further. She drew a castle with seven rooms, and a silkworm that dies and comes out again as a butterfly.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on March 28, 1515, in Ávila; entry into the convent on November 2, 1535 (a witness statement and her own remark from 1575); the conviction of her grandfather Juan Sánchez de Toledo by the Inquisition in 1485; the death of her mother around 1528; boarding school with the Augustinian nuns in 1531; the long illness and about three years of paralysis; the arrival of the nuncio Sega at the end of August 1577; the founding of San José on August 24, 1562; the meeting with John of the Cross in 1567 and the men's monastery in Duruelo (1568); seventeen convents for women; the examination of the story of her life by the Inquisition (1575) with the favorable judgment of Báñez; the opposition of the nuncio Sega and the imprisonment of John of the Cross (1577); *The Interior Castle* (1577); her death in Alba de Tormes in the night of the calendar change of 1582; beatification (1614), canonization (1622) and the title Doctor of the Church (1970).

Only from own testimony or later tradition: running away to the land of the Moors and the uncle who brought the children back; her inner experiences before the painting of the wounded Christ and while reading Augustine; the words that she would not get up until her prayer was answered; the details of her seizure (four days unconscious, candle wax on the eyelids, the open grave) and the healing through the intercession of Joseph; the first rapture at the *Veni Creator* and the words about the angels; the inner words, the visions and the piercing by the angel; the vision of hell; the command of Christ after communion to found San José; the conversations with

her confessors, including the insulting gesture one of them made her give; her last words; the incorrupt body.

Unconfirmed: the exact year of her turning point (1553 to 1556; she did not give her age herself, and the Spanish Academy holds to about 1554); the year of her vows (1536 or 1537) and of her seizure and paralysis (1537 or 1539; the English edition of the story of her life gives both in notes and introduction); the year of the vision of hell (around 1558 to 1560) and of the piercing (1556 to 1559); the literal words of the nuncio Sega (the Spanish wording is often quoted, but no source I opened names the original document); the figure of fifty thousand kilometers (only from the Vatican website); the exact words on her deathbed (Benedict XVI gives the longer form, the shorter one comes from a reference work).

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

- *Entry.* Older books give 1533. A witness who knew her stated that she took the habit on November 2, 1535, and Teresa herself wrote in 1575 that she had taken it forty years earlier. That is why most biographies hold to 1535.
- *The childhood story about the Moors.* A nineteenth-century timeline places it in 1522, when she was seven.
- *Vows.* November 1537 according to the Vatican website and a timeline, a year earlier according to the editor of the English edition.
- *Seizure and paralysis.* The seizure falls in 1537 or in 1539. The healing is placed in 1539 or 1542.
- *Turning point before the painting.* From 1553 to 1556; I follow 1554.

Interpretation: whether her visions came from God is a question of faith. Teresa herself laid them before people she trusted, and the Inquisition found no error in the story of her life.

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27. EWTN, The Life of St. Teresa of Avila (translation David Lewis, introduction and chronicle)

Susanna Wesley: the mother who opened the rectory on Sundays

On February 6, 1712, a woman in the village of Epworth wrote a letter to her husband in London. While he was away, people came to her home on Sundays, to the rectory, to hear her read sermons aloud. He thought that was unusual for a minister's wife. She explained how it had come about.

She had started with her own children and the servants. She felt it was her duty, she wrote, to spend part of the day reading to them and teaching them in her own house. That others joined in, she called merely accidental. A servant boy told his family about it, and his parents asked whether they could come. Then others asked too. The previous winter there had been about thirty, she wrote, seldom more than forty. A few weeks later she had to write to him again. By then there were more than two hundred.

The woman's name was Susanna Wesley. She had given birth to nineteen children and buried nine of them. Two of her sons, John and Charles Wesley, would later set the Methodist movement in motion, a revival that went out from England across the whole world. Methodists now often call her the mother of Methodism. That ti-

tle says something, but it also hides something. Susanna was more than the mother of famous sons. She was a woman with her own conscience, her own pen and her own way of walking with God.

She began as the youngest girl in a large house in London.

The twenty-fourth child, or the twenty-fifth

Susanna Annesley was born on January 20, 1669, in Spitalfields in London. Her father was Dr. Samuel Annesley, a well-known preacher. Her mother's name was Mary White.

To understand her father, you need to know something about the English church of that time. England had a state church, the Church of England or Anglican Church, with bishops and a fixed prayer book. Anyone who stayed outside it for reasons of conscience was called a dissenter or nonconformist. Samuel Annesley was one of them. He preached in London to Protestants who worshiped outside the state church.

How many children he had, nobody knows exactly. The story that Susanna was the twenty-fifth child is often repeated. It goes back to a joke passed on by the publisher John Dunton, who was married to her sister Elizabeth: a colleague is said to have asked whether there were two dozen of them now, or a quarter of a hundred. A sketch from 1902 already notes how vague that is. Epworth Old Rectory, the museum in her later home, holds that she was the twenty-fourth child of twenty-four or twenty-five. All that is certain is that the family was large and that she was one of the youngest.

Her own choice at twelve or thirteen

As a teenager Susanna made a decision that weighed heavily in her family. She left her father's congregation and joined the Church of England. Some sources say she was twelve, others thirteen. Accord-

ing to the Wesleys in Oxford website, her father accepted her choice. How that conversation went has not come down to us.

A girl of twelve or thirteen who chooses a different church from her father, the preacher, is taking a big step. The pattern would come back more often in her life. Susanna thought for herself, and when she reached a conclusion, she held on to it.

In August 1682 she was at the wedding of her sister Elizabeth. There she met Samuel Wesley, who later became an Anglican clergyman. In November 1688 they married. Susanna was nineteen.

It was a restless month for England. The Dutch stadtholder William III had just crossed over with an army, and a few months later he became king of England, together with his wife Mary. The previous king, James II, fled. That change of power would still make itself felt in Susanna's marriage.

Two kings, two beds

In 1697 Samuel became rector, the settled minister, of Epworth, a village in Lincolnshire on the Isle of Axholme, about 225 kilometers (140 miles) from London. He also had charge of the neighboring village of Wroot. The family lived in a rectory of timber and plaster with a thatched roof.

It was not a friendly place. Samuel was an outspoken man with royalist, conservative views. According to the museum in Epworth, villagers damaged crops and maimed cattle, apparently out of dislike for his politics. There was never enough money. In 1705 Samuel was put in prison for debt.

Inside the house there were clashes too. In her heart Susanna believed that James II and his family were the rightful kings. When Samuel prayed for King William during family prayers, she did not

say amen. He noticed. According to tradition he said that if they had two kings, they must have two beds. Her oldest surviving letter, of March 7, 1702, to Lady Yarborough, is about this quarrel over her political views. Samuel went off to London for months. According to the historian Charles Wallace, they came back together after a fire in the rectory. The museum in Epworth mentions a fire in 1702 that damaged two thirds of the house.

On June 17, 1703, their son John was born.

What do you do with a story like that? I think it is honest that it is in this book. Susanna was not a quiet woman who swallowed everything. She could be stubborn, and so could her husband. They found their way back together.

Nineteen births

Susanna brought nineteen children into the world. Nine died as babies or very young. About ten grew up. Anyone who reads the figures sees above all how many small graves there were in her life.

The children who lived were taught at home by her. She began only on the day after their fifth birthday. On that first day they had to learn the whole alphabet, in six hours of lessons. All but two managed it. About those two, Molly and Nancy, the museum in Epworth writes that they needed a day and a half, and their mother thought that too long. Her daughters learned to read before they learned to sew, and that was unusual in her time. She wrote herself that it troubled her how few women could read well enough to be understood, and she saw one of the causes in teaching a girl to sew before she could read properly. Her daughters were also taught Latin and Greek. It is said of Hetty, in full Mehetabel, that at eight she read parts of the New Testament in Greek. The museum in Epworth reports that with some caution.

There is also a well-known story about her prayer life. In a crowded house she is said to have pulled her apron over her head when she wanted to pray, and then the children knew not to disturb her. It is a lovely picture. I have not found it in any reliable source about her. What is certain is that she regularly withdrew for prayer and Bible reading, that she kept a journal and that she wrote explanations of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments.

A child at the window

On the night of February 9, 1709, around half past eleven, Hetty woke because burning pieces of the roof were falling on her bed. She ran to her father. Samuel slept in a separate room that night, because Susanna was ill and heavily pregnant. He heard someone shouting, got up and opened the door to the hallway. There was fire. He told Susanna to run for her life. She escaped to the garden with her two oldest daughters, Emily and Sukey, and suffered burns on her legs as she did. In a letter to her oldest son Samuel, who was away at school, she later wrote that only a thin wall had kept the fire from the stairs.

The maid Betty gathered the smallest children, Charles among them, and called to five-year-old John, Jacky to the family, to follow. A servant broke a window and climbed out with Molly and Hetty. When Betty reached the garden, Jacky was missing. He had gone to the door, Susanna wrote, had seen that everything was on fire and had run back.

Samuel tried several times to get upstairs, but the flames on the stairs drove him back. He went back to the garden, aware that his son would not be saved. The family knelt and prayed that God would receive the child's soul, Samuel wrote later.

Meanwhile the child woke upstairs. John wrote years later that he believed he woke at that very moment (my translation). He called out, went to the door and then to the window. Someone in the yard saw him. There was no ladder. A neighbor stood on another man's shoulders and pulled the child out, just before the roof came down.

A week later Samuel wrote that he could not believe it until he had kissed his son two or three times. According to John's later memory, his father called on the neighbors in the garden to kneel and thank God. He had all his eight children back, he is said to have said, and the house could burn: he was rich enough.

The house burned to the ground. Much of what Susanna had written was lost. There is a story that villagers set the fire to drive the family away. There is no evidence for that.

Susanna saw the hand of God in her son's rescue. She sometimes called him a brand plucked from the fire, after a verse from the prophet Zechariah: *Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?* (Zechariah 3:2). On May 17, 1711, about two years after the fire, she wrote in a prayer that she wanted to be especially careful for the soul of this child (my translation). I know those words only secondhand. John kept the memory all his life. In 1753 he wrote an epitaph for himself that called him a brand plucked out of the burning. It was never used.

After the fire the children were placed with other families. For Susanna that was hard. She feared they no longer kept the Sabbath properly and were picking up a coarse village accent. Samuel had a new house built of brick and stone, on the same spot. It was finished in December 1709 and cost him four hundred pounds of his own money, plus help from friends. It made the debts even larger. Susanna complained that the house was never quite finished. How

soon the children came back is not clear; one source speaks of almost two years.

The house is still standing. It is now a museum.

Molly on Monday, Jacky on Thursday

On December 7, 1711, the Convocation opened in London, the assembly of the clergy of the Church of England. Samuel had gone there as a delegate, 140 miles from his parish. He would not be back until spring. He left the church services in Epworth to his curate, Godfrey Inman.

Shortly after her husband left, Susanna read an account of the Danish missionaries. It moved her deeply, she wrote. She spent a large part of an evening thanking God for their zeal. Then she thought about herself. She was not a man nor a minister, she wrote, but with a sincere heart she too could do more than she was doing.

She began with her own children. Every evening she took one of them aside to talk with him or her about faith and life. On Monday Molly, on Tuesday Hetty, on Wednesday Nancy, on Thursday Jacky, on Friday Patty, on Saturday Charles, and on Sunday Emily and Suky together. A large family, a house that had just been rebuilt, and still she set aside a separate evening for each child.

On Sundays she did more. She felt that a morning church service did not yet make the day holy. So in the afternoon or evening she read sermons aloud, sang with the children and the servants and prayed with them. That is how it began. And then the parents of that servant boy came.

Above two hundred

The group grew quickly. In her next letter she wrote: "Last Sunday I believe we had above two hundred." There were people stand-

ing outside because there was no room inside. An article from the United Methodist Church, based on the same letter, mentions two to three hundred. The museum in Epworth places the meetings in the kitchens of the rectory. Fewer people sat in Inman's church on Sunday mornings.

She chose sermons that were meant to wake people up, she explained. Daily life and other matters were not discussed at the meeting. She wrote that they banished all temporal concerns from their society. She hoped it would bring people back to church faithfully and stop them from profaning the Sabbath. She did not worry about the criticism she expected. The work would look strange, she admitted, but so did everything that was serious about God's honor. She had long since shaken hands with the world, she wrote.

Samuel had suggested that someone else should do the reading. She saw little in that: few of the listeners could read a sermon without spelling out many of the words, and her family did not have enough voice for so many people.

On one point she hesitated herself. In her letter she wondered whether it was really fitting for her, as a woman, to bring the prayers of all those people before God. She had meant to send them away afterward, but they had asked so urgently whether they could stay that she had not dared to refuse. What she did, she called reading and instructing. According to later accounts, she read sermons from the collection of her husband or her father.

Inman saw it differently. He wrote to Samuel and complained that it was not fitting for a woman to preach. He had a few supporters in the village. According to Charles Wallace, such meetings outside the church were also not formally allowed. In her letter to her husband Susanna pointed to something Inman would rather not hear:

her group drew more people on Sunday evening than his service in the morning.

Send me your positive command

Samuel wrote to his wife that he would rather she stopped. Her answer is the best-known thing she ever wrote. She gave him the last word, but she wanted him to really say it. If he wanted to end the meeting, he should not write that he would like that. A wish was not enough for her conscience. She asked him to send her his positive command. Then she would be free of guilt and punishment, she wrote, for neglecting a chance to do good. She reminded him that they would both stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

In that letter I do not read a woman pushing her husband aside. I read a woman who wants to obey her husband and God at the same time, and who does not make it easy for him to play the two against each other. How would you write such a letter, if you were convinced that God was bringing people to your home?

Samuel did not give the command. According to the United Methodist Church, neither he nor Inman challenged her again after that, and the meetings went on until he came back from London. What happened to them after that, the sources I read do not say.

A letter about raising children

Twenty years later, on July 24, 1732, Susanna wrote a long letter to a son about how she had brought up her children. John later included the letter in his published journal, because he thought parents could learn from it.

It is a letter that grates today. From birth the children had a fixed rhythm of sleeping, eating and washing. Babies were laid in the cradle awake and rocked to sleep. As soon as they were strong enough,

the children ate three meals a day, at a small table beside the parents' own, where they could be watched. They ate what the rest ate and did not choose. Eating between meals was not allowed, except in illness. At six o'clock came supper, right after family prayers. At seven the maid washed the children, and at eight they were in bed. They lay awake in their own room, because nobody sat with a child until it slept.

Around their first year, she says, they learned to fear the rod and to cry softly. She wanted to conquer the child's own will. That worked with every child, she said. A person can learn to take anything, she wrote, even a nasty medicine. The result was a house where you seldom heard a child cry. That phrase about the rod is often quoted. The Wesleys in Oxford website warns that it gives a distorted picture and has rightly drawn much criticism. Her other letters also show the mother who gave each child one evening a week all to themselves, and who taught her daughters to read when the world thought it unnecessary.

I am not going to defend her or condemn her. She was a woman of the early eighteenth century with ten children, a husband in debt and a house that burned down. Her strictness and her devotion came from the same source: she wanted her children to know God.

Questions from Oxford

Her sons kept writing to her, even after they had left home. In 1725 John sent letters from Oxford to Epworth with the questions of a student. On May 28 he asked about her thoughts on Thomas à Kempis, on cheerfulness and on suffering. On June 18 he asked for her blessing and advice, and wrote about *Holy Living and Dying* by Jeremy Taylor. On July 29 it was about humility, faith and predestination, and he asked what she thought of it. On his letter of June 18 she herself wrote: Jacky's letter. Humility. A note she enclosed begins

with the sentence that weakness, deformity or imperfection of the body is in itself no evil.

The Foundery

Samuel Wesley died in 1735. Susanna had to leave the rectory so that the new minister could move in. She sold much of the furniture to pay his debts. After that she lived with her children.

Her sons John and Charles were by now ordained and were taking a new path. At first Susanna was worried about their new zeal, and later she supported their work. On Wednesday, June 13, 1739, John spoke with her after the Lord's Supper in Islington. Through a relative she had come into possession of a text by John that worried her, he wrote in his journal. She had approved the same text herself a year earlier. They talked about it.

On Monday, September 3, 1739, John had a long talk with her, he wrote in his journal. She told him that until shortly before, she had hardly ever heard it said that you can receive the forgiveness of sins here and now, and that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are His children. She had thought it was not for all believers. She said she had never dared to ask for it herself.

Two or three weeks earlier her son-in-law Westley Hall had given her the cup at the Lord's Supper. He spoke the words: "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee." She said the words struck through her heart, and that she knew God, for Christ's sake, had forgiven her all her sins.

She was a woman of seventy, who for decades had prayed, written and taught, and who now heard this for the first time for herself.

In the same conversation she spoke about her father. John asked whether Dr. Annesley had had the same faith and had preached it

too. Shortly before his death he had said that for more than forty years he had known no darkness, fear or doubt about his acceptance by God. She could not remember him preaching about it. She thought he saw it as something for a few, not as a promise to all the children of God.

She spent her last years at the Foundery in London, the first center of John's movement in the city. According to the Wesleys in Oxford website, she encouraged John to accept that lay people, ordinary believers without ordination, could also preach. That would become one of the marks of Methodism. In Epworth she had experienced for herself how such a thing worked.

A psalm at the bedside

In the summer of 1742 John left Bristol on Sunday evening, July 18, and arrived in London on Tuesday. He found his mother on the borders of eternity, he wrote, without doubt or fear.

On Friday, July 23, he came to her bed at about three in the afternoon. She was in her last struggle, he wrote, could no longer speak and was, he said, clear in mind. Her look was calm and quiet, her eyes fixed upward, while they commended her to God. He sat down on the edge of her bed. Between three and four, he wrote, the silver cord was loosing, and without strife, sign or cry her soul was set free. Earlier she had asked: "Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God." The family did so.

She was seventy-three. On Sunday, August 1, at about five o'clock, John buried her at Bunhill Fields, the burial ground in London where dissenters were buried. So the daughter of Samuel Annesley came back to her father's people. According to John there was an almost countless crowd. He preached on the great white throne from Revelation 20, where the dead are judged according to their

works. It was one of the most solemn gatherings he had ever seen, he wrote, or expected to see on this side of eternity.

On a simple stone at the head of the grave the family had it recorded that she was the youngest and last surviving daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley. In his journal John wrote that his mother, like her father, her grandfather, her husband and three sons, had been in her own way a preacher of righteousness (my translation).

She never stood in a pulpit. In a rectory in Lincolnshire, on Sunday evenings, she read other people's sermons aloud, while people stood outside because there was no more room inside.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on January 20, 1669, in London as the daughter of the nonconformist preacher Samuel Annesley; move to the Church of England as a teenager; marriage to Samuel Wesley in November 1688; move to Epworth in 1697; nineteen births and many children who died young; the conflict over the prayer for King William (her letter about it to Lady Yarborough is dated March 7, 1702); the fire of February 9, 1709, and the rescue of John by neighbors; the Sunday meetings in the rectory in the winter of 1711 to 1712, Inman's complaint and her request for a positive command; Samuel's death in 1735; her last years at the Foundery; her death on July 23, 1742, and the burial at Bunhill Fields on August 1, 1742.

From her own letters and notes: the details about the meetings (letters of February 6 and 25, 1712: the numbers, the account of the Danish missionaries, the evening schedule for the children, her doubt about the prayers, the request for a command); her note on John's letter of June 18, 1725 (according to the editor of the letters); the rules of upbringing from her letter of 1732; her prayer of May 17,

1711 about John's soul (only through a second source); the letter to her son Samuel about the fire.

From the journal of John Wesley: the words of her assurance at the Lord's Supper in 1739 (September 3, 1739); her words on her deathbed and the description of her last hours; Samuel's words in the garden after the fire (John's memory of a later date); his epitaph of 1753.

Only from tradition or unconfirmed: the remark about two kings and two beds; that she was the twenty-fifth child (the number goes back to a joke); the apron over her head in prayer (no source found); that Hetty read Greek at eight; that the fires at the rectory were set on purpose; her influence on John's acceptance of lay preachers. I was not able to consult the article on her in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

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

- *Age at her choice of church.* Twelve (a reference work) or thirteen (two other sources).
- *Day of the wedding.* November 10 or 11, 1688.
- *Year of the quarrel over King William.* 1701 or 1702, probably because of the English calendar of the time, in which the new year began only in March. The museum in Epworth mentions a fire in 1702; Charles Wallace links the reconciliation of Samuel and Susanna to a fire.
- *Number of children.* Seventeen to nineteen births (one overview), ten children who grew up (the museum), nine who reached adulthood (Cambridge University Press) or eight still alive at her death (another overview).

- *Number of visitors.* Above two hundred (her letter), two to three hundred (United Methodist Church), forty to fifty according to the same article for the first weeks.
- *Length of the separation after the fire.* The new house was finished in December 1709; one source speaks of almost two years that the children were away.
- *Date of death.* July 23, 1742 according to John's journal; a reference work gives July 30 as an alternative.

Interpretation: whether her Sunday meetings were preaching was already a point of dispute in 1712. She called it reading and instructing; her curate called it preaching. Whether God gave her the assurance of forgiveness at the Lord's Supper in 1739 is a question of faith. I believe it with her: John wrote it down, and she said it herself.

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Fanny Crosby: the woman who wrote songs in her head

On November 20, 1850, a blind woman of thirty walked forward alone in New York. It was an evening of the revival meetings in the Thirtieth Street Methodist Church. She had already gone to the altar twice that fall. Both times she had come back without the peace she was looking for. This evening she felt that it had to happen now, or never.

There was prayer. Then the congregation sang an old hymn of surrender. At a line from the fourth verse something happened, as she told it herself more than fifty years later. She wrote that her soul was flooded with heavenly light (my translation). She jumped up and shouted hallelujah. She suddenly understood that she had been trying to hold the world in one hand and the Lord in the other.

That woman's name was Fanny Crosby. She would become the best-known writer of gospel songs of the nineteenth century. Her songs were sung in the campaigns of Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey, in Sunday schools, in missions for the homeless and in churches all over the world. In the Netherlands too, believers sang her songs in translation, such as *Veilig in Jezus' armen* (*Safe in the Arms of Jesus*).

How many songs she wrote, nobody knows exactly. She had never learned to write legibly. Everything she made, she first kept in her head.

It began with a cold.

Hot poultices on a baby's eyes

Frances Jane Crosby was born on March 24, 1820, in Southeast, a rural town in Putnam County, in the state of New York. Her parents were John and Mercy Crosby. When she was six weeks old, she caught a slight cold. Her eyes became inflamed. The family's regular doctor was not at home, and a stranger was brought in. He advised hot poultices on her eyes. Those poultices destroyed her sight, she wrote later in her memoirs.

Later writers turned that man into a quack who passed himself off as a doctor. Her own text says only that he was a stranger. Fanny was the only child of John and Mercy. According to the archives of Wheaton College, which keeps much of her legacy, her father died a few months later. I have not found that detail in her own writings.

What she said about that man is striking. For more than eighty-five years she had not felt a spark of resentment against him, she wrote at eighty-six. In her earlier autobiography of 1903 she goes even further. If she ever met him, she would thank him. She would say to him, "Thank you, thank you," and more than once. She saw the hand of God in what had happened, preparing her in this way for her work. Without the sight that distracts others, she could give herself completely to what she heard within.

Do you know that, someone who has done you harm and whom you still do not want to blame? With Fanny Crosby this was not a pose she adopted later. It is a thread that runs through all her writings.

In April 1825, shortly after her fifth birthday, her mother took her to New York. She wanted Dr. Valentine Mott to look at her eyes. According to her later account, Mott and a colleague, Dr. Delafield, examined her and said there was no hope. The girl stayed blind.

In those years a blind child in America had few prospects. The United States was a young country of farmers and small towns. Women could not vote and could hardly study anywhere. There were almost no schools for blind children. Fanny knew that. Her greatest worry as a child was that she would never get an education, she wrote later.

Her mother was sometimes sad about her daughter's blindness. As a child Fanny decided not to cry about it. When she was discouraged, she went alone to her knees and asked whether she, though blind, also had a place in God's world. Then she felt, she wrote, that God told her she would one day be happy and useful.

Her grandmother taught her to pray. She was a woman who firmly believed in prayer, Fanny remembered. Around the age of eight the family moved to Ridgefield, in the state of Connecticut. There she wrote her first little verses. The first one began with the words "Oh, what a happy child I am, although I cannot see!" and was about a blind girl who decided to be content. She was eight or nine at the time.

Five chapters a week

In Ridgefield the family lived in the house of a woman called Mrs. Hawley. According to Fanny's own account, Mrs. Hawley gave her chapters of the Bible to learn by heart, sometimes as many as five a week. After a year she could recite the first four books of the Old Testament, and the four Gospels.

The story comes from her, and it is the only one we have about it. But it fits with what followed. A woman who could not read carried the Bible with her in her memory. Later she would carry her songs in the same way.

At twelve she went to a Methodist service in Ridgefield. Methodism was a movement that had begun in England in the eighteenth century with John and Charles Wesley. In America it grew fast, with warm services, much singing and the emphasis on a personal conversion. Fanny had been raised Presbyterian, in a church with a Calvinist tradition. Methodism would later become her home.

As a teenager, troubled by the feeling that she was getting too little education, she prayed, she wrote, asking the Lord for light. She meant light for her mind. She usually rose from her knees with the certainty that the answer would come.

Saturday morning, March 7, 1835

On Saturday morning, March 7, 1835, Fanny Crosby rode in a carriage to the New York Institution for the Blind, on Ninth Avenue in Manhattan. She was almost fifteen. By her own account she had longed for this. It was not seeing she was after. She wanted to learn.

She stayed there twenty-three years. First as a pupil, then as a teacher. The sources differ on the year she began teaching, somewhere in the 1840s. An overview from 1914 names the subjects: English grammar, rhetoric and the history of Rome and America. She also played the piano, harp, organ and guitar. As a teacher she corrected pupils only in private. A pupil who was dressed down in front of the class learned nothing more, she felt.

The institution made use of her talent. She had to recite poems for visitors. When President John Tyler visited the institution, she ad-

dressed him. In 1844 her first book of poems appeared, *The Blind Girl and Other Poems*.

A blind woman before Congress

In January 1844 Fanny traveled to Washington with a group from the institution, she writes in her memoirs of 1906. The aim was to persuade Congress, the American parliament, to support education for the blind. She recited a poem at a joint session of both houses. It was the most impressive gathering she had ever seen, she wrote. In the book of 1915, which is based on her own telling, she dates that first visit to the fall of 1843. There she also tells how much she loved listening in Washington to John Quincy Adams, the former president who was then a member of the House of Representatives. In April 1847 she was there again. This time she recited a tribute to a cabinet member who had died, Hugh Legaré. According to her own account, many senators wept. President James Polk, who had visited the institution in 1845, invited the group to the White House.

Her friends said later that she was the only woman who had ever spoken before a joint session of Congress. An overview from 1914, which the hymn database Hymnary.org still reproduces, calls her the first woman whose voice was heard in public in the Senate chamber. The United Methodist Church puts it more carefully: she reportedly was.

What does stand out: a woman speaking in Washington was rare in that time. Fanny herself did not make a cause of it. She was there for the institution, and for other blind children.

An observatory in a dream

Fanny also told of a dream from those years, a dream she never forgot. She was in an observatory and was carried to a star. Her

guide told her she had to return to earth to do her work there. That memory, she wrote later, kept her going in writing songs.

Then there was the summer of 1849, when cholera swept through New York. Pupils were sent home. Fanny stayed at the institution. According to her own account, one day she felt the first signs of the disease herself. She said nothing, walked around and took a good dose of cholera pills. She was afraid that giving in to the illness would mean death. The next morning she was well again. On August 1 she was sent to the countryside. A later article says that during that summer she helped make pills and sat up with the sick. That is not how it reads in the passage of hers that I read.

Since 1839 class meetings of the Eighteenth Street Methodist Church had been held at the institution. A class meeting was a small Methodist group in which members told one another how their faith was going. Fanny went on one condition: she did not have to say anything herself. A friend, Theodore Camp, led the group. She later told of a dream in which Camp asked her whether she would meet him in heaven. After that dream she decided to seek help from God.

The fourth verse

That brought her, in the fall of 1850, to the revival meetings on Thirtieth Street.

In her memoirs she calls the hymn of that evening, November 20, 1850, an old hymn of surrender. Later writers say it was *Alas! and did my Saviour bleed* by Isaac Watts, a hymn about the cross. She herself does not give the title in that place.

She describes honestly what came after that evening. Her growth was slow. On the Thursday after, in her class meeting, she gave a public testimony for the first time. Afterward she was ashamed: she

felt a wave of pride and recognized it as temptation. She became discouraged, for days. A friend gave her advice she never forgot: do what is your duty at once, because you have not yet fully surrendered your will. Fanny promised God that she would do what He made clear to her.

Weeks later Stephen Merritt asked her to close a class meeting with a short prayer. Her first reaction was to refuse. Then her conscience reminded her of her promise. She prayed aloud, and since then, she wrote, she never again refused to pray or speak in a public service, with rich blessing as the result. The woman who had insisted in the class meeting that she did not have to say anything would later stand before halls full of men.

In 1851 she became a member of the Methodist church on Thirtieth Street. She became friends with Phoebe Palmer, a well-known Methodist woman from New York.

A wedding in March 1858

On March 1, 1858, Fanny stopped her work at the institution. Four days later, on March 5, she married Alexander Van Alstyne. He was blind too, a former pupil of the institution and a gifted musician. They had known each other for almost fifteen years. He later wrote music for a number of her songs. After the wedding Fanny kept her own name as a writer.

They were happy together for many years, she wrote in 1906. But the marriage was unusual. According to her modern biographer, the historian Edith Blumhofer, the couple lived apart for a long time and led largely separate lives. Blumhofer wrote her biography *Her Heart Can See* (2005) on the basis of thousands of Fanny's unpublished manuscripts. The United Methodist Church and the Encyclopaedia Britannica give 1880 as the year from which they lived

apart. They stayed married. Fanny herself did not write about it. Alexander died on July 18, 1902.

About a child it is even quieter. According to the Britannica and the United Methodist Church, they had one child in 1859, a little daughter, who died soon after birth. The book of 1915 has Fanny say one sentence about it: "God gave us a tender babe but the angels came down and took our infant up to God and to His throne." There is nothing more, and I am not going to make anything up. She almost never wrote about it. Perhaps that is an answer in itself.

Why don't you go to Mr. Bradbury?

In December 1863 Peter Stryker, minister of a Reformed church of Dutch origin on Twenty-third Street in New York, asked her for a short poem for the New Year's Eve service. Soon after, he introduced her to William B. Bradbury, a well-known publisher of Sunday school songs. On February 2, 1864, she stood in his office at 425 Broome Street. Bradbury thanked God that they were finally meeting, as she told it. He told her he wanted her to begin right away, she said (my translation). Within three days she came back with verses. It became her first published hymn.

She was forty-three. From that moment on, writing songs became her work. She stayed connected for more than forty years with Bradbury's firm and its successor, Biglow & Main. According to Christianity Today, she had a contract for three songs a week, and was paid one or two dollars apiece. Bradbury died in 1868. She told how she stood weeping by his coffin when a voice from the congregation told her to take up his work and dry her tears. She never knew who said it.

She wrote in her head. A review of Blumhofer's biography says she had never learned to write legibly. She composed a whole song in

her mind and then dictated it to someone else. She began every song with prayer, she wrote: "I never undertake a hymn without first asking the good Lord to be my inspiration in the work that I am about to do." When she was not in the mood, she built one, she said. She watched the meter strictly: a song with a false stress had little chance. She let a draft rest in the writing desk of her mind, as she called it, and revised it later.

Most of her best-known songs came about together with composers. According to her own story, the composer William H. Doane once came to her with forty minutes to spare before his train to Cincinnati. He played her a melody. She heard the subject in it at once: safe in the arms of Jesus. She wrote the words in about a quarter of an hour. According to Christianity Today, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* became a regular song in the campaigns of Moody and Sankey.

In 1873 a friend, Mrs. Joseph F. Knapp, played her a melody and asked what it said. She played it a few times, and Fanny gave the words. *Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!* That is how *Blessed Assurance* came about, as she told it herself. Other sources give the same year. That the melody and the song were meant for each other was her feeling from the first moment. Moody's singer Sankey later told how young Christians sang the song on the train to Minneapolis, to the great impression of their fellow passengers. The refrain says in one line why it was sung so much: *This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.*

These are lovely stories, and they all come from her. A reviewer of Blumhofer's book notes that Fanny kept no diary. She dictated her memories when she was in her eighties, with a selective memory, and much of what we know comes from the uncritical stories of others. That does not make them untrue. It does mean that I tell them as her testimony.

In Scotland, she said, a woman thanked Ira Sankey after a meeting for a song. Sankey said that Fanny Crosby had written it. She sent Fanny the greeting that an old Scottish woman was blessing her (my translation). She wrote about such things with warmth. She had always prayed for what she needed, she said, and it was given to her. Once she needed five dollars, prayed for it and a visitor pressed exactly that amount into her hand.

A boy of eighteen

Some of her songs came out of evenings in the missions of New York. Those were halls in poor neighborhoods of Manhattan, where people living on the margins could hear a sermon and get help.

On a warm summer evening she spoke there to a large group of workingmen. A day or so earlier Doane had sent her the subject *Rescue the Perishing*. She kept thinking of a mother and her son. A mother's child had to be reached that evening, her feeling told her, or it would never happen. She asked whether there was a boy who had wandered from his mother's faith, and who wanted to come forward.

A boy of eighteen came. "Did you mean me?" he asked, according to the book of 1915. He had promised his mother to meet her in heaven, he told her, but the way he was living now that could not be. She prayed with him. When he stood up, there was light in his eyes. Now he could meet his mother in heaven, he said, because he had found God (my translation).

That night she finished *Rescue the Perishing*, a song about saving people who are being lost. *Rescue the perishing, care for the dying*, it begins. The next day she sent it to Doane, who wrote the music.

In November 1903 she spoke in Lynn, in the state of Massachusetts, for the YMCA, the Young Men's Christian Association, and told the

story behind the song. Afterward a man came up to her, visibly moved. He told her he was that boy (my translation). He said that on that evening he had found peace in the mission and had tried to live as a Christian ever since. He kissed her hand and left before she could answer. She went on calling him her nameless friend. This story too we know only from her.

She had a fixed rule for this work. Never to lecture the erring had always been her policy, she wrote (my translation). Harsh words harden hearts, she felt. She knew men who had been saved after someone spoke kindly to them, and others who left a meeting because nobody had a good word or a helping hand.

Her mission work itself is well confirmed. She knew Jerry McAuley, in her view one of the best-known men in New York, and she visited his mission on Water Street. She knew his past, she wrote: a thief, a drunkard and a desperate man, who could touch people deeply with his honest speech. Through the Cremorne Mission on West Thirty-second Street, which McAuley and his wife helped found, she got to know Mrs. Whittemore, the founder of the Door of Hope for unprotected girls. She spoke at sixteen anniversary celebrations of the Bowery Mission and wrote a song for each of them. From about 1880 she also worked among railroad men, through the YMCA. Blumhofer names the Bowery Mission and the YMCA as places to which she gave much time.

According to an article from 2015, she lived for years in a rented room in a poor neighborhood of Manhattan. According to an exhibition at the Bridwell Library, she usually gave her earnings away to mission work.

Opposition because she was a woman is something she hardly describes herself. She worked within the room that women were given in the churches of her time: missions, care for the poor, temperance

and song. In East Northfield, Massachusetts, she gave a short address, but only after people had pressed her to. One reviewer of Blumhofer suggests that the use of pen names may also have had something to do with her being a woman. The main motive, in his view, was that the publisher did not want her name to fill every hymnbook. Blumhofer herself portrays her as an independent woman who took full part in the world of hymn writing, and who also earned money from it.

Almost two hundred names

How many songs did she write? An overview from 1914 speaks of about eight thousand poems, more than four thousand of them for Biglow & Main. The book of 1915 mentions five thousand nine hundred songs for that publisher, counted in her ninety-third year. Christianity Today speaks of more than nine thousand. The Encyclopaedia Britannica holds to five and a half thousand to nine thousand. These figures come from her own circle and from her publisher. A reviewer of Blumhofer's book writes honestly that he doubts we will ever know.

What can be counted: the archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in Illinois keep almost 2,400 original manuscripts of her songs and poems, from the years 1862 to 1915. Most of them are numbered and dated. The hymn database Hymnary.org lists more than 3,600 texts by her.

Part of the confusion comes from the pen names. In the hymnbooks her songs appeared under almost two hundred different names. Blumhofer includes in her biography a list that Fanny partly gives herself. Hymnary.org lists more than sixty of them, from Grace J. Frances to Lizzie Edwards.

I find that a beautiful detail. A woman who wrote so much, and whose name so often did not stand under her own work.

The first face

Someone once told her it was a pity that God had not given her sight. According to Christianity Today, she answered that if she could have made one prayer at her birth, she would have asked to be born blind. Then the first face she ever saw would be the face of her Savior. It is a saying that is often quoted, in many versions.

How do you deal with what you lack? Fanny Crosby did not make light of it. What she wrote later shows that she kept to her choice not to cry about it.

Around 1900 she moved to Bridgeport, in Connecticut, where she had family. According to an article from 2015, that was because of heart trouble. The United Methodist Church gives 1907 and says she went there to care for a sick friend. She stayed there and for years kept traveling to speak. In 1903 her autobiography *Fanny Crosby's Life-Story* appeared, in 1906 *Memories of Eighty Years*. In 1905 she celebrated her eighty-fifth birthday, grateful, as she wrote.

She died on February 12, 1915, in Bridgeport, six weeks before her ninety-fifth birthday, after a stroke. In her will she left money for a home in that city. With the help of church women it later grew into the Fanny Crosby Memorial Home for the Aged, a home for the elderly that existed from 1925 to 1966. She was buried at Mountain Grove Cemetery in that city. Her first gravestone bears, in English, the name Aunt Fanny and the words that she has done what she could.

Those words come from the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with costly oil. When others grumbled about the waste, Jesus took

her side. He said that she had done what she could, and that she had anointed His body beforehand for the burial (Mark 14:8).

On May 1, 1955, a second memorial stone was placed, with the first verse of *Blessed Assurance* on it.

The first stone carries no line of her own. The woman who carried thousands of songs in her head was given a few words from the Gospel, chosen by people who called her Aunt Fanny.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on March 24, 1820, in Southeast, Putnam County (New York); blind as an infant after a treatment of inflamed eyes; pupil and then teacher at the New York Institution for the Blind from 1835; appearance before Congress in the 1840s; first book of poems in 1844; marriage to Alexander Van Alstyne in March 1858; one child, born in 1859 and dead as an infant; the couple living apart from about 1880, without divorce; start as a hymn writer for William B. Bradbury in 1864 and long collaboration with Biglow & Main; *Blessed Assurance* in 1873 with Phoebe Knapp; the use of her songs by Moody and Sankey; work at the Bowery Mission and the YMCA; the use of a great many pen names; almost 2,400 surviving manuscripts (1862 to 1915) in the archives of Wheaton College; death on February 12, 1915, and burial in Bridgeport; the Fanny Crosby Memorial Home (1925 to 1966) from her estate.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the stranger with the hot poultices and her forgiveness; her prayers and kneeling as a child; the visit to Dr. Mott in 1825; learning books of the Bible by heart in Ridgefield; her dream about the observatory; the cholera weeks of 1849; the dream about Theodore Camp; the conversion on November 20, 1850, and the hymn that was sung then, the Thurs-

day after and the prayer at the request of Stephen Merritt; her way of making songs; the voice at Bradbury's coffin; how *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* and *Rescue the Perishing* came about, the boy and the man in Lynn in 1903; the Scottish woman; the five dollars; her policy of not lecturing the erring; the saying about the first face she would see; the date of the first meeting with Bradbury (February 2 or 5, 1864); that the little daughter died in her sleep; listening to John Quincy Adams in Washington.

Unconfirmed: that she was the first or only woman to address the Senate or Congress; the early death of her father (Wheaton College and an article from 2015, not in her own books); that the man with the poultices posed as a doctor; which hymn exactly was sung at her conversion; the exact numbers of songs (five and a half thousand to nine thousand), which come from her own circle and from her publisher. I did not find a source on a Fanny Crosby Society.

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

- *Congress.* The dates vary, even in her own books: fall 1843 (1915), January 1844 (1906), April 1846 or 1847 for the session with the tribute to Legaré. Whether she was the first woman in the Senate chamber, I cannot establish.
- *Teacher.* Somewhere in the 1840s (1843, 1847); some sources hold to twelve years as a pupil and eleven as a teacher.
- *Conversion.* A short life sketch by the Christian History Institute speaks of a camp meeting when she was thirty. Her own account names the church on Thirtieth Street. I follow her.
- *First meeting with Bradbury.* February 2, 1864 (her own account) or February 5, 1864 (an overview from 1914).
- *Time for Safe in the Arms of Jesus.* About a quarter of an hour (Life-Story, 1903, with forty minutes for the train) or about half an hour (book of 1915).

- *Bridgeport.* 1900 (article from 2015, heart trouble) or 1907 (United Methodist Church, sick friend).
- *Father.* Died a few months after her birth according to Wheaton College and an article from 2015; not in her own books.
- *Hymnary.* More than 3,600 texts in the database, 2,400 manuscripts at Wheaton.

Interpretation: what Fanny Crosby experienced on November 20, 1850, we know only from her own words, written down more than fifty years later. Her modern biographer warns that her memories are selective. Her songs and her work in the missions were, however, recorded in their own time and by others. Lines of song are quoted from her songs from before 1929.

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Catherine Booth: the woman who wanted to say a word

It was Whit Sunday, Pentecost, in 1860, at Bethesda Chapel in Gateshead, an industrial town on the River Tyne in the north of England. Her husband William had preached. The service was drawing to a close. Then Catherine Booth rose from her pew and walked to the front. She was thirty-one, she had four small children and the youngest was a few months old.

William saw her coming and asked what was the matter. Her answer has been preserved: "I want to say a word." According to her own later account, she then told the people in the church that she had been disobedient for years. She had felt that God was calling her to speak, and she had not done it. That morning she did not want to go on like that any longer. She said later that she stood there, and God only knows how (my translation).

William did something nobody expected. He announced that his wife would preach that evening.

What followed was the beginning of thirty years of preaching. Catherine Booth would become one of the best-known speakers of

Victorian England. She preached to workingmen and to the rich in the fashionable districts of London. Together with William she built the movement that became the Salvation Army, and within that Army women were given a place in the pulpit that was rare in other churches at the time. She wrote books, she wrote to the queen, and she joined the fight against the trade in young girls.

But before that Sunday in Gateshead there was a girl with a curved spine, who had to lie down a great deal and read a great deal.

A girl on a footstool

Catherine Mumford was born on January 17, 1829, in Ashbourne, a market town in the county of Derbyshire in the middle of England. Her father, John Mumford, built carriages and preached now and then as a lay preacher. Her mother's name was Sarah Milward. It was a Methodist family.

Methodism had arisen in the eighteenth century around John Wesley, an Anglican clergyman who preached in the open air and had his followers meet in small groups. By Catherine's time it had become a church of its own, outside the Church of England, with a strong emphasis on conversion and a holy life. A woman in the pulpit was unusual there, and for many unacceptable.

In 1834 the family moved to Boston, in Lincolnshire. Catherine went to a girls' school there for a short time. Otherwise her mother taught her reading and arithmetic. By the age of five she could read. According to her son-in-law Frederick Booth-Tucker, who wrote a large biography after her death, as a little girl she was already reading aloud to her mother, sitting on a footstool. Before she was twelve she is said to have read the whole Bible through eight times. That story comes from the family.

She herself said later that she could not remember a time when she did not have a strong longing for God (my translation).

Her father took to drink, writes the historian Norman Murdoch. The family lived with that shadow. As a girl Catherine became secretary of a youth branch of the temperance movement, the Boston Juvenile Temperance Society, the movement that called on people to drink no alcohol at all. She also wrote articles for the magazines of that movement under a pen name. The subject would occupy her all her life.

Years in bed

In 1843 she was fourteen. A curvature of her spine was discovered, and that was the end of her schooldays. For months she had to lie down, in a kind of hammock meant to relieve her back, and she was in a great deal of pain. She read. The sermons and writings of John Wesley, the American revival preachers Charles Finney and James Caughey, the Bible commentator Adam Clarke.

From those books she took two things, writes Christine Parkin in the magazine Christian History. The assurance that she herself was saved. And the conviction that the Bible does not forbid women to proclaim the gospel.

In 1844 the family moved to Brixton, then a suburb of London. On June 15, 1846, Catherine told her mother that she was saved. She had read a well-known hymn, and the words were suddenly new to her. Later she wrote that she no longer hoped she was saved, she was sure of it (my translation). She felt so happy, she said, as if she were walking on air. After that she kept a diary, in 1847 and 1848, in which she wrestled with the question of what God wanted of her.

Have you ever had a time when you had to lie still, while everything in you wanted to move? For Catherine those became the years in which she learned to think.

Expelled

Around 1850 Methodism in England became divided. A group that wanted reforms, the Reformers, came into conflict with the leadership of the Wesleyan Methodists. Catherine refused to condemn the Reformers. In 1850 she was put out of her church. She began teaching a girls' class at a Sunday school of the Reformers in Clapham.

In that circle she met a young preacher who had been expelled for the same reason. His name was William Booth. They got to know each other at the home of Edward Rabbits, where William recited a poem against drink that evening. On May 15, 1852, they became engaged.

It was a long engagement of three years, and an engagement full of debate. In 1853 Catherine wrote a letter to a minister, the Reverend David Thomas, about the equality of women. William was more cautious. He would never forbid a woman to preach, he wrote to her, but he would not encourage her to start either.

She herself was not sure of her place in those years. In a letter to William from 1853 she wrote that she wanted to be useful, but quietly and in obscurity (my translation). She described herself as someone trimming between half service and perfect consecration (my translation). That sentence shows that she already felt God's leading, long before she gave in to it.

On June 16, 1855, they were married at Stockwell New Chapel in London. By then William was a minister in a smaller Methodist denomination, the Methodist New Connexion. Catherine herself had advised him to go there.

Eight children and a pen

In the years that followed she had a child almost every year. Bramwell in 1856, Ballington in 1857, Catherine in 1858, Emma early in 1860. Later came Herbert, Mary, Evangeline and Lucy. Eight children in twelve years. William was often ill, they moved from congregation to congregation, and money was tight.

She kept reading and writing. In 1854 an article of hers appeared in the magazine of the New Connexion, on the question of how to keep people who have just been converted. In 1857 she addressed a meeting of children on temperance. A small step, for children, outside the church service. She prepared while running a household. Years later she wrote that she had no time for preparation if she could not send the sewing out.

A minister in Sunderland

In 1859 a woman from America came to the north of England. Phoebe Palmer was an American Methodist speaker. Her meetings drew large crowds. In Sunderland, not far from Gateshead, a minister was annoyed by it. The Reverend Arthur Augustus Rees wrote a pamphlet arguing that a woman should keep silent in church.

Catherine read it and was angry. To her mother she wrote that the fellow would not get off without a thrashing (my translation). She sat down and wrote a reply. In December 1859 it appeared as a small booklet, Female Teaching, later reworked and published as Female Ministry; or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel. It cost a penny.

The booklet reads like a careful Bible study. She begins with the sentence that she does not need to defend Phoebe Palmer personally. Her concern is the question of a woman's right to teach. She starts with the prophet Joel, who says that God will pour out His Spirit

and that sons and daughters will prophesy, and with the apostle Peter, who says on the day of Pentecost that this promise has been fulfilled. Women will use that gift, she writes, in the same way as the sons. She discusses the texts her opponents relied on, the words of Paul that women should keep silent in the churches and that he does not permit a woman to teach. She reads them in their context and arrives at a different explanation: Paul does not forbid all speaking, but disorderly or domineering speaking. She points to Phoebe, whom Paul calls a servant of the church. According to her, the word actually means deacon, and translators softened it because a female deacon did not please them. She ends with Galatians, where it says that in Christ there is neither male nor female.

Her central question was whether a woman has been given that right by God. "If she has the right, she has it independently of any man-made restrictions," she wrote. She also argued that God does not treat woman as less: she is an independent and responsible person, and what passes for inferiority comes mostly from unequal education. And in another place she wrote that the Spirit always works in harmony with the Word of God, and that the two cannot contradict each other (my translation).

I tell this without turning it into a plea. Churches read these texts differently to this day, and so do readers of this book. What I find striking is that Catherine tried to draw her conviction from the Bible, text by text. And that she did not yet put her own booklet into practice. She defended another woman. She herself stayed silent.

Her biographer tells of a Sunday evening in Gateshead in that time. On the way to the chapel she felt urged not to walk on, but to talk with women in the houses along the road. She spoke with a woman who was bringing beer to her drunken husband, read the story of the prodigal son with the couple and prayed with them.

The thought, the biographer wrote, came to her with great force. It was not the pulpit. It was a kitchen table.

Whit Sunday in the Converting Shop

Bethesda Chapel in Gateshead was called the "Converting Shop" in those years. On the Sunday in question there were about a thousand people present, according to the accounts.

What went on inside her we know only from what she later told about it herself. She felt, she said, that the Holy Spirit was urging her to stand up and speak. She thought she could not do it. Then she remembered a promise she had made to God as a child: that she would obey Him, whatever it cost. She stood up.

The story of what followed is in every book about her. She walked to the front, said she wanted to say a word, and told the congregation that she had disobeyed God for years by not speaking for Him. According to the account, many people were moved and many promised to be more obedient from then on. William announced that she would preach in the evening.

That evening she spoke on a text from the letter to the Ephesians: *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18). Her sermon took as its title the last words of that verse.

How long have you been carrying something you know God is asking of you?

Nine weeks alone

A few months later, in September 1860, William broke down. He went to a spa in Matlock for nine weeks. Someone had to do his work. Catherine took over his preaching appointments and his pas-

toral work. According to the biography from Lutterworth Press, she preached in Gateshead and the surrounding area in full churches.

How the church responded is harder to follow in the sources I have read than you might expect. What is certain is that it was unusual, and that Rees and others were openly opposed to women preaching. What is also certain is that William changed his mind. He was the man who did not want to encourage a woman, and he became the man who sent his wife into the pulpit.

When someone objected that Paul said it is a shame for women to speak in the church, she answered, so the story goes, that this was not a church, that she was not a Corinthian, and that Paul also said it was good for the unmarried to remain unmarried.

On February 1, 1861, she experienced, as she wrote to her parents on February 11, a new step in holiness. I have not been able to read her own words about it, only a summary.

In 1861 the couple broke with the Methodist New Connexion and went their own way, with no denomination behind them. In 1861 and 1862 they held revival campaigns together in Cornwall and Wales. In November 1861, from St Ives in Cornwall, Catherine wrote the preface to a second, enlarged edition of her booklet.

The historian Norman Murdoch writes that by around 1864 her sermons were already more highly valued than William's. The article in Christian History says that many thought no man of her time, her husband included, surpassed her in popularity and spiritual fruit. That is their judgment, and it fits with what followed. She followed the methods of Charles Finney: a public invitation to come to God, ordinary believers who joined in prayer and testimony, house-to-house visiting, and preaching in theaters, music halls and on the street.

Two sides of London

In 1865 the family settled in London. In the East End, the poor eastern part of the city, William began a mission among people who never came to any church. Out of that grew the Christian Mission. Catherine faced a choice that, according to her biographer, she left to William. He told her he felt he had to stay. She answered that if he felt he must stay, he should stay: they had trusted the Lord once, and they could do so again (my translation). Later she wrote that she herself had doubts at that time about where his work was heading.

She took another part of the work. She preached in the West End, the wealthy western part of London, and in the seaside resorts of the south coast. In 1865 she also spoke at meetings of the Midnight Movement, a movement that reached out to women in prostitution. Between 1867 and 1873 she held long summer campaigns on the coast. In Southsea she stayed seventeen weeks.

Her listeners were often well off. Their gifts kept the family and the work in the East End going. Murdoch calls her the family's main breadwinner in those years. Her son Bramwell later compared her to a lawyer pleading for the life of a prisoner.

In 1872 William broke down again. Catherine then took over the leadership of the Mission for a time.

When I make the list, it makes my head spin. She preached, she wrote, she raised eight children, she led a movement and she did not have a strong body herself. She treated her ailments with cold water cures, and the Army later adopted that method as advice. Murdoch writes that she wore herself out. She often complained herself that she could not do what was expected of her. I can well believe it.

A flag in Coventry

In 1878 the Christian Mission was given a new name: The Salvation Army. Uniforms, ranks and flags followed. On September 28, 1878, in Coventry, Catherine presented the first flag of the Army.

She herself received no rank. She remained "Mrs. Booth", and the soldiers called her the Mother of the Army. Her influence lay elsewhere. In the Orders and Regulations that William wrote, the Army's rulebook, women were expressly given an equal share in preaching. The Army itself credits that to her influence.

After a short training of three to six months in evangelism, administration and reading, the Army sent young women from the working class, often teenagers from small towns, out as evangelists. They were called the Hallelujah Lasses. Josephine Butler spoke of them as "surplus womanhood" (my translation). According to Murdoch, by around 1890 such women had helped the Army spread across the world.

In these years Catherine wrote a series of books, worked-out addresses on what she called living Christianity: Practical Religion, Aggressive Christianity, Godliness, Life and Death, Popular Christianity. From 1883 on, baptism and the Lord's Supper were no longer celebrated in the halls of the Army. On that point the Army differs from most other churches to this day.

What the gospel does, in her eyes, she summed up in a sentence that holds the secret of her preaching: "What the law tried to do by a restraining power from without, the gospel does by an inspiring power from within."

A letter to Balmoral

On February 6, 1884, Catherine spoke at Exeter Hall in London, a large hall for Christian meetings, about what she called the iniquity of state-regulated vice. Her address appeared as a booklet. Josephine Butler had drawn her into the fight against the Contagious Diseases Acts, laws that put prostitution under state supervision.

In the England of 1885 the age at which a girl could legally consent to sex was thirteen. There was a bill before parliament to protect girls better.

Catherine wrote to Queen Victoria. The answer came on June 6 from Balmoral Castle, through the Dowager Duchess of Roxburghe. The queen was fully sympathetic on the painful subject (my translation), and her letter would be forwarded to a lady closely connected with the government. A New Zealand newspaper printed the answer that fall. In the Army's archives in London her letters and the queen's replies are kept to this day.

Sympathy was not enough. In July 1885 the journalist William Thomas Stead published a series of articles in the Pall Mall Gazette under the headline "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon". With the help of Catherine's son Bramwell and a former brothel keeper, Rebecca Jarrett, he had shown how easy it was to buy a girl of thirteen in London. The girl, Eliza Armstrong, was then taken to safety with the Army. On July 16 the Army held a large meeting at Exeter Hall on the protection of girls. According to an archive article from the Army itself, 393,000 people signed a petition to parliament.

On August 14, 1885, the law was passed. The age went from thirteen to sixteen. In the trial that followed in October over the purchase of

Eliza, Stead was sentenced to three months in prison. Bramwell was acquitted.

What part Catherine played in the campaign varies by source. Some articles give her a leading role, others mention mainly her son and her daughter-in-law Florence. The letter to the queen is hers, and that is certain. She also pleaded for better conditions and pay for women in the sweatshops of London, especially in the match industry.

Do not confuse it

On February 21, 1888, the surgeon Sir James Paget made the diagnosis: breast cancer. She was fifty-nine.

On June 21, 1888, she preached for the last time, at the City Temple in London. In 1889 she withdrew to Clacton-on-Sea, on the coast of Essex.

In those last years William was working on a large social plan, published in 1890 under the title In Darkest England and the Way Out. It was a plan for the poor of England. Catherine supported it. But she also gave a warning. Praise humanitarianism as much as you like, she said, but do not confuse it with Christianity (my translation).

On October 4, 1890, she died in Clacton-on-Sea, sixty-one years old. During her last illness she is said to have said: "The waters are rising, but so am I. I am not going under, but over." The saying comes from tradition, not from an account of the deathbed.

Her body was taken to the Army's Congress Hall in Clapton, in the east of London. According to Murdoch, about twenty-seven thousand people filed past. The funeral service was held at Olympia, a large exhibition hall, and she was buried at Abney Park Cemetery in

Stoke Newington. How many people attended the service varies by source. One of the timelines speaks of thirty-six thousand. Those figures come from circles around the Army, and I pass them on with that caveat.

Seven of her eight children became leaders in the Army, writes Murdoch. Two of them, Bramwell and Evangeline, later became General, the highest leader of the worldwide Army. The Church of England remembers her on August 20. William regarded her as his closest companion, and her death was a heavy blow to him.

Saying a word

I come back to Bethesda Chapel. A woman of thirty-one with a baby at home, a husband in the pulpit, a full church. She had written a booklet explaining why women were allowed to speak. She had defended it against a minister in Sunderland. And she had never preached herself.

What set her in motion that morning was, in her own words, not theology. It was a promise she had made as a child, that she would obey God. She stood up, walked down the aisle and said she wanted to say a word.

That evening she stood there again.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on January 17, 1829, in Ashbourne; Methodist family; moves to Boston and later Brixton; spinal condition around 1843; expulsion by the Wesleyan Methodists in 1850; marriage to William Booth on June 16, 1855; eight children; the pamphlet of 1859 in reply to the Reverend A. A. Rees about Phoebe Palmer; her first preaching at Bethesda Chapel, Gateshead, in 1860; departure from the Methodist New Connexion

in 1861; preaching in the West End and on the south coast; the first flag in Coventry in 1878; the address at Exeter Hall in 1884; the letter to Queen Victoria and the reply of June 1885; the law of August 14, 1885; the cancer diagnosis in 1888; the last sermon on June 21, 1888; death on October 4, 1890, in Clacton-on-Sea.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: reading the Bible through eight times before she was twelve (family biography by Booth-Tucker); her inner struggle in Gateshead, the urging of the Spirit and the childhood promise to obey God (her own later account, "I stood, God only knows how"); her conversion of June 15, 1846 and her words about it; her letter to William from 1853 about being useful in quietness and "trimming between half service and perfect consecration"; the Sunday evening in Gateshead with the woman who carried beer (her biographer); the response of the congregation in Gateshead; her letter to her parents about February 1, 1861; the words with which she left William the choice to stay in London; the remark about the Corinthians; the words about the rising waters.

Unconfirmed: the exact date of Gateshead; the extent of her personal role in the campaign of July 1885; the number of signatures on the petition (393,000, from a source of the Army itself); the numbers at her funeral; the moment at which she spoke the words about the rising waters.

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

- *Date of Gateshead.* Whit Sunday, May 27, 1860 according to most biographers, Booth-Tucker in the lead; January 1860, shortly after the birth of Emma, according to the Christian History Institute, Wikipedia and an article in the War Cry. I follow Pentecost.

- *Year of her conversion.* June 15, 1846 according to the biography from Lutterworth Press, about 1845 according to a timeline, between 1844 and 1847 according to Booth-Tucker. I follow 1846.
- *Day of the funeral service.* October 13 (Lutterworth Press) or another day; the burial at Abney Park on October 11 according to the Victorian Web.
- *Books.* The dates of her books differ by a few years between sources.
- *Age.* At Pentecost 1860 she was thirty-one; older versions of this chapter and some sources say thirty.

Interpretation: the texts about women in the church are explained differently in different churches. This chapter describes how Catherine Booth read them, without passing judgment on them.

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Maria Woodworth-Etter: the woman with the raised hands

In the summer of 1890 a doctor from Philadelphia sat among the crowd in a large tent in St. Louis. His name was Theodore Diller, and he had come to watch, not to pray. The tent held three to four thousand people. On one evening he estimated that five thousand were inside.

He wrote down what he saw for a medical journal. A woman in her forties preached. Then the people were told to fix their eyes on the electric lamps and the ropes of the tent, and to raise their hands. Many fell to the ground. Some lay there with their eyes wide open and their arms stiff, while a song was sung over and over again. There were more women than men, and almost every evening there were children too.

Diller called it hypnosis. About the woman herself he was harsh. In his view she was not a fraud, he wrote in September 1890, but rather a paranoid person of a strongly religious type (my translation). Together with a colleague he asked the court to examine her mental health.

The woman's name was Maria Woodworth. Later, after a second marriage, it became Woodworth-Etter. Newspapers called her the trance evangelist. She preached for more than forty years, in tents, opera houses, roller skating rinks and churches of every kind. When the Pentecostal movement arose in the twentieth century, many young Pentecostals saw in her someone who had already seen what they were only now discovering. In Indianapolis there is still a church that she founded.

I tell her life the way she told it herself. Where the newspapers of the day saw something different, I say so.

It began on a farm in Ohio.

A father who did not come home

Mariah Beulah Underwood was born on July 22, 1844, in New Lisbon, in Columbiana County in the east of the American state of Ohio. The little town is now called Lisbon. She was a daughter of Samuel and Matilda Underwood. The family had eight children and was poor. Her father drank.

Around 1855 he died of sunstroke. Maria was about eleven. Her mother was left behind with eight children. The oldest girls had to go out to work to help the family, and for Maria that was the end of school.

The America of her childhood was a land of small villages, farms and many churches side by side. There was no state church. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers and newer groups each drew their own people. The country stood on the eve of the Civil War. Women could not vote and could not preach in most churches. Among the Quakers it was different: there a woman too could stand up and speak if she felt led by God.

"A light came over me"

The Underwood family belonged to the Disciples of Christ, a movement that wanted to bring the church back to the New Testament and had little time for emotional outbursts. When Maria was about thirteen, she was baptized there. In her own book she describes how at that baptism a light came over her and she was converted. Bystanders thought she had fainted.

Shortly afterward she heard the voice of Jesus. In her own words, she heard Him call her to go out into the highways and hedges and bring in the lost sheep. She thought of the parable of the great supper, in which the master tells his servant: *Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'* (Luke 14:23)

A girl of thirteen who wants to preach, in a church that would have none of it. She wrote it down later without beating about the bush: the Disciples did not believe that women had any right to work for Jesus (my translation). She thought that if she had been a man, she would gladly have preached. As it was, it remained a longing. She also dreaded it. A woman who spoke in public, she felt, would expose herself to mockery and contempt. She was shy, she had hardly any schooling, and she knew it.

We know of this calling only from her own books, which she wrote when she had long been well known. I believe her, and I assume that she experienced it exactly this way.

Six children

In 1863 she married Philo Woodworth, a man who had been discharged from the Union army. The Civil War was still raging. According to a later source he had suffered a head injury. They went to live near Lisbon and tried to farm. One biographer describes him

as a man of extremes in his faith: one moment on the mountaintop, the next in the valley.

They had six children. Five of them died young. In her book Maria names them. Georgie lived to seven and died after months of illness. Gertie lived four months. Willie lived to almost seven. Freddy died within a year of the first loss. A little son also died when he was small. Only Lizzie survived.

I cannot read that list without stopping for a moment. Maria writes about it soberly, without complaining against God, but also without pretending that it was light.

She was often ill herself in those years. The family moved and came to live among Quakers. According to her own account they took her along to their meetings, and there the old longing returned. Around 1879 she made a new choice for Christ, at a Quaker revival meeting.

During the long period of illness she had visions, she tells us. She saw the abyss lying open and people about to fall into it. She saw children in heaven, and she saw lost people suffering. She also dreamed that angels carried her over a landscape, to fields of grain. Where she preached, the grain fell in sheaves. That, she understood, was how it would go if she did the work: she would bring in souls the way a reaper brings in grain. In her visions the message was always the same.

Then there was the vision in which Jesus spoke to her. Go, He said, and I will be with you. She answered: Lord, I will go. He told her to go to every place where souls were being lost. She promised God that she would work if He made her well. She also prayed for the power of the apostles, the baptism with the Holy Spirit. What happened next she described later like this: it felt like liquid fire, and around her were angels (my translation). By her own account she began to recover from that moment, and she recovered quickly.

She was afraid. She describes herself as shy, bound by the fear of man. At home she received no support. Her husband and her daughter opposed it, and friends and family did not like it either. Later Philo changed his mind and wanted to go with her.

She looked for support in the Bible itself. Maria wrote that Miriam, Deborah, Hannah and Phoebe had been used by God too. The prophet Joel said about the last days: *And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy* (Joel 2:28). And in Acts the four daughters of Philip were mentioned, who prophesied. She read it as a commission for the whole church.

In 1880, after the death of her fifth child, she chose the work. She was thirty-five. She preached her first sermon in a place where she had lived before, on the call to set your house in order. Her first listeners were people who knew her shortcomings. She found that hard, and she also found strength in it. Another biography tells that in those early years she spoke briefly at a Quaker meeting, and that in the years before she left for the West she preached more than two hundred sermons in eight denominations. The Quakers, the United Brethren, the Bible Christians and the Methodists each offered her a place. She chose to travel. By her own count twenty people came to conversion.

How long have you waited to do something you knew God was asking of you? For Maria, more than twenty years lay between the voice at thirteen and the first sermon.

A license, and people who fell

No major church wanted a woman as a minister. Maria found her place with smaller churches. First she received a license to preach from the United Brethren in Christ, a church that had grown out

of German-speaking revival in Pennsylvania. In 1884 she received a license from the Churches of God in Indiana. That church was also called the Winebrennerian church, after its founder John Winebrenner, and it was open to revival meetings and to the holiness movement. That movement taught that after conversion a Christian could receive a second, deep cleansing of the heart.

She traveled through Ohio and Indiana and preached in little schoolhouses, chapels and churches of anyone who invited her. Churches asked her to become their pastor. She refused and kept traveling. She kept well away from quarrels over doctrine. Even in her own church she had opponents. Elder E. L. Frazier called her meetings a reproach and a disgrace to the religion of God (my translation).

In 1883, in Fairview, Ohio, something happened that startled even her. The congregation had surrendered to God and prayed for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Maria wrote that she felt God was going to restore love and unity in that church. Fifteen people came forward, crying out for mercy. Men and women fell down and lay there, by her account, as if they were dead. She noted honestly that she was a little afraid (my translation). After about two hours they stood up with shining faces and told of visions of heaven and hell. The ministers and the older believers wept and praised God.

In November of that year, in a Methodist church in Monroeville, Indiana, she herself fell several times under what she called "the power."

This became the mark of her meetings. People went into trances, sometimes for hours. She herself sometimes stood still on the platform with her hands raised, while the service went on around her. Opponents later spoke of hypnosis, or called her a voodoo priestess. She saw it as the work of the Holy Spirit. In her sermons she left no

doubt about what she expected. The wonders of the Day of Pentecost were, in her view, only a foretaste of what God had intended for every age. Believers should look ahead to a new Pentecost and not stay stuck in the old one. A revival would come, she said, that would shake the world. The absence of such signs she saw as a sign of the church's decline.

In January 1885 she came to Hartford City, Indiana. She began in the Methodist church and moved to the opera house. By her own account a merchant went into a trance at home and could not speak for hours. A well-known lawyer from the town also knelt at the altar. According to a survey of her campaigns, a boy also came out of a trance and began to preach with remarkable wisdom and power. The survey mentions about five hundred conversions and less crime in the town. The newspapers wrote about it in any case: The New York Times and The Cincinnati Enquirer mentioned the meetings.

In March 1885, in Columbia City, she began to pray for the sick. She believed that whoever came with faith could be healed. After that the doors opened wide. In Tipton, Pendleton and Kokomo she preached in churches, a courthouse and a roller skating rink. In Kokomo, by her own account, twenty thousand people came.

In Alexandria, Indiana, she described how the power of God fell on about five hundred people. Many fell down, some stretched their hands to heaven, and others cried out, spoke or wept aloud. In Anderson she held a revival of three weeks, in which, according to a survey, twenty to fifty people came to faith every day. In 1886 and 1887 she preached in Indianapolis, in the Meridian Skating Rink.

On the bank of Wildcat Creek near Kokomo she had people baptized. According to a survey about twelve thousand people watched as eighty-two people went into the water, and a few weeks later an-

other sixty-two followed. Out of all those converts a new congregation of three hundred and twenty members arose in Kokomo.

What the newspapers saw

The newspapers saw something else than she did. Some cities forbade children to attend her meetings. One reporter compared a meeting to the women's ward of an insane asylum. Journalists wrote with disgust about her husband, who sold ice cream and photographs at the meetings. One paper reported that men and women shouted and fell into trances while he sold ice cream to those standing around.

Maria herself wrote about the same meetings that God was at work. The newspapers and the doctors saw what outsiders see. You need both to understand her.

Large tent campaigns in the West also date from those years. Around 1889 and 1890 she stood in Oakland, California, with a tent that, according to later sources, held eight thousand people. She wrote about those gatherings that the Holy Spirit fell on the people while she preached. People fell, she wrote, all over the tent, like trees in a storm (my translation). It became deathly still, as if death had come among them. Well-to-do men sank back in their chairs with their hands raised.

In Oakland things went wrong. In 1890 it was predicted in her circle that San Francisco and the bay would be destroyed by an earthquake and a tidal wave. The newspapers wrote about it mockingly. The disaster did not come.

The judge in St. Louis

Then came St. Louis, in the summer of 1890, with the tent and the doctor who took notes. Theodore Diller and his colleague Welling-

ton Adams asked the probate court in September to have her mental state examined. Diller gave four reasons: her visions, her conviction that they were real, her belief that God gave her instructions directly, and what he called her conceit.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Globe-Democrat and the Republic followed it closely. Judge Gabriel Woerner saw no ground for declaring her insane. If she caused a public nuisance, he said, another court would have to judge that. Adams let it rest and said he would ask the legislature to ban public hypnosis.

When you read Diller's four reasons today, you see how thin the line was. A woman who said that God spoke to her could end up before a judge in 1890. Whether it would have come to that as quickly for a man, I do not know. What I do know is that all her life she ran up against churches that gave a woman no place in the pulpit.

At home things went wrong in those years. In 1890 Philo accused her publicly in an open letter. According to the historian of her church, the Church of God in southern Indiana then expelled him from the congregation. In 1891 Maria divorced him, on grounds of adultery. The newspapers wrote about it, and there were people who spoke up for her. Philo died soon afterward, according to one source in 1892.

A divorce was a great risk for a woman evangelist in those days. She went on anyway. In 1902 she married Samuel Etter, a believing man who traveled with her and helped her in the work. From then on she called herself Woodworth-Etter. Samuel died in 1914.

In those years she also acquired a rival in the healing ministry, John Alexander Dowie. According to one biography he canceled his own meetings in order to thwart hers. Maria predicted that he would end in disgrace. Dowie died in 1907 in Zion, near Chicago.

Her bond with the Winebrennerian church ended in 1904. She had to hand in her license. According to the historian Wayne Warner the church found her attitude uncooperative. She was about sixty then.

Sixty, sixty-eight, and a new movement

In 1906 the revival began on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, the beginning of the Pentecostal movement as it then spread across the world. Pentecostals taught that the baptism in the Holy Spirit goes together with speaking in tongues, a language the speaker has not learned.

At first Maria looked at it with suspicion. She had trouble with what she saw as exaggerated teaching. In turn, the Pentecostals were not immediately warm toward her. According to the historian Grant Wacker this was also connected with the fact that in those early years they did not want to ordain women. In her own meetings people did speak in tongues after 1904. Later she accepted the movement as a true work of the Holy Spirit and became an example and adviser for younger preachers. She could wait, she had done that more than once.

In July 1912 pastor F. F. Bosworth invited her to his church in Dallas, Texas. She was sixty-eight. She stayed until December. The newspapers in Dallas paid hardly any attention to it, but Bosworth wrote letters to Christian magazines, and Pentecostal magazines as far away as England reported on the meetings. The magazine Triumphs of Faith devoted a report to it in November 1912.

From Dallas on she belonged to the Pentecostal movement. A survey calls 1912 the beginning of a new wave in her work, which lasted until her death. She preached until the end. In April 1914 more than three hundred men and women gathered in the opera house of

Hot Springs, Arkansas. There the Assemblies of God were founded. Maria never formally became a member. She did, together with the preachers Julia Ross and W. J. Wathall, hold revival meetings in the region around Russellville before the founding. And the weekly paper of the new church, the Pentecostal Evangel, reported on her campaigns.

In October 1916 she began in Salt Lake City, in a rented hall with more than eleven hundred seats, where boxing matches were also held at other times. Her coworker August Feick was there. The Pentecostal Evangel wrote about the campaign on October 7 and 14 and November 4. The director of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Darrin Rodgers, writes that this campaign laid the foundation for the fifteen congregations the Assemblies of God now have there.

The police chief in the meeting

In the summer of 1913 she held meetings at Montwait, a Methodist camp ground in Framingham, Massachusetts, not far from Boston. On August 18 or 19, during a meeting, the police chief stood up from the audience, walked to the front and arrested her. Two coworkers, Earl W. Clark and Cyrus B. Fockler, were taken along as well. The Boston Daily Globe put the arrest on the front page.

What was the charge? She was said to have promised people healing and then taken up collections: obtaining money under false pretenses.

In the courtroom a blind man testified that he had not been healed. More than twelve others testified that they had been healed. The Boston Herald reported this on August 28, 1913, under a headline about the lame and the crippled who told of miracles. Two of those witnesses are known by name: Jessie Van Husen and Mrs. Frederick A. Peck. In the reports of the hearing the name of Judge Kingsbury

appears. Maria, sixty-nine, made a statement herself. According to The Topeka Daily Capital of August 29, a judge named MacFarland ruled that minors were no longer allowed to take part in the meetings.

There was open testimony, for and against, about what God, according to the witnesses, had done. I read those testimonies with respect: people stood before a judge to say that they were healed, while a blind man beside them said that he was not. Both stood their ground. After that Maria could go on. In 1914 a meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, was disrupted by rioters. It never became entirely quiet.

A tabernacle on Miller Street

In 1918 she built a church building of her own in Indianapolis, the Woodworth-Etter Tabernacle, at 2114 West Miller Street. She was seventy-four. According to a biography it stood there within two months. It became her permanent home base. According to later sources people of different skin colors came from the beginning, something that was not a matter of course in that city. In October 1918 she held revival meetings there together with the young evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson.

In the years that followed there were campaigns there around Christmas, at Easter and in the summer. She wrote books: *Signs and Wonders* in 1916, *Holy Ghost Sermons* in 1918 and *Marvels and Miracles* in 1922, besides an earlier life story from 1894, *Life, Work and Experience*, which also became known under the title *Acts of the Holy Ghost*. According to Wacker they were sold tens of thousands of times in all and translated into about six languages. Stanley Smith, one of the Cambridge Seven who went to China and later worked with the China Inland Mission, wrote that he valued her

life story next to the Bible (my translation). Her healing ministry he called unequaled in the history of the church.

She grew old and ill. Stomach trouble and dropsy were added. According to later accounts, in her last years she was carried in a chair to the pulpit, preached with power and was carried home again afterward.

In 1924 her daughter Lizzie died after a traffic accident in Indianapolis. Of the six children, not one was left now.

Soon afterward, on September 16, 1924, Maria Woodworth-Etter died, eighty years old. She was buried in Memorial Park Cemetery in Indianapolis, next to her daughter and son-in-law. According to a biography her gravestone carries a line about lovingkindness that is shown to thousands. Her tabernacle remained and is now called Lakeview Church.

After her death she became a forerunner for many Pentecostals, sometimes called the mother of the Pentecostal movement. In popular books her life became a chain of miracles. That she was a forerunner of the Pentecostal movement is beyond doubt for Wacker.

A girl at the baptismal water

You may think what you like about her trances. Diller saw hypnosis. Judge Woerner saw no madness. She herself saw the Spirit. In the preface to her life story she wrote that it is useless to fight against God (my translation).

Go back to the beginning. A poor girl of thirteen in Ohio, just having lost her father, stands in a church that silences women. She is baptized, and by her own words a light comes over her. She hears

a voice that sends her out on the roads. She waits. She buries five children. Then, at thirty-five, she stands up and begins to speak.

More than forty years later an old woman is carried in a chair to the pulpit of her own church in Indianapolis. There she preaches one more time, and afterward they take her home.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on July 22, 1844 in New Lisbon (Lisbon), Ohio; early death of her father and poverty; marriage to Philo Woodworth in 1863; five of her six children dying young; the start of her preaching work around 1880; licenses from the United Brethren and (1884) the Churches of God (Winebrenner), withdrawn in 1904; trances and prayer for the sick from 1883-1885 in Indiana, with national newspaper attention; the campaign in St. Louis in 1890, the report by Theodore Diller and Judge Woerner's refusal to declare her insane; divorce in 1891; marriage to Samuel Etter in 1902; Dallas, July to December 1912, at the invitation of F. F. Bosworth; arrest at Montwait in Framingham in August 1913 on suspicion of obtaining money under false pretenses, with witnesses for and against in the courtroom (Boston Herald, August 28, 1913) and a ban on minors (Topeka Daily Capital, August 29, 1913); her campaigns in Pentecostal circles, also reported in the Pentecostal Evangel of the Assemblies of God (Salt Lake City, 1916); revival meetings in Arkansas before the founding of the Assemblies of God (Encyclopedia of Arkansas); the tabernacle in Indianapolis (1918); death on September 16, 1924.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the light at her baptism and the calling voice at thirteen; the dreams of the grain, the vision with the words "Go, and I will be with you" and the baptism with "liquid fire"; the visions during her illness and her promise to God; the names and circumstances of death of the children; the first

sermon and the twenty converts; the events in Fairview and Monroeville (one biography gives Fairview 1883 with fifteen people at the altar); the merchant and the lawyer in Hartford City; the twenty thousand people in Kokomo; the scenes in Oakland; that at the end she was carried to the pulpit. The illness of her last years (stomach trouble and dropsy) and the line on her gravestone come from one biographical sketch, the statement of Stanley Smith from a survey on Revival Library.

Unconfirmed:

- *San Francisco.* That about a thousand people fled the city after the prediction of 1890 appears only in later sources. A newspaper scan does show the prediction itself. The earthquake of April 1906, sixteen years later, was later seen by admirers as a fulfillment. That remains an interpretation after the fact. Wayne Warner counts incorrect prophecies among the weak sides of her ministry.
- *Numbers.* The twenty thousand in Kokomo come from her own book. The historian Wayne Warner did research in the newspapers of the day in the 1980s. For twenty-five years he led the archive of the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal church in the United States (the archive is now called the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center), he was well disposed toward her and wrote two books about her: *The Woman Evangelist* (1986) and *Maria Woodworth-Etter: For Such a Time as This* (2004). He died in 2024. He concluded that she systematically overstated her results, Grant Wacker wrote in his review. The figures of Wildcat Creek (twelve thousand onlookers, eighty-two and sixty-two baptized, three hundred and twenty members) come from a survey without a newspaper source. The five hundred conversions in Hartford City likewise come from a survey.

- *Oakland.* The tent with eight thousand seats comes from later sources.
- *Framingham.* The day of the arrest (August 18 or 19); a local account that the charge was practicing medicine without a license; the acquittal, which appears only in later sources (the newspaper reports to which I found references end before the verdict); the number of witnesses (more than twelve or about thirty-five, in a trial of four days). Warner devoted a whole chapter to it in 1986, "Maria's day in court," but I could not consult that book.
- *Assemblies of God.* Her role in the founding at Hot Springs in 1914. I have found no source from that time that places her there.
- *First sermon.* Another biography mentions an invitation from the United Brethren in 1876, a third a brief address at a Quaker meeting. I follow her own account.
- *Smaller points.* The year of Philo's death; the cause of her father's death (sunstroke or lightning); whether Lizzie was hit by a streetcar or a bus; that according to one source she married at sixteen; that she held her own disobedience responsible for the death of the children (only in one biographical sketch); her quarrel with the healer John Alexander Dowie, who according to one biography canceled his own meetings to thwart hers (she predicted that he would "fall in disgrace"; he died in 1907).
- *Her books.* Warner pointed out that in her books she took over passages from others without saying so.

Interpretation: whether the trances were the work of God, hypnosis or something else, sources cannot decide. Wacker wrote as early as 1987 that her story had long been hidden under hagiographic tradition, stories that mainly wanted to admire, and that only

Warner's newspaper research showed what had actually happened. He doubted whether she had really broken the male grip on the American pulpit. I believe with her that God called a poor girl from Ohio. Her books sometimes exaggerate, her prophecy about San Francisco did not come true, and the newspapers were not always fair. All of that stands side by side.

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Mary Slessor: the factory girl who went up the river

In 1888 a canoe made its way up the Calabar River. It was a hollowed-out tree trunk, about twenty feet long, lent by King Eyo VII of Creek Town. In it sat a small Scottish woman of thirty-nine. She was going to Okoyong, an inland region where missionaries had never been welcome.

At the landing place another walk of about four miles through the forest was waiting. It was raining. When she reached the village of Ekenge, it was almost empty. The mother of a chief had died that morning and most of the people had gone to the mourning ceremony. She walked her feet so sore that for six weeks she could not wear shoes. So it stands in an early biography, which draws on her own letters.

That woman was Mary Slessor. She would live in Okoyong for fifteen years. She took in children who would otherwise have been killed, she spoke the language so well that Africans said she had an Efik mouth, and she became the first judge the British appointed there. In Calabar today there is a statue of her with two babies in her arms. In Scotland she appeared on a ten-pound banknote.

Stories grow around a person like that. I tell them the way her first biographer recorded them, and I say where the story became bigger than the woman. For the woman herself is great enough.

She began in a jute factory in Dundee.

A shoemaker who drank

Mary Mitchell Slessor was born on December 2, 1848, in Gilcomston, a district of Aberdeen in northeastern Scotland. She was the second of seven children. Her father, Robert Slessor, was a shoemaker. He drank, and he lost his work. Her mother, also named Mary, was a devout Presbyterian woman. Presbyterians are Protestants in the line of Calvin, with churches governed by elders.

From her mother Mary had her soft voice and her loving heart, writes her first biographer, W.P. Livingstone. Her mother read the Missionary Record, the mission magazine of their church, and talked at home about Calabar. As a child Mary played that she was keeping school for black pupils who were not there. Two sayings of her mother stayed with her: be thankful to God for what you receive, and about duty, if one duty crowds out another, it was not a duty (my translation).

In 1859 the family moved to Dundee, an industrial city on the east coast where jute was spun and woven. Her father became an unskilled laborer in a factory there. Mary was eleven. She went to work at Baxter Brothers as a half-timer: half a day in the factory, half a day at the school the factory itself ran. By about fourteen she was a skilled jute worker with days from six in the morning until six in the evening.

Livingstone describes long Saturday evenings when mother and daughter waited for the father to come home, and how Mary ran through silent streets to the pawnshop with bundles from her

mother, to make ends meet. Her father and both her brothers died. What remained was a household of women: Mary, her mother and two sisters.

She read on the way to the factory and back. Later she even read her Bible at the loom, a later writer told. Livingstone adds that sometimes she kept reading a book by Carlyle until the factory bell rang, and then stood up and went to work.

Do you see that fire?

Of her conversion we know one story, and it comes from Livingstone's book. An old widow in the neighborhood pointed out the fire in the hearth to a group of girls and asked (my translation) whether they saw that fire. She warned them about the eternal fire. Mary was frightened, so it says, and as a child she made peace with God. She was converted and believed.

It is a hard story, from a time when people preached about hell differently than now. Mary herself made something gentle of it. She became a serious Bible reader and was convinced that she had to serve God. To a girl in Dundee she later gave a Bible with the words that this book had changed her own self (my translation).

She began teaching at a mission station in Queen Street, opposite Quarry Pend, and later in a room under the Wishart Church. In Dundee that church was known as "Heaven and Hell": the church hall was on the first floor, and on the ground floor there was a pub. She had a Sunday school class and a youth club. Livingstone tells that a gang wanted to drive her away from there. Their leader swung a lead weight close to her head. She did not move. She has pluck, boys, he said. After that the boys came inside.

Another boy stood at the door with a whip and refused to enter the hall. Mary offered to take his lashes on her own back. He threw the

whip down, followed her inside and gave himself to Christ that day, so Livingstone tells.

She walked early in the morning through dark passages between the houses to wake boys for the Sunday meeting. She sat by the fires of the women she visited, as one of them. On the street, in South Gray's Close, she asked a group of women what they wanted to do with Jesus, and then let them decide for themselves.

Quiet meditation did not always come easily to her. She told a friend that her thoughts went in all directions. He answered: get to work, for that is what God means for us. So she did.

A letter from Africa

Her mother read the Missionary Record, the mission magazine of their church. That church was the United Presbyterian Church, one of the Presbyterian churches of Scotland. It had missionaries in Calabar, in the southeast of present-day Nigeria.

When in 1874 it became known in Scotland that the explorer and missionary David Livingstone had died in Africa, Mary decided that she wanted to go. She was twenty-five. In May 1875 she offered herself to the mission committee of her church. She received a short training in Edinburgh and a salary of sixty pounds a year.

How old were you when you first heard something from God that turned your whole life upside down? Mary had fifteen years of factory work behind her. She had no further education. She was small and often ill. She went anyway.

On August 5, 1876, she left Liverpool on the steamship Ethiopia. On the quay she saw casks of strong drink being loaded onto the ship, dozens of casks. And only one missionary, she exclaimed (my translation). At sea she longed for Sunday. No service was held on

board, and she wrote that her heart and body cried out for the courts of God's house. On September 11 the ship entered the estuary of Calabar.

Calabar was not a colony in those days. It was a group of trading towns on the river: Duke Town, Creek Town and Old Town. The inhabitants were Efik, a people of traders. The slave trade and the trade with Europeans had thrown the region into disarray. From Lagos, which the British took possession of in 1861, that power slowly expanded. Only in 1891 did the area officially become a British protectorate. Europeans called the coast the white man's grave, because of malaria and other fevers.

Mary first lived for three years in the mission compound in Duke Town. She learned Efik, and she learned it well. Livingstone tells how she rang the morning bell, once she overslept, another time she rang it by moonlight. Mrs. Anderson, called "Mammy" by the missionaries, corrected her. Her husband, "Daddy" Anderson, secretly smuggled cookies to her.

She gave her first address under a tree next to a spirit house. She could hardly get a word out. Then she began to talk about healing and asked whether they wanted to get well (my translation). In the villages she came to a mother who sat under a blue cloth over the grave of her child. Another woman said that God does not answer. In a poor quarter someone asked her why white men sold rum if it was bad. One day she admitted that she wanted to go home, to her mother. It was fever and exhaustion that made her say it.

In June 1879 she had to go home with malaria. In October 1880 she came back and was put in charge of the work in Old Town. She lived there simply, in the kind of house in which the people around her lived too.

She wanted to go further into the interior. An older missionary, whom everyone called "Daddy" Anderson, was against it.

Twins in the bush

In large parts of the region around Calabar the birth of twins was considered a curse. According to the belief, one of the two children had been fathered by an evil spirit, and nobody knew which. The babies were killed or left in the bush. The mother was cast out.

Missionaries took such children into the mission house. Mary did that too, and she kept doing it until her death. Livingstone tells how a Scottish trader, Owen, came to her one day with a baby. He had found her, he said, somewhere in the bush. It was a twin girl. Her little brother was taken away by family under false pretenses and killed. The girl stayed alive. Mary named her Janie, after her youngest sister.

A man was afraid of his twin daughter. What can a little girl do to you, she said, and pulled him along to the child, with a "hoots" (my translation). When the ruling against the killing of twins was announced, the mothers of twins cheered: "Sosoño! Sosoño!", thank you, thank you.

In 1883 Mary fell ill again. She took the baby along to Scotland, and in the Sunday school of the Wishart Church Janie was baptized. That girl stayed with her all her life.

Those years in Scotland became hard. Her mother and her sister Janie were ill. At the beginning of 1885 Mary proposed taking her sister along to Creek Town and living there with her in a mud house. The committee refused. On the advice of an acquaintance from Exeter the family moved to Topsham in Devon. Soon afterward her sister Susan died.

At the end of 1885 Mary returned to Calabar, now to Creek Town. Around the turn of the year her mother died. Three months later her sister Janie died too. She wrote (my translation) that heaven was now nearer to her than Britain.

There was no one left at home. I think this loss made her freer to go where others did not want to go. I say that carefully, for she herself did not put it that way. In 1886 she did receive permission to prepare for Okoyong.

The king's canoe

The Okoyong lived in the forest region upstream. In Calabar they were known as dangerous, and earlier visits by missionaries had been badly received. According to Livingstone they said at a first conversation (my translation) that they did not want a missionary, man or woman.

Mary kept negotiating. She went back and forth a few times. In June 1888 King Eyo VII lent her his canoe, and in August she settled in Ekenge. There lived chief Edem, who gave her land for a house and a school. His sister Eme Ete, also called Ma Eme in the sources, became her friend. Livingstone calls her a motherly heathen soul. Ma Eme never became a Christian. But she repeatedly helped Mary to save women and slaves who were about to be killed.

It is good to stop at that friendship. In the old stories the woman missionary stands alone against the darkness. In reality she had allies among the people themselves, and without them she would have gotten nowhere.

There was not yet a cup in the house. Mary drank her tea from the saucer. Whoever uses what he has, Livingstone says she said, never goes short.

In Okoyong she experienced things that are described at length in the mission books. At the death of an important man, slaves and women were killed to follow him. People suspected of witchcraft had to undergo an ordeal with poison or boiling oil. Mary went to the discussions and protested.

Livingstone describes how she sat down in the courtyard of the chiefs while prisoners waited for the poison ordeal. She told the armed men that she would not leave until all those poor people were free. When they advised her to bring the dead back to life, she stayed seated. Another time a chief opened his bag of poison beans. Mary walked along the rows of armed men and handed them out to whoever wanted them: here they are, take them. They were too bewildered to stop her.

She was not always in time. At the boiling-oil ordeal she came too late to prevent a boy's hands from being burned. She told the crowd that everyone would suffer if they treated people like that (my translation). A slave accused of witchcraft she did save. She stepped in front of the armed warriors and said that this man had done nothing wrong. The chiefs said this was not good speaking, but they spared him. Bound and beaten, he came out alive.

When Etim, the son of a chief, was killed, the chiefs Edem and Ekpenyong still wanted lives taken at the funeral. Mary guarded the door of the compound while a drunken crowd swung guns and machetes. When the chiefs gave in, one woman managed to escape, and to another prisoner Mary whispered: "Ifehe!", run. He got away. On another day two groups aimed their guns at each other. Mary laid the weapons in heaps between them, three or four feet high. She stopped a canoe that was bringing machetes up the river for a war. A drunken band on its way to a fight stopped before her outstretched arms and went around.

For four days and four nights she stayed in the forest at a poison ordeal. With fires she kept the leopards away and she outlasted the men, who gave up. She prayed that a cruel chief would become gentle. Word came that a prisoner had been sent home. She wrote that it turned soft (my translation).

She could also simply stay calm. Livingstone tells that she sat knitting during long trials, which quieted those present. To chiefs who could not read she sent a blank sheet of paper, sealed with wax. It bought her time to come in person and settle the matter. When there was a dispute about land, she read from the Bible about moving your neighbor's boundary stones. When chief Akpo had fled after his village was burned, she was glad that Edem gave him land. That is how Jesus does it, she said.

In a mission magazine of 1902 a colleague wrote that Okoyong had changed since 1889 and that no more twins were being killed. It is the voice of the mission itself, but it is a voice of that time. Later Ekpenyong asked her forgiveness and said that the killing of the twins had been folly that he saw only now. Chief Edem died of smallpox. Mary nursed him alone. After his death she made the coffin herself and buried him at night.

She herself described her life as one long record of answered prayer. And she asked a friend to pray for her work in a businesslike way: concretely and to the point. In her letters it says that prayer was her great comfort and rest. At the leopards she prayed that the God of Daniel would shut their mouths. The singers of Okoyong, she joked, would drive away any respectable leopard.

The children of the mission

In her house baby hammocks hung from the roof, with a cord she pulled to rock a child back to sleep. Once she found a baby in the

forest, left there five days. Poor little helpless things, she said, and took him with her. She named the child Mary, and among the people it was called "the wonder child."

Sometimes she carried a baby against her body to Creek Town to fetch milk. A girl, Susie, was burned by boiling water. Mary carried her to Creek Town in the middle of the night, but the child died. Oh, Susie! Susie! she wrote (my translation). The dead children she buried among flowers. The little cemetery filled up.

She loved to laugh, too. Livingstone tells how she worked on the roof without a hat and lost count of the days, so that once she held the Sunday service on a Monday. Her colleague Ovens sighed that he could not afford two Sabbaths in one week. A visitor she woke with a rooster that she tied at the foot of his bed, as an alarm clock. And when an officer praised her, she answered: why, lad, the tea has gone to your head! (my translation).

She went barefoot, without a hat, without a mosquito net, and drank water that had not been boiled. Her health broke down in the forest several times. Once she wrote that the work was too much for her.

An engagement that did not go through

In 1890 Mary was recovering from illness in Duke Town. There she met Charles Morrison, a young teacher of the mission. He was eighteen years younger. They shared a love of books and poetry. In 1891 they became engaged, on condition that the mission board would allow him to go with her to Ekenge.

The board refused. Mary did not go back to the coast. The engagement ended. As far as is known, she never wrote down what that did to her.

Here you see something of what it meant to be a woman in the mission in those days. Mary was given a great deal of room, more than most women. But about her marriage, her place of residence and taking her sick sister along, men on a committee in Edinburgh decided. She was criticized for going barefoot, cutting her hair short and leaving the long Victorian petticoats behind. She climbed trees. At meetings in Scotland she was nervous; speaking before an audience she found an ordeal.

David Calhoun tells about the margin of her Bible. Next to the words of Paul that wives must submit to their husbands, she wrote a sharp objection. How she read those words further, we do not know. It shows that she wrestled with the Bible while she read.

Vice-consul in the bush

In 1891 the region became the Niger Coast Protectorate, under British authority. A year later, in 1892, Consul General Claude MacDonald appointed Mary vice-consul for Okoyong. In practice it meant that she presided over the native court. Hardage writes that this mainly confirmed what she was already doing: settling quarrels, passing sentences, protecting slaves and women.

The travel writer Mary Kingsley, who visited her, called her a real white chief. Kingsley describes how Mary walked barefoot along the path to meet a procession and took the box and little pot from an exhausted woman, to carry them back herself. The Okoyong called her Ma. According to Hardage they sometimes hated her, and more often loved her. In her court in Ikotobong she kept the chiefs in line, and sometimes she boxed the ears of a chief who talked too much.

Here I must be honest about something the old mission books hardly saw. Through Mary, British authority became visible in Okoyong, in the form of a woman who passed sentence on behalf

of a foreign government. The Scottish historian William Knox shows how twofold that was. She worked with colonial officials, but regularly clashed with them. She felt that the land belonged to the Africans. One of her sayings that he cites is (my translation) keep Africa for the Africans.

He also cites a letter from 1905 in which she describes the Ibibio in harsh, contemptuous words. She called grown African men boys. She was a woman of her time, with the eyes of her time. According to Knox her thinking did change: she came to see European advantage as a matter of knowing Christ, not of race.

Itu, Use and a court without pay

In 1901 a British punitive expedition marched against the Aro, at Arochukwu. The people along the Enyong creek then asked her themselves to come, so her church magazine wrote later.

She moved on shortly afterward. In 1903 she began work in Itu, on the Cross River, and in 1904 she settled there. In May 1905 she became vice-president of the native court, with the authority of a magistrate. Her letters from those months come from Ikot Obong, where she held court. She refused to accept money for it. Knox and Hardage call her the first woman magistrate in the British Empire.

In 1907 she started a refuge in Use for abused women. In February 1909 she wrote to an official that she had sat for the last time. She was (my translation) so worn out. A new district commissioner, Captain Warrey, asked her to stay. In April she still did not know what her place was and what the "supervision" of her court meant. In 1909 she laid down her function as judge. There were quarrels with officials, especially over a clerk who gave orders without authority, after which a messenger of the court was killed.

Another district commissioner, Charles Partridge, became one of her most faithful pen friends. He was an agnostic. According to Hardage he said that she was the only missionary he could appreciate. He kept her letters and gave them in 1950 to the library of Dundee.

Meanwhile her household grew. Hardage counts six girls and two boys whom she raised as her own children. Other sources speak of eight or nine. According to Calhoun she often had about twelve babies at a time in her huts. Janie, the twin girl from Old Town, stayed with her to the end. In Livingstone's book Alice, Annie, Maggie and Whitie are also named as girls in her house. Her adopted son Dan went along on her last furlough to Scotland in 1907. She wrote to Alice in Efik and told about Whitie who had fallen asleep after sweeping, and about Janie who slept with a twin mother and her baby. After her death a bundle of letters lay in Use with the inscription "My children." A chief had once warned her: Ma, you are our mother, but what you have done will be our death (my translation).

She gave the children Western, Christian names. That too belongs to the honest story. She took them in out of love, and she raised them as Scottish Presbyterian children. Janie once scrubbed the soles of her feet in Glasgow and said that the white part kept getting bigger.

She kept moving. From 1910 she also worked in Ikpe, about twenty miles from Use, and in 1913 she began in Odoro Ikpe. She was sixty-four then and often ill. Livingstone cites her saying that Christ was never in a hurry. She traveled on as long as she could. When someone said she should take up cycling, she cried out: Me on a bicycle! An old woman like me! (my translation).

In 1913, on the recommendation of Frederick Lugard, she was admitted to the Order of St. John. According to an early biographer

she wondered aloud who she was that she should receive such a thing.

A prayer in Efik in the night

In August 1914 her last illness began. On January 13, 1915, before daylight, she died in Use Ikot Oku, with her girls at her bedside. She was sixty-six. The fever came back every afternoon. On Sunday she had still dragged herself to church and led the service. The day after, she was seized by severe abdominal pain. A girl was sent to Ikotobong to fetch the woman missionary Miss Peacock, who came at once on her bicycle. Doctor Robertson from Itu came with ice and medicines. She lay in a room with mud walls, a cement floor and a corrugated iron roof. She was very thirsty and asked for a piece of ice in her mouth. Janie, Annie, Maggie, Alice and Whitie kept watch.

Her last words were a prayer in Efik: "O Abasi, sana mi yak." That means: O God, let me go. Miss Peacock, who was there, wrote it down. I find it telling that on that last night she prayed in the language of the people among whom she lived. At half past three it went out gently, writes Miss Peacock: no great struggle, only a strength slowly falling away.

The girls wept and cried that they would now be seen as slaves, now that their mother was dead. From Itu and the surrounding area people came to look. They called her Eka kpukpru owo: mother of everyone. Or also Ma Akamba, the Great Mother.

Her body went by boat down the river to Duke Town. The flags hung at half-mast. The coffin, under a British flag, was carried to Mission Hill by rowers in black shirts. Boys of the mission institute stood along the beach. The schoolchildren of Duke Town stood along the road. At the grave Mammy Fuller stood up to calm the

weeping women: do not cry, do not cry, Ma was a great blessing (my translation). When the coffin was lowered, she whispered: Safe. Later she told Mrs. Wilkie that all that time she had been very near heaven.

On the grave stood crosses of bougainvillea and frangipani. A rose cutting from Use was planted beside it. Governor-General Frederick Lugard sent condolences and wrote a eulogy. He telegraphed that her death was a great loss for Nigeria.

In her Bible, next to Paul's chapter on the resurrection, she had written (my translation): Hallelujah! What a climax! It concerned the words: *Death is swallowed up in victory.* (1 Corinthians 15:54).

A statue on Mary Slessor Avenue

After her death Mary Slessor became a legend. The first biography appeared in the year of her death, and many followed. A fifteen-year-old girl from Edinburgh, Christine Orr, wrote a lament on behalf of her African children. The Calabar Council and the Women's Foreign Mission Committee made plans for a home for women and girls bearing her name.

In Nigeria the image of Mary is above all tied to the twins. In schools it is taught that she put an end to the killing of twins in Calabar. On Mary Slessor Avenue in Calabar stands a statue of her with two babies.

Here a doubt touches the story itself. The Nigerian historian David Imbua wrote a sharp article, titled Robbing Others to Pay Mary Slessor. He calls it a generally accepted assumption for which concrete evidence is lacking. European missionaries were already fighting that practice before her arrival. And the Efik themselves did so, such as King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town, who in the middle of the nineteenth century was praised by Europeans for his support

of abolition. The story of one Scottish woman who saved a whole people makes the Africans who themselves chose change invisible.

I find that a justified correction. Mary saved twins, and that is certain. But she was one link in a long chain, and part of that chain bore Efik names.

Other voices are milder. The Nigerian church historian Ogbu Kalu wrote that she was a new kind of person, who became African. There were also Nigerian historians who criticized her simple village schools without English, where ambitious pupils in the long run stayed away. In Calabar her name is on a plaque in Millennium Park, among a hundred people whom the state of Cross River wants to honor.

What do you see when you think of her? A heroine who went into the bush alone? Or a woman who, with her weak body, her harsh judgments and her big heart, stood between two worlds?

In Dundee there has been a stained-glass window about her life since 1923, now in the café of the McManus museum, and at the Steeple Church a granite memorial stone was unveiled in February 2015.

She lies on Mission Hill in Calabar, next to two Scottish friends from the mission. It is a cemetery where in the past the bodies of slaves were left behind.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on December 2, 1848 in Aberdeen; the move to Dundee in 1859 and the work as a half-timer at Baxter Brothers; a father who drank; departure on August 5, 1876 and arrival in Calabar in September 1876; her work in Duke Town, Old Town and Creek Town; the death of her mother and

sisters in the years 1885 and 1886; settlement in Ekenge in Okoyong in 1888 and the support of chief Edem and his sister Eme Ete; the engagement to Charles Morrison in 1891 and the board's refusal; an appointment with judicial duties in Okoyong in 1892 (by Claude MacDonald according to Hardage and others); the work in Itu, Use and Ikpe; the position as judge in the native court from 1905, with sittings in Ikot Obong (her own letters to Charles Partridge, Dundee); her plan in February 1909 to stop because of exhaustion and Captain Warrey's request that she stay (own letters); the Order of St. John in 1913 on Lugard's recommendation; the stained-glass window (1923) and the memorial stone (2015) in Dundee; death on January 13, 1915 and the funeral in Duke Town.

Only from own testimony or later tradition (mainly the early biographies by W.P. Livingstone from 1916): the conversion story with the widow and the fire; the gang story and the story of the whip in Dundee (not confirmed by a second witness; it does fit everything else we know about her); her mother's sayings and Mary's reading at the loom; the details of her arrival in Ekenge (the empty village, the sore feet); the Okoyong's statement that they did not want a missionary; the scenes with the poison ordeal, the boiling oil, the four days in the forest, the sealed blank paper, the knitting, Edem's smallpox and the coffin; the baby in the forest and Susie; the jokes (the rooster, the Monday, the bicycle); the letters to Alice; the last night, the words of Miss Peacock and the funeral; the marginal notes in her Bible; her last words in Efik (according to Livingstone written down by Miss Peacock, with a slightly different spelling than Hardage: yok or yak).

Unconfirmed:

- *Her title in 1892.* Vice-consul in Hardage, government agent in Livingstone, British consul in a tract from around 1914. A

church magazine from 1913 names Ralph Moor as the one who asked her to lead the court of Okoyong.

- *Numbers.* The numbers of people who, according to an early biographer, were killed at funerals, I have found nowhere else. In one case that an early biographer describes, a slave who had already been sentenced to death stayed alive because of her. The testimony of a mission magazine from 1902 that no more twins were being killed is the voice of the mission itself.
- *Conversion.* Hardage, of whom the mission historian Andrew Walls said that she wrote the best biography so far, mentions no moment of conversion. She says only that Mary became a serious Bible reader and became convinced that she had to serve God.
- *Twins.* The idea that she alone put an end to the killing of twins is disputed in scholarship by Imbua. Of his article I could read only the beginning; the rest is behind a paywall. The death year 1858 of Eyo Honesty II comes via Wikipedia from older literature. Imbua cites the Nigerian historian Emmanuel Ayandele, who wrote that no other chief in Nigeria at that time interfered so deeply in the religious foundation of his own society. Eyo died in 1858, eighteen years before Mary arrived.
- *First woman magistrate.* Whether she was the first woman magistrate in the British Empire I have not been able to check independently.
- *The punitive expedition.* On her attitude toward the British expedition against the Aro of 1901 the sources differ. Hardage writes that Mary did not question the military intervention. Knox writes that she was in general against military expeditions and wanted peaceful change. Her own church magazine dates the expedition to 1902. Her letters show no principled opposition. At the end of 1905, when she had no courtroom

yet, she wrote to a British official that he had better bring a Maxim, a machine gun. Whether that was mockery or earnest cannot be made out from that one sentence. I cannot decide the disagreement between Hardage and Knox.

- *Leaving the court in 1909.* Knox writes that it clashed over the rights of African laborers in road construction; British companies had complained about her. Hardage speaks of a conflict with a young district commissioner. Her own letters, kept in Dundee, show a messier course. The letters after April 1909 I could not open.
- *Number of children.* Hardage counts six girls and two boys, other sources speak of eight or nine, Calhoun of often about twelve babies at a time.
- *Place and date of her death.* Livingstone describes the last illness in Use; the Government Gazette named Itu and January 18. I follow Use and January 13, the date most sources give.
- *Boxing ears.* The stories that she boxed men's ears: one reviewer calls them unchecked but probable.
- *The spelling of Efik.* The spelling of her last prayer differs between sources.

Interpretation: whether Mary Slessor was mainly a liberator or mainly an instrument of the British Empire is a question that historians answer differently. According to most she was both. That she was a woman who gave her life for children nobody wanted is in every source.

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Amy Carmichael: the mother of Dohnavur who never married

On an evening in March 1901 a girl of seven walked out of a temple house. She lived with women who were training her for the temple, in a village in the far south of India. Once before she had run away, a two-day walk to her mother in Tuticorin, today's Thoothukudi. Her mother was afraid of the gods and had taken her back. Now she went again. She walked down the village street, past the temple walls, and no one stopped her (my translation). In a village farther on a woman found her and took her along.

That is how Amy Carmichael told it thirty years later in her book *Gold Cord*. She called the girl Pearleyes; in other books she is called Preena. In the darkness of the innermost temple cell the child had prayed that God would let her die, Amy writes. Other sources say that the woman who found her was a Christian, and that the girl herself asked for "the Amma," the foreign woman who traveled around the area. The date Amy gives is March 6. Later Preena herself told how from that day on she became her mother (my translation).

That she did become. For this girl, and afterward for hundreds of others. The community that grew around her, the Dohnavur

Fellowship, would give a home to more than a thousand children, according to the movement itself and her biographers. Amy Carmichael never married and had no children of her own. Yet the children called her Amma all their lives: mother, in Tamil.

She was thirty-four then. She had come a long way.

A miller's daughter from Millisle

Amy Beatrice Carmichael was born on December 16, 1867, in Millisle, a village on the coast of County Down. The whole island of Ireland belonged to the United Kingdom then; Millisle is now in Northern Ireland. She was the oldest of seven children. Her father David had a flour mill, her mother's name was Catherine. It was a Presbyterian family, of Scottish descent, with the Bible on the table.

There is a story about her eyes that she often told later. As a little girl she prayed for blue eyes. The prayer was not answered. Years later, in India, she was glad of it. Brown eyes did not stand out among Tamil women. The story comes from herself, and it says above all how she looked back on her own life: as something God had been at work in from early on.

She went to a Methodist girls' boarding school in Harrogate, in Yorkshire, England. There, according to her biographers, she came to a personal faith. When the family fell into financial trouble, her parents took her home.

Girls with shawls

Around 1883 the family moved to Belfast. Two years later her father died, according to a recent biographical sketch of pneumonia. Amy was eighteen and the oldest. She helped care for her brothers and sisters.

In her own book *Gold Cord* she describes a Sunday from that time. She was walking with her brothers and sisters along a street in Belfast, on the way from church. A poor old woman was lugging a bundle. Amy and the children helped her carry it home. She was ashamed of the looks of the respectable churchgoers. At a fountain, she tells, in the drizzle, a Bible passage flashed through her mind about gold, silver and precious stones, against wood, hay and straw: the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:12 about building on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw. From that moment nothing mattered to her anymore, she writes, except the things that are eternal. The first chapter of the book bears the title *Gold, Silver, Precious Stones*.

Belfast was a city of spinning mills and linen mills. The girls who worked there wore a shawl over their heads, because they could not afford a hat. They were therefore called "shawlies." In respectable churches they were not always welcome. Amy started a Sunday class for them in a hall of the Presbyterian church on Rosemary Street. The group grew to hundreds.

A building of their own was needed. In 1887 a woman, Kate Mitchell, gave five hundred pounds, and a miller donated a piece of land. So the Welcome Hall arose. Out of this work later grew the Welcome Evangelical Church, which is still there.

A nineteen-year-old woman who raises money, has a hall built and teaches hundreds of factory girls. That was not usual in the Belfast of the 1880s. The sources say little about how church leaders reacted. What is certain is that she did it, and that it lasted.

A voice in Keswick

In 1887 Amy went to the Keswick Convention, an annual summer conference in the English Lake District. Christians from all kinds

of churches gathered there to speak about a holy life, a life wholly surrendered to God. In Keswick she heard Hudson Taylor speak, the founder of the China Inland Mission. From that moment the world abroad drew her.

Through Keswick she got to know Robert Wilson, the chairman of the convention. In *Gold Cord* she writes about the small, worn Bible from which he read aloud, with his name and the year 1858 in pencil in it. Amy went to live with his family in England. He never officially adopted her. Yet until 1912 she wrote under the name Amy Wilson-Carmichael.

She applied to the China Inland Mission. In 1892 she was turned down. Her health was too weak, the mission judged. She suffered from neuralgia, nerve pain that she would have all her life.

Have you ever seen a door close through which you were certain God was sending you? For Amy this was such a door. She did not go to China. A year later she went anyway.

Fur gloves in Japan

In 1893 she left for Japan, as the first missionary the Keswick movement itself sent out. She joined the work of Barclay Buxton. Her letters from there became her first book, *From Sunrise Land*.

From Japan comes a story she told herself. She was talking with an old woman about Christ. The woman kept looking at her hands. Amy was wearing fur gloves, and they completely distracted the woman. She took them off, and from then on she wore Japanese clothing. In this she followed the example of Hudson Taylor.

She did not stay long. She suffered from headaches and nerve pain, and Robert Wilson had a stroke. She went to Ceylon, today's Sri

Lanka, and before the end of 1894 she was back in England. A failed start, you would say.

A woman for the women's quarters

In 1895 she was accepted by the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society. A zenana was the part of an Indian house where the women lived. Men from outside did not enter there, so neither did a male missionary. Only women could read the Bible and pray there. In this way room was made in the mission for unmarried women like Amy.

In November 1895 she arrived in India. She would never leave the country again. First she was in Bangalore, for her health, and learned Tamil. Then she moved south, to Tinnevelly, today's Tirunelveli. There the Anglican missionary Thomas Walker worked with his wife Catherine. Under his guidance she learned Tamil and traveled around with Indian Christian women.

India was a British colony then, and it would remain one until 1947. Missionaries came from the same country as the administrators. That tension lay over all mission work of those years, including Amy's.

The Starry Cluster

In 1897 Amy formed a group of traveling evangelists with Indian Christian women. They were called the Starry Cluster. They went from village to village, read the Bible to women and prayed with them. About an Indian woman from her circle, Ponnammal, Amy wrote a book in 1918.

They traveled in a bandy, a cart without springs with a mat roof. In her book *Things as They Are* Amy tells how on a flooded road the cart slid into a deep puddle and the books floated out. They sat

there, she says, rather wet but glad while they fished them out (my translation). In the village of Cupid's Lake a little girl ran down the street and cried that a big white man had come. The villagers were frightened, until the women of the group said it was a woman.

In a house of the Vellala, a high caste, the women's quarters were low and without windows. Amy and her friends were glad to be let in. They sat on the floor among the women, who asked about marriages in England and whether a white skin was spotted. A grandmother wanted to look at her skin. At a death the women pressed closer together to make room. It was hard, Amy writes, not to touch those you love. In a Brahmin village she was refused entry: no white man had ever set foot in their street, and no white woman would. In a potters' village a girl asked whether she would get new clothes every day and good curry if she became a Christian. Her grandfather snorted: have you ever seen a potter of caste change?

Elisabeth Elliot, her best-known biographer, tells that someone advised Amy to bring pink wool. Then the women could knit while they listened. Amy refused. According to Elliot she saw such a bait as unbelief.

In 1909 she wrote in *Lotus Buds* that her group was used to going about, as she put it, in Indian clothes (my translation). In a crowd at the temple they then did not stand out. In *Gold Cord* she explains why: whoever was foreign in clothing, food or habits, she held, locked the only doors to the life of the people.

At the end of 1898 something happened in her group that became known as the jewel question. A young convert told his wife to give up her jewelry: what does a soul winner need with jewels? Star, also called Arulai, decided at the foot of the cross to give up her jewelry. Her father threatened to take her home. Her grandfather met the cart at night and accepted the little package with the jewelry.

In February 1899 F.B. Meyer came to visit and spoke frankly about caste and debts, which hurt many listeners.

The best-known story about her belongs here. She is said to have darkened her skin with coffee and worn the clothing of Tamil women, to belong with the people she helped. This story appears in almost every short biographical sketch. In the parts of her own books that I could read I have not found it.

"Things as They Are"

Amy wrote about what she saw, and she wrote it plainly. Two friends in Dohnavur, Ella Crossley and Mary Hatch, urged her to share what she saw, and so in 1903 *Things as They Are* came about, on the mission work in South India. She wanted to show how the work really went, including where things went against it. The life of a woman missionary, she writes, is more ordinary than people think. In a dream she saw blind people stepping toward an abyss, with far too few watchmen to hold them back. Eugene Stock of the Church Missionary Society wrote the foreword. About some things she knew, he said that if she wrote them down, they could not be printed (my translation).

Not everyone believed her. According to a later edition some readers in England doubted. One reviewer called the book pessimistic. Later statements by other missionaries were added that confirmed what she wrote.

In India itself, too, she was not believed at first. In *Gold Cord* she tells about F.R. Hemingway, a British official of the Indian Civil Service. He was indignant about her book and thought it was not true. He went to investigate for himself, and came back a friend. He asked her for dry, factual notes and submitted them to the governor of the province of Madras. After that the government asked more than

once for information, and Amy gave it in silence. She names no year for this.

A visit to a powerful trader in children ended without result: in a dark, smoky room they were not even heard, and they left as they had come. But Amy also describes a day on which the tamarind trees in Dohnavur turned into olive trees before her eyes, and she saw Jesus kneeling alone in the garden.

In the mission world itself she also caused friction. In her early letters she was sharp about missionaries whom she found too comfortable.

Children for the temple

After Preena more children came. In 1901 Amy, the Walkers and their Indian coworkers settled in Dohnavur, a village about thirty miles from the southern tip of India. The village was named after a German count, Dohna, who in the early nineteenth century had supported German missionaries. It was remote and healthy, with mountains that gave Amy rest. In 1904 more than thirty children lived there, in 1907 more than seventy, in 1913 more than a hundred and thirty. Those numbers come from Christian biographical sketches of her.

The first three babies who came there all died within a year. Amy's mother, who had raised seven children, took them in her arms and did not understand why they were so fragile. On Christmas Eve Amy walked with a sick baby through the Christian quarter and found help nowhere. Later a lawsuit made the rescue of children more difficult, and some children were quietly taken away.

Where did the children come from? Here I must be careful. In some Hindu temples in South India devadasis lived, literally "servants of the deity." Girls were dedicated as children to the god of the temple.

Christian sources about Amy speak of temple prostitution, and the researcher N.J. Cho too writes that the Fellowship wanted to protect children from sexual exploitation.

In *Lotus Buds* Amy describes how, in her view, children ended up at the temple. A widow gave her daughter, because a girl who was given to the god could never become a widow. Grandmothers and aunts dedicated children. Older temple women wanted a daughter who would later care for them. Sometimes she mentions abduction. The children in her stories are sometimes babies, sometimes six, eight or twelve years old.

One of those babies, she writes, was rescued at the moment the temple people came to fetch her. The wife of a pastor, who had first opposed the work, wept when she saw the child. A schoolboy saw a baby with a radiant little face and heard that temple women wanted her. After prayer and searching the mother was found, and the child stayed. On the morning of July 6, 1907, a day of prayer, a Brahmin baby was rescued from the hands of a temple woman in a city five hundred miles away, so a letter reported. Dévai, an older woman in her circle, took a girl, Latha (Firefly), out of a closed house during a festival. They fled at night, on foot and by cart, while temple people jeered at them. A baby of about three pounds, whom nobody thought would see the morning, stayed alive and became one of the healthiest children.

According to *Gold Cord* the team paid a hundred rupees in 1904 to buy Firefly free, a girl of eight who was to be dedicated to the temple. Colleagues doubted. Amy asked God for a sign: exactly a hundred rupees. A missionary who knew nothing of the request sent that very amount that day. They laid the check on the ground, like a new fleece of Gideon (my translation). Firefly stayed about twenty years and died in severe pain. A doctor, Dr. Somervell, came in a car, an almost unknown sound in Dohnavur, with medicines ordered by

mail. Their funeral feast that evening, with lanterns and cymbals, was the beginning of a lasting friendship.

It is her picture, and it is the picture of an outsider. Scholars read it critically today. The literary scholar Jo-Ann Wallace wrote in 1998 that in *Lotus Buds* Amy used colonial images of Indian dancers to justify her work. She even called the rescue work the abduction of the young and vulnerable (my translation). Cho, of Nottingham Trent University, sees it differently. According to Cho it was about real protection of children, and in her songs Amy looked for Indian imagery: the landscape, the animals, the flowers of Tamil Nadu.

The Indian theologian J. Baskar Jeyaraj of Madurai, who himself works in children's ministry, describes her work as a mission to vulnerable children. He also tells something that is missing from most biographical sketches. Baptized converts were sometimes taken into the Fellowship to protect them from their Hindu family, and the Fellowship arranged marriages so that they could remain Christian. For those families that may have been a loss.

There were also Indian voices against the system, and they were not those of missionaries. The doctor Muthulakshmi Reddy, herself the daughter of a woman who had been a devadasi, spoke with hundreds of devadasis and around 1930 proposed in the legislative council of Madras to forbid the dedication of girls. It took until 1947 before that law came. In *Gold Cord* Amy writes only that a prominent Indian woman led the struggle in South India. She names no name. She herself held to something else: whatever the law said, the rescue of children had to go on in silence.

I cannot resolve those questions for you. There were children in danger, even critics do not deny that. And there were families who saw it differently than Amy. Both belong in this story.

A bell under the tree

Dohnavur became a world of its own. Amy was the mother of all. The day ran from five in the morning until ten at night, and every worker had fixed hours for prayer. Under a tree hung a metal disc that was struck every hour as a prayer bell, and even the smallest children used it. Every service began with a minute of silence. Once a month there was a day of prayer, and a quiet room stayed open for whoever wanted to be alone. The older children and converts sometimes had fear at night, especially on Tuesdays and Fridays, when demons were worshiped in the neighborhood. Their medicine was to turn their last thoughts before sleep to God, with a song, a psalm or a promise, for example from Psalm 23, where the psalmist says that even in the valley of the shadow of death he will fear no evil, because God is with him (Psalm 23:4). Amy slept lightly, with one ear open. Several times a child was in danger just before someone woke up. They called that the work of the children's angels.

The children received Indian names and wore Indian clothing. The first nurseries were of sun-dried brick with earthen floors and thatched roofs. Because of termites and fire danger they switched to baked brick and roof tiles. The hammocks were cotton strips on ropes, with ribbons along the side against falls. When a baby of six months got her head caught in the ribbons and was choking, sister Mabel Wade, a Yorkshire nurse who had come in November 1907, cut her free just in time. Give them time to take root, Amy told advisers, we are training them for storms and floods (my translation).

In 1916 she formed the Sisters of the Common Life with unmarried women, a Protestant community of women who lived for the work without marriage. Many of them were Indian Christian women. Ponnammal led a convoy in 1905 and wrote during an epidemic in Neyyoor that everything around them was windy now (my trans-

lation). Her daughter Perfection later took charge of more than a hundred girls.

In 1918 the first little boy came. A house for boys was built, many of whom were children of women from the temples. Around that time Amy received the Kaiser-i-Hind medal, a British award for service to India. The Dictionary of Ulster Biography gives 1918, the Irish women's museum Herstory 1919. The official announcement I have not found.

She asked no one for money. Like George Müller, who ran orphanages in Bristol, England, without asking for gifts, she prayed for what was needed: money, a nursery, a car, a hospital. The money for the first school building came, in the faith that teachers would follow. In years of strict thrift the team pasted receipts onto postcards to save postage stamps. The year usually ended with a small surplus.

She was strict, too. A recent article in Christianity Today tells that she put ink on the tongue of children who lied, or made them wear a sign with the word LIE. She saw that as love. Almost no one would see it that way now. In Gold Cord milder means are also mentioned: a deer's horn around the neck of a child who sought quarrels, or quarrelers who had to fight it out among themselves, which usually ended in laughter. With other missionaries she clashed regularly. She tested new coworkers so hard that friction arose. After a conflict with the young Stephen Neill, from a family of doctors, the Neill family left the work. What exactly was going on is not clear.

How hard may love be? In her little book *If* Amy wrote that whoever has no compassion for his fellow servant knows nothing of the love of Calvary.

Free of the societies

In the 1920s a break came. In 1925 Amy detached herself from the mission societies she was connected with. According to one source one of those organizations wanted to draw the work to itself. According to another source she left the Zenana Missionary Society because it cooperated with people who no longer saw the Bible as given by God. In 1926 she drew up principles of her own for Dohnavur, and in 1927 the Dohnavur Fellowship became an independent registered organization.

A hospital came, Parama Suha Saalai: the place of heavenly healing. The Fellowship itself writes that the hospital has provided care since 1936 (other sources give 1912 or 1929).

From now on no bishop or mission board stood above her work. The sources I read say little about opposition because she was a woman. They do say how she went her own way, and what that cost in friendships.

A hole in the ground

In 1931 Amy fell. According to Christianity Today she sank into a pit, dislocated her ankle and broke her leg. She already had arthritis. She never became her old self again. The last twenty years of her life she lay largely in bed.

According to the biographical sketches she had prayed that day that God might do everything that made her more fit to serve Him and her loved ones.

From that bed she wrote. In 1932 *Gold Cord* appeared, the story of the Fellowship. Books followed such as *Gold by Moonlight* and *Windows*. In all she wrote about thirty-five; the Church Times counts thirty-eight that appeared in her lifetime. For every book she asked

herself, according to Christian History, five questions. Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it kind? Is it necessary? And does it carry something of eternity in it?

I write books myself. That last question I take with me.

A saying of hers has been going around for decades. Someone asked her what the life of a missionary was like. She is said to have answered that the missionary life is simply a chance to die (my translation). Elisabeth Elliot used those words as the title of her biography. Whether Amy said it literally that way, I do not know.

A birdbath with one word

India became independent in 1947. That same year the province of Madras passed the law that forbade the dedication of girls to temples and gave devadasis the right to marry. In 1948 Amy fell again, and after that she could hardly move.

Amy Carmichael died on January 18, 1951, in Dohnavur. She was eighty-three. For fifty-five years she had lived in India, and she had never left.

She had asked for no stone on her grave. The children placed a birdbath there, with one word on it: Amma.

The Fellowship still exists. It is now led by Indians and is connected with the Church of South India, a Protestant church in which Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians, among others, came together. About five hundred people live and work there, there is a hospital, there are schools. According to the Fellowship itself the work is carried by her great-grandchildren, children of the children of her children. They are not family by blood.

A birdbath is not a gravestone. There is no year of birth on it and no date of death. Only the name the children gave her.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on December 16, 1867 in Millisle; Presbyterian family; work among the shawlies in Belfast and the Welcome Hall (1887); Keswick and Hudson Taylor; rejection by the China Inland Mission (1892); Japan (1893) and return at the end of 1894; Church of England Zenana Missionary Society and arrival in India in 1895; cooperation with Thomas Walker in Tirunelveli; the coming of Preena in 1901 and settlement in Dohnavur; Sisters of the Common Life (1916); work with boys from 1918; a Kaiser-i-Hind medal around 1918 or 1919 (two sources); registration of the Fellowship (1927); the ban on dedicating girls to temples in the province of Madras in 1947, after a proposal by Muthulakshmi Reddy around 1930; fall in 1931 and being bedridden; death on January 18, 1951 in Dohnavur; about thirty-five books; continued existence of the Fellowship under Indian leadership.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the prayer for blue eyes; the fur gloves in Japan; the details of Preena's flight (from *Gold Cord*); how children were given to the temple (her own description in *Lotus Buds*); the pink wool (via Elisabeth Elliot); the prayer on the day of the fall (via biographical sketches); the Sunday in Belfast with the old woman and the Bible passage (from *Gold Cord*; my source does not name the verse itself, I follow the chapter title); the jewel question, the three babies who died in the first year, Firefly's hundred-rupee sign, the prayer bell and the fear at night (all from *Gold Cord*); the scenes in the bandy and the villages (from *Things as They Are*); the children from *Lotus Buds* (Latha and others; I do not know whether Latha and the girl Firefly from *Gold Cord* are the same); the saying about "a chance to die"; the story about F.R. Hemingway and the governor of Madras (only from *Gold Cord*, without a year).

Unconfirmed: the coloring of her skin with coffee (only in later biographical sketches, including the Church Mission Society in 2009, which gives it another purpose: that way she could enter Hindu temples to see what happened to the children; not found in her own books that I could read; whether it happened exactly so and how often, I cannot establish; a white woman who makes herself darker raises uncomfortable questions today, for her it was, if it happened, a way not to stand out); the exact year of the medal (1918 or 1919; the official announcement not found); the year of the hospital (1912, 1929 or, according to the Fellowship itself, 1936); the cause of the break with the Neill family; the precise reason for the break with the societies; the number of more than a thousand children (from the movement and her biographers); the inscription at her grave (birdbath with Amma, according to one source a stone with Ammai).

Interpretation: about the devadasi system there are different readings. Amy described it as exploitation of children; later researchers point out that her picture was colored by colonial narratives. Indian reformers such as Muthulakshmi Reddy themselves fought against the dedication of girls; a thorough Indian historical study of the system, such as that of Davesh Soneji (2012), I could not consult. The study by Hans Kommers, *Triumphant Love* (AOSIS, 2017), is the most extensive on her work and is open access online (22 chapters), but the full text could not be opened from my working environment. Whoever checks this chapter further can best start there, especially for the year of the hospital, the medal and the break of 1925.

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Johanna Veenstra: the typist who went to Lupwe

On October 2, 1919, the Mauretania lay in the harbor of New York. On board stood a young woman of twenty-five from Paterson, New Jersey. On the dock stood friends. When the ship left, they began to sing. They were spiritual songs.

A fellow passenger listened along and turned to her. So she wrote it down herself later. He said (my translation) that he really believed they were singing for her.

They were. In her book Johanna describes how she stood at the rail, a New Testament in her hand, while the ship sailed up the Hudson. A woman in the crowd, who had buried her daughter shortly before, asked whether she could talk with her before she reached England. Johanna Veenstra was on her way to Africa, to a region that the English then called the Sudan. She had no church that sent her out, for her own church did not yet have a foreign mission. She traveled under a British mission organization, and she traveled largely alone. A little more than thirteen years later she would be buried in Nigeria. Her church would follow only afterward, and today Christians of the Kuteb people call her their spiritual mother.

She began as a girl who was sent away from Sunday school.

A Dutch church in an American city

Paterson lies close to New York. In the middle of the nineteenth century Dutch immigrants came there. They found work there and a community where they could speak their own language. Early on they founded a congregation, the first Dutch immigrant congregation in New Jersey. They held to the teaching of the Synod of Dordrecht, the great Reformed synod of 1618 and 1619. After a few changes the congregation joined a church that was called in English the True Dutch Reformed Church. Today it is called the Christian Reformed Church, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, CRC for short.

For a Dutch reader that world feels familiar. Catechism class, making public profession of faith, a minister who pays house visits. In the church where Johanna grew up, the services were in Dutch. She writes that herself in her book.

She was born on April 19, 1894, in Paterson. Her father was William Veenstra, a minister in the CRC. Her mother's name was Cornelia Anna de Hoop, according to a survey that I could not confirm from a second source. What is certain: her father died in 1902. He was not yet thirty-five. Johanna was at most eight.

Sent away from Sunday school

About the years after that she is honest in her own book. She calls herself very naughty as a child. At thirteen she was sent away from Sunday school, after a joke in which she pretended to faint in front of a catechism teacher. At regular school she had to go to the principal three times before she turned fourteen.

The Christian History Institute writes that after her father's death she became angry and rebellious. How she saw it herself comes across in her book less as an explanation and more as a fact: that is how it was.

Around fourteen she passed an exam in shorthand. She got a job in an office in New York and traveled back and forth every day from Paterson. She earned well. According to the Christian History Institute much of that money went on dresses and jewelry. In the city, film, theater and dancing drew her.

Can you remember when you first noticed that God was asking something of you? With Johanna that came slowly, and it took a year.

A year of unrest

Her minister, Rev. K. Van Goor, invited her to his home. He talked with her about her soul. Later he spoke with her once more, together with a friend, after catechism. According to her own account a period followed of almost a year in which she felt guilty and found no rest. She was afraid of death and of hell.

She describes the difference sharply. Believing she was willing to do. What she did not want was to give her whole life to God. Once she went to a dance class. She did not go back, because she experienced it as a warning of the Holy Spirit.

When she finally surrendered, she writes, peace came. Her minister asked her at communion when she would come along to the table of the Lord. She went to the profession-of-faith catechism. A few months later she made public profession of faith, together with forty-five others. She was the youngest of the group. A year she does not give.

I find it something beautiful that this simply happened in a Reformed congregation in Paterson. A minister who keeps asking. A catechism class. A girl who struggles for a year and then says yes. No revival meeting was needed.

After her profession of faith she went to work at the Star of Hope Mission in Paterson. She went along to services in the prison, to meetings on street corners and in a mission hall. In September 1913, when she was nineteen, she began a three-year course at the Union Missionary Training Institute in Brooklyn, a training for mission workers. The first weeks she doubted, she writes. For three weeks she refused to unpack her suitcase, until a quiet certainty came. A dentist and a woman doctor taught there without pay. The food was meager. The students called dried prunes "mission school strawberries," and a church sent the bones of a turkey in a washtub. A Danish classmate who wanted to go to the Sudan died of tuberculosis shortly after her graduation. In her third year Johanna went three times a month to a shelter in New York for girls who came out of prison.

In those years she did not yet think of Africa. That changed in one summer.

Three days in Wisconsin

In the summer of 1915 Johanna was a delegate at a ten-day mission conference at Lake Geneva, in Wisconsin. One of the speakers was Dr. Karl Kumm, the man behind the Sudan United Mission. That was a British mission organization that worked in the broad belt south of the Sahara, called the Sudan in those days. So it was about much more than the country now called Sudan. The organization had been founded in 1904 to reach the peoples whom Islam had not yet reached. A chief had told a coworker that for five years he had been watching the road, to see whether a teacher would come.

Kumm spoke for more than an hour. It touched her deeply. According to her own account she withdrew afterward and prayed for three days. On the third day she gave in. She described it later as a call from across the sea, like Paul, who in a night vision received a call from Macedonia.

There was a problem. Her own church, the CRC, had no mission abroad. Whoever from that church wanted to go to Africa had to do so through another organization. She therefore applied to the Sudan United Mission. There came the second problem: the mission sent no one to Africa who was younger than twenty-five, because of the climate. Johanna had to wait about three years. What a candidate needed above all, the secretary said, was patience.

Three years of waiting

She used that time. For a year she did city mission work from the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, where Rev. J. Groen was minister. She took lessons in Reformed doctrine at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. There she became the first female member of the Student Volunteer Band, a group of students who wanted to give themselves to the mission.

For four months she traveled along churches to speak about missions. She received five dollars per church. At the end she had a hundred and fifty dollars left. She put that in the bank for the trip to Africa. On the advice of the mission she obtained her diploma as a midwife at a maternity clinic in New York. She also worked six to eight months at a mission among Jews in Paterson.

All these details come from her own book. They show a woman who did not sit still while she waited.

What did her family think of her plan? She writes nothing about it. She says only that in those days she had no friends nearby with

whom she could discuss it. In her book is a text that she calls her motto: *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.* (Joshua 1:9).

Alone over the Benue

In 1919 she became a member of the Sudan United Mission. On October 2 she left with the Mauretania. On the way a storm raged for three days, and a lifeboat was lost. On October 10 she arrived in London. No one was there to meet her, she writes, and the mission's office could not yet arrange a passage. She waited more than two months. When she heard that it might take until February, she cried. On December 22 a telegram came: on December 31 she could sail from Liverpool to Lagos.

In January 1920 she arrived in Nigeria. Nigeria was a British colony then. The north, where she was headed, had many peoples and languages. Hausa was the trade language. Every missionary began with it, she writes, and the New Testament already existed in it in the Latin alphabet.

The journey from Lagos to the interior she describes step by step. By train to Minna and Baro. In Minna she heard that a young Canadian woman missionary had died of a snakebite. By steamboat to Lokoja. Then about two weeks by barge on the Benue to Ibi. The crew quarreled and a man drew a long knife, which frightened her. She saw a lion at the edge of the river and suffered from the sun. From Ibi she cycled to Wukari and then to Donga. After cycling twenty-five miles in the heat she drank seven cups of tea in Wukari. She remarks that as far as she knew no white woman had yet made that journey alone. In Donga, where the mission had had a station since about 1907, she stayed seven months.

On one of her bicycle trips to Donga the path became narrow and she prayed, in her own words: Lord, help me to stay on the path.

February 1, 1921

On February 1, 1921, she arrived in Lupwe, close to Takum, in what is now Taraba State. According to her book the last thirty miles were a hot ride. Her baggage had to be carried from Donga to Lupwe, on the heads of carriers, in loads of at most sixty pounds. She came together with the missionary C.L. Whitman. On the way, about three miles after Donga, her front tire went flat. She prayed, she writes, and a young Christian found a rubber tree. A hunter passing by showed him the way to it. The boy offered her his tire: white lady, I will change the tires. The first night in her mud hut she described with an exclamation mark: home.

Lupwe was a young station. William Bristow had built a station there in 1919. Even earlier, in 1916, Filibus Ashu Angyu had begun in Takum. According to the history of the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria he was the first Nigerian missionary in that area. Johanna was therefore not the first who spoke there about Jesus. In the history of the Nigerian church that honor belongs to an African.

The people around Lupwe were the Kuteb. Johanna calls them in her book the Dzompere, and she writes about them as a tribe of cannibals. That is how Western missionaries often wrote in those years about peoples they hardly knew yet. I do not adopt those words as fact. The book shows above all how a young American woman in 1926 looked at a foreign world, and how she tried to move her readers at home.

What she does describe is the life of ordinary people. A mother escaped, she tells, from men who were hunting people on the path, by saying that they had thought she was alone, when she was not (my

translation). A Christian woman who under pressure had taken part in a test of the old belief confessed later in the chapel openly that she had committed a great sin (my translation). A man presented a shy girl of about ten as his wife. A girl of thirteen was bought for thirty sheep or goats, as a bride for a boy of fifteen. Johanna writes it down because it touched her. It also shows how far she herself stood from that world.

A woman in charge

Soon Johanna stood there largely alone. According to the Christian History Institute no male missionaries were available, and therefore she led the work. A survey gives 1923 as the year in which she took the lead. Church sources in America and Nigeria later call her the leader or director of the station at Lupwe.

That was striking in those days. In Lupwe she taught from the Bible, preached in Hausa and led a mission station. Her sources do not show that anyone openly opposed her for it. They do show that it went this way because there was no one else. This book is not about the question of what women may do in the church. What Johanna did, she did in a place where the work would otherwise have been left undone.

She worked mainly in two ways. She had a dispensary, where she treated the sick. Her diploma as a midwife came in handy. More than half of her patients had an eye infection or a tropical ulcer. Children with eyes full of pus screamed at the strange white woman. A boy with an ulcer on his leg laid a green leaf on it against the flies. After a few weeks of treatment he was better and no longer needed his stick. A man with cancer died after the treatment, and she wrapped his body for the burial together with another missionary. In July, two weeks alone at the station, she found a patient dead in a hut. His family had left him alone. A woman from Lumbu, with

an ulcer of four years, came for treatment and died after a cold in the rainy season. Johanna held the first funeral in Lupwe. Her husband stayed on three months as a laborer at the station. At a birth the wife of a chief had been in labor for six days already. The child was dead and the woman died the same day. A Christian couple sent a thank-you note with five shillings, a week's wage. She refused it and put it in the Lord's treasury.

And she started a school with a boarding department, to train pupils who could later become pastors and leaders in their own church. According to a survey she did this together with a colleague, Miss Haigh. More than her name I do not know about her. In a little over two years forty to fifty pupils came, never more than twenty-five at a time. The day began at half past five, with morning devotions at six, and at half past eight everyone went to bed. Seven young men who had confessed Christ learned to read and left with a New Testament and a hymnbook. An older pupil earned a New Testament of two shillings by cutting grass and carrying water. A chief offered his little son of four as a gift. She said that boys should be about ten before they came to school. Girls could come from about eight. She counted eight interruptions in one hour that she tried to type.

In her book are chapters with titles like The Lupwe Dispensary, The Lupwe Boarding School, First Fruits and The First Convert among the Dzompere. It is certain that many Kuteb became Christians in her time. The American and the Nigerian church both say so.

The first convert

On trips through the villages, five to twenty-three days long, with seven carriers, a chief greeted her with welcome, welcome, welcome! and she answered with thank you, thank you! In one village a hundred and thirty men listened, while the women peeked

through the mats. At a next visit the women came too. During a thunderstorm her grass hut flooded and the thunder lasted three hours.

The area got its first Christians. She counted seven baptized, and three who had been baptized elsewhere joined. Three married men became elders: Filibbus, Istifanus and Danyelu. The men of the congregation voted for abstinence from strong drink.

Danyelu was the first of the Dzompere to become a Christian. He was first called Nasamu, an orphan who as a boy was taken in by the chief as a slave and was a horse boy. Three times he asked the chief whether he might go to the school in Takum. Finally the chief said he could go, if he did his share of the work. He was baptized as Danyelu, Daniel, and later became an elder. With his wife Hawa he moved to Kwamba, nine miles farther, to witness to his own people. The Christians of Takum helped with the huts, and the village built a prayer hut. Their first son was born the night of their arrival. They named him Job. Johanna asks her readers to pray for Danyelu, the first volunteer among his people.

She also cared about the children. She writes about a father who carried only a spear, while his naked little son toiled barefoot behind him through the rain. She laid it beside Astira, a freed slave woman who after her baptism married Filibbus and washed her baby in a warm enamel basin. The Christian parents gave their children Bible names. A father asked for Simon Peter as the only name. About half of the children died before the fifth year. A Christian family prayed five days and nights for a sick little son, who recovered.

She was also honest about what was hard. The biggest problem she named was polygamy: it pays, she wrote, and who does not seek his own gain? Converts with more wives faced hard choices, about whom they had to send away, how they had to provide for them

and who got the children. The church now required a Christian marriage ceremony, and the first in the district was held recently.

A book she did not want to write

In 1926 Johanna was on furlough in America for the second time. She received many invitations to speak in churches in the United States and Canada. She could not accept them all. Her vocal cords were overworked.

Dr. Henry Beets, who was in charge of missions in the CRC, suggested that she write a book. She did. In the preface she writes that she never intended to write a book, and that she did not think herself capable of it either. It became Pioneering for Christ in the Sudan, a hundred and ninety pages, published in London and Edinburgh and also in Grand Rapids. The last chapter is called Is it Nothing to You?, a question to her readers. She sets the comfortable Christmas of the West against African girls who are promised as a child and are already mothers. More than half of the world, she writes, has never heard of Jesus. She asks her readers to pray for more workers. The church has a larger outlook than the gloomy prospect.

That question she also put to her own church. She asked the CRC to begin a mission of its own in Nigeria. According to the Christian History Institute the synods, the national assemblies of the church, kept saying no.

Beets knew her well. He traveled with her and spoke at meetings of the Women's Missionary Union, the mission league of women in the church. Her articles regularly appeared in the Missionary Monthly, a magazine he co-edited. After her death he gave memorial addresses. They aroused so much interest that in 1937 he published a book about her, *Johanna of Nigeria*, with much of her own writing in it.

A colleague later described her as tall, very humble and very human. If she had been curt in the afternoon, in the evening she offered her apologies. Prayer, the colleague said, made them one. So it stands in the account of the Christian History Institute.

Palm Sunday in Vom

In March 1933 Johanna became ill. She went to the hospital of the Sudan United Mission in Vom, on the plateau near Jos, in the present state of Plateau. She was operated on for her appendix. At first the operation seemed to go well. Then she grew worse.

She died on April 9, 1933. It was Palm Sunday. Ten days later she would have turned thirty-nine. She was buried in Vom.

According to the Christian History Institute she said at the end, while friends prayed around her bed, that she had no regrets and that the Lord was her portion. She called herself only a sinner, saved by grace. Another account puts in her mouth (my translation) the words: I am not sorry. It is all in God's will.

Seven years later

Johanna had still prepared the handover. According to the Nigerian church she laid the foundation for the takeover of the work by the CRC. From 1937 that got under way. In 1939 the synod decided that the station Lupwe Takum should be taken over. In 1940 the Christian Reformed Church in North America officially took over the mission field. Seven years after her death her church did what she had asked.

In the American church she is now regarded as the first CRC missionary in Nigeria, even though she went under a British flag. From that mission field a Nigerian church grew. In 1951 it became an independent church. Since 1967 it has been called the Christian Re-

formed Church of Nigeria. In 2008 the American CRC spoke of more than seventy-five thousand members in a hundred congregations. Later figures from the church itself are higher. The Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria, too, with its headquarters in Takum, has roots in her work according to surveys.

In Donga, where Johanna lived seven months before she went to Lupwe, now stands the Veenstra Seminary, the theological school of the church. A building of Calvin University in Grand Rapids also bears her name. Her letters, photos and a family history are kept in Heritage Hall, the archive of that university.

A new plaque

Her grave in Vom fell into oblivion. The plaque had been missing for at least twenty-three years. In November 2008, seventy-five years after her death, four Kuteb students of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria went on a Saturday to the grave, next to a hospital and an auto repair shop. Their teacher, the American missionary Timothy Palmer, went along. They brought cement, water and tools. They cleaned the grave and laid a new memorial plate. The students were angry that the old plate had been gone for so long.

Palmer told his church afterward that he had always thought Johanna was one of them, an American from the CRC. He said (my translation): but the Kuteb thought she was one of theirs.

How would it be if strangers came to clean your grave, seventy-five years after you died, because you once came to them?

Johanna Veenstra came from a Dutch church in an American city. She learned the faith in a catechism class, from a minister who came to her home. She went to a people whose language she did not yet

speak, under a mission that was not of her own church. She became thirty-eight.

In Vom, on the plateau, stands a plate of cement that was made by her spiritual children.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): born in 1894 in Paterson, New Jersey; daughter of Rev. William Veenstra (1868-1902), minister in the Christian Reformed Church; the Dutch roots of that church in Paterson; the meeting with Karl Kumm in 1915; joining the Sudan United Mission in 1919 because the CRC had no foreign mission of its own; arrival in Nigeria in January 1920 and in Lupwe in February 1921; leadership of the work in Lupwe; medical work, a school and preaching; many Kuteb who became Christians; the book Pioneering for Christ in the Sudan (1926); Henry Beets, who urged her to write that book and later wrote about her (*Johanna of Nigeria*, 1937); her place as the first CRC missionary in Nigeria; death on Palm Sunday April 9, 1933 after an appendix operation, buried in Vom; takeover of the field by the CRC in 1940; Veenstra Seminary in Donga; the restoration of her grave by Kuteb students in 2008.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the scene on the dock in New York and the storm at sea; the waiting in London and the journey over the Benue; the front tire, the rubber tree and the young Christian; the scenes in the dispensary, the school and on the trips; the stories about Danyelu (Nasamu), Astira and the elders Filibbus, Istifanus and Danyelu (not to be confused with Filibus Ashu Angyu, the Nigerian missionary of 1916); the words at her deathbed: that she had no regrets and called herself a sinner, saved by grace (Christian History Institute); her youth, the Sunday school and the job in New York; the year of struggle and the talks with Rev. Van Goor; the

three days of prayer after the conference; the age limit of twenty-five and what she did in the waiting time; the route to Lupwe and her remark that no white woman had made that journey alone; her description of the Kuteb as a cannibal tribe; her last words (only via the Christian History Institute, without source); the judgment of a colleague.

Unconfirmed: a birth certificate or emigration record I have not seen; the name of her mother, her birthday and the street (one survey source); the year 1923 for her leadership; the colleague Miss Haigh; where in the Netherlands the family came from (not found; the family history in the Johanna Veenstra Collection of Heritage Hall, COLL-306, is not online); Beets' *Johanna of Nigeria* (online as a pdf, but I could not open it); her own book (full text on archive.org) I consulted for this version through summarizing fragments per chapter, not read word for word; years in those fragments that did not agree with the other sources I did not adopt; an article about her in the Dictionary of African Christian Biography I have not found; the age at which she became a stenographer (fourteen according to her book, fifteen according to the Christian History Institute); the reasons why the synods rejected her request; numbers of patients, pupils and baptized. An article in The Banner from 2011 places the restoration of the grave in the fall of 2010; the CRC report of December 2008 and the Christian History Institute give 2008. The same Banner article has her arrive in Nigeria in 1921; according to her own book that was January 1920, and she arrived in Lupwe in 1921.

Interpretation: that Johanna as a woman led a mission station because there were no male missionaries is in the sources. That she was opposed for that reason I have found nowhere. Membership figures of the Nigerian church come from the churches themselves.

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Afterword

A nun who could not sit still. A mother who opened the rectory on Sunday evenings. A blind woman who wrote hymns in her head. A woman who wanted to say something. An evangelist with raised hands. A mill girl who went up the river. A mother of Dohnavur who never married. A typist who went to Lupwe.

They lived in different centuries and belonged to different churches. Some of them would have disagreed with one another. A few of them made choices you may have questions about. I have tried to show them as they were.

Behind every woman in this book stand thousands who were never written down. Mothers, sisters, teachers, nurses, women who prayed. They too belong to that great company.

The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it. (Psalm 68:11)