HEROES OF FAITH AMONG WOMEN

VOLUME 2

Women of God

Eight women who followed God, from Hildegard of Bingen to Elisabeth Elliot

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 2

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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 whispermagazine.org.

Introduction: eight messengers

Volume 1 of this book began with a line from Psalm 68: *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. In that first volume I told the story of eight of them. This is volume 2, with eight others.

They lived in different centuries, countries and churches. A German abbess from the twelfth century who wrote down what she saw and, as an old woman, traveled from cathedral to cathedral to preach. A slave from the state of New York who spoke only Dutch as a child and won her son back in court. A washerwoman from Maryland, born a slave, who traveled as an evangelist to England, India and Liberia. An English painter who said no to John Ruskin and worked for forty years in Algiers. A Russian poet who became a nun in Paris, helped Jews and died in Ravensbrück. A housemaid from London who was turned down by a missionary society and went to China by train. An American evangelist who filled halls with the sick and kept saying that she healed no one. And a widow who went with her little daughter to live among the people of the men who had killed her husband.

Why a second volume?

Volume 1 told of eight women. There are many more. These eight, too, often stand in the shadow of something or someone else in the history of the church: an abbot, a husband, a missionary society, a famous film. I wanted to tell their own story.

A few of these women preached, which was unusual in their time and which still does not happen in every church today. A few met opposition because they were women. 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. Sojourner Truth probably did not say her best-known sentence in that form. For the best-known story about the death of Mother Maria I have found no eyewitness. 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 volume belong to very different churches and movements: the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Methodists and the holiness movement, Protestant missionary societies, independent congregations and the charismatic renewal. They are in order of time, from the twelfth century to the twentieth.

How you can read this book

Each chapter stands on its own, and you do not need to read volume 1 first. Start wherever you like. Read 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.

Hildegard of Bingen: the woman who saw the living light

She was forty-two years and seven months old. That is how precisely she wrote it down later, at the beginning of her first great book. It was the year 1141. A fiery light, she said, came out of an open heaven and filled her whole mind. It set her heart and breast on fire, the way the sun warms everything its rays fall on. It was glowing hot, she wrote, but it did not burn.

Then she heard a voice. It called her a frail human being, ashes of ashes. And that voice gave her a task: *Say and write what you see and hear.*

In a single moment she understood the meaning of the Psalms, the Gospels and the other books of the Bible. But the words, the syllables and the grammar she kept finding hard.

She did not do what the voice told her. She refused for a long time, she wrote, not out of stubbornness but out of humility. She doubted herself, and she knew what others would say about a woman with visions. Until she fell ill and ended up in bed. She saw it as a rebuke

from God. Only then did she begin to write, and from that moment she got back on her feet. It took her ten years.

This is her own account. No one else was there inside her mind and heart. What is certain is what happened afterward. A nun from a small convent in the Rhineland wrote books that a pope had read aloud. She wrote letters to popes, to an emperor and to bishops. She composed music that is still sung today. As an old woman she traveled from cathedral to cathedral to preach. And more than eight hundred years after her death the Roman Catholic Church named her a Doctor of the Church, a title that very few people have received.

But in 1141 she was above all a woman who did not dare. To understand why, we have to go back to a girl of eight.

A child who was given away

Hildegard was born in 1098, in the Rhineland, in what is now the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Her parents were noble and owned land. She came from a large family.

Do not picture the world of that time as a country. There was the Holy Roman Empire, a loose collection of principalities under an emperor. Bishops were also landlords. The church of Western Europe was one church, with the pope in Rome at its head. A Reformation was still four hundred years away.

For a girl from the nobility there were roughly two roads: marry or enter a convent. Hildegard's parents chose for her. They dedicated her to God. When she was eight, she became an oblate, a child given by her parents to a monastery. The Rule of Benedict, the way of life the monk Benedict wrote in the sixth century and that many monasteries followed, describes this custom in a chapter of its own.

First she went to a widow, Uda of Göllheim. Then she was entrusted to Jutta of Sponheim, a young woman from a noble family. On November 1, 1112, Jutta and Hildegard had themselves enclosed at the Benedictine monastery on the Disibodenberg, a hill near Bingen. You have to take that enclosing literally. An anchoress lived shut away in a small room attached to a church or monastery.

The monastery on the hill was a monastery for men. The women lived next to it, under the authority of the abbot. Over the following years a small community of women grew up around Jutta's cell.

In 1115 Hildegard took her monastic vows. Life revolved around the hours, the fixed services of prayer in which the psalms were sung. Later she would call herself unlearned. She had been taught to read, nothing more, and she would keep saying so all her life. A monk of the monastery, Volmar, became her teacher. He stayed at her side until his death.

"From my earliest childhood"

Hildegard had a secret, and she told almost no one. She saw things.

According to her biography, it began when she was three. She saw a light so great that her soul trembled. A child who sees that does not talk about it. At five, as she herself told it in the introduction to her first book, she knew she saw what others did not see. She kept it to herself, except for a few people in the convent.

She wrote it herself, years later, in a letter to the most famous monk in Europe. From her earliest childhood, she wrote, she had seen great wonders, with the eyes of her spirit and not with her ordinary eyes. In another letter, to a monk who would become her secretary, she added that it began before her bones, nerves and veins were strong.

She never described it as dreams or as a kind of trance. She saw, she said, while she was awake and clear in mind, by day and by night. She never fell into ecstasy. What she saw and heard, she remembered. She wrote down only what she perceived, not what her own heart imagined. The light she saw, she said, had no length, width or height. In a letter in her old age she gave it a name: the shadow of the living light.

Her words, she said, did not sound like human speech. They were more like a shining flame or a cloud. She could never have made a book of it herself, she felt, and she held to that until the end of her life. Those who visited her, Guibert said later, could not explain her. They only said that her soul was lit by an invisible radiance that only she knew.

Sometimes, she wrote, she saw within that light the living light itself. Then her sorrow fell away from her and she felt young again.

What is a Protestant reader to make of that? I tell it the way she told it, because otherwise you cannot understand her life. She did not doubt the source. She did doubt herself.

Jutta was the only person she spoke to about her visions, one biographer writes. Jutta passed it on to Volmar. So there was a monk who knew what she saw, long before she put anything on paper herself.

A woman in charge

In 1136 Jutta died. The sisters chose Hildegard as their magistra, their leader. She was thirty-eight. She now led a community of women, but it still stood under the abbot of the Disibodenberg, Kuno.

Five years later came the light of 1141, and the command to write. In the introduction to her book she names two people who could tes-

tify that it happened that way: a young woman of good family, and the monk she had long sought in vain and had finally found. She dictated to Volmar and to a young nun she loved dearly, Richardis of Stade. The book that came out of this was given the title *Scivias*, Latin for "Know the Ways." It describes thirty-five visions, from creation to the end of time. At its center, according to Benedict XVI, stands the bond between God and humanity, which became visible when Christ became man.

In the book a second voice can be heard. It speaks of a living and yet hidden light that chooses a person, makes that person humble and leads her through sorrow and work. Such a person must seek a companion, the voice says, and together they must exert themselves. Hildegard read that as a description of what was happening to her.

How do you know whether what you see or hear inside comes from God? That question tormented her. She was a woman, she was unlearned, and the church of her time did not let women teach. She decided to seek help from someone with authority.

A letter to Clairvaux

Around 1146 she wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux. He was abbot of a monastery in France, the best-known preacher of his day and a man who advised popes. Her letter has been preserved. You can hear a frightened woman in it. She wrote that she had never lived one hour free of anxiety. She had heard of many heresies and so had told no one what she saw, except one monk whose life she trusted. That silence had made her ill. And she did not dare to speak either.

She called herself wretched, and more than wretched, in her condition as a woman. She described how Bernard had appeared to her in an earlier vision, like a man looking straight into the sun. She said that the insight touched her like a burning flame. She wrote in

tears, she said. And she asked him whether she should speak about what she saw, or keep silent.

Bernard's answer was short. He encouraged her and asked her to pray for him. Nothing more.

The moment when everything changed lies in the winter of 1147 into 1148. Pope Eugenius III held a church council, a synod, in Trier. Archbishop Henry of Mainz laid a text of Hildegard's before him. The pope read from it. He gave her permission to write down what she saw. The apostolic letter of 2012 adds that she was also allowed to speak in public. A bishop, Albero of Verdun, examined her and reported favorably on her.

Afterward Hildegard wrote the pope a letter. In it she called herself small and insignificant, and she asked him to support her book. That letter shows that many learned men were against her work. She received the approval of the highest church leader of her time. With that she did not win over all the scholars.

Later, around 1175, she herself received a letter from an admirer, Guibert of Gembloux. He wrote that she had gifts that had not been seen for centuries. He placed her in a line with Miriam, Deborah and Judith. And he warned her: *great trees are uprooted sooner than reeds.* A compliment with a brake on it.

A hill she had to leave

Hildegard wanted to leave the Disibodenberg. Her group was growing, and she wanted a convent of her own for the sisters. She had a place in mind: the Rupertsberg, a hill near Bingen on the Rhine.

Abbot Kuno did not want to let her go. He wanted to keep her as prioress under his own authority. There was a great deal of opposi-

tion, the sources say. Hildegard went over his head to Archbishop Henry of Mainz. And then something happened that is recorded in her biography. She became so ill that she could not move. She understood it as a sign that God did not approve of her staying. When the abbot himself could not get her back on her feet, he gave in.

In 1150 she moved to the Rupertsberg with about twenty sisters. Volmar went along as priest. In 1152 the archbishop of Mainz consecrated the church of the new convent. A year earlier, in 1151, *Scivias* had been finished.

Richardis

In that same year, 1151, came the most painful break of her life. Richardis of Stade, the nun who had helped her with the writing, was chosen abbess of a convent in Bassum, in northern Germany. Her family had influence, and her brother Hartwig was archbishop of Bremen.

Hildegard did not want to let her go. She wrote to the family, to church leaders and to Richardis herself. It was not the will of God that they be separated, she wrote. It did not help. Richardis left. On October 29, 1152, she died in Bassum, after less than a year as abbess. According to one source she had planned to return to Hildegard.

In October 1152 Hildegard wrote to Hartwig. That letter has been preserved. His message was that his sister had had a good Christian end. Hildegard wrote back that she trusted in the salvation of Richardis. And she wrote about her death: *For God loved her more.* She would cast the grief out of her heart, she said.

In that letter she called Richardis her daughter and also her mother. She wrote that Richardis was admired for her beauty and her worldly wisdom, and that she had nevertheless always detached herself from what the world offered her. Hildegard herself had

loved Richardis with divine love, she said. This had been commanded to her in a vision, she wrote, by the living lights. While Richardis was still alive, she had heard the words in a vision: *O virginity, you are standing in the royal bridal chamber.* The old serpent had tried to rob Richardis of her honor, through her high birth. But the mighty Judge had drawn her to Himself. Hildegard closed with a request to Hartwig: do good works in her memory.

I find this one of the most honest letters of her life. The woman who rebuked emperors could not let go of a friend. She wrote it down, and then she gave it back to God.

An abbess who did not sit still

On the Rupertsberg Hildegard kept writing. Between 1158 and 1173 she produced the *Book of Life's Merits*, about virtues and sins, and the *Book of Divine Works*. The latter consists of five visions. It began with a vision she later described herself, a rain of sweet drops. She linked it to the beginning of the Gospel of John, about the Word who was with God in the beginning. Benedict XVI wrote that the book is inspired by those words.

She also wrote about nature and about illness. In two books, *Physica* and *Causae et curae*, she described plants, animals, stones and the workings of the body, as the scholars of her time saw them. She even invented a language of her own, the *Lingua ignota*, the unknown language, with more than a thousand words and an alphabet of its own. What that language was for, no one knows for sure.

And she wrote music. Her songs for the hours of prayer are collected under the title *Symphonia*. She also wrote a musical play, the *Ordo Virtutum*, the play of the virtues. In it the virtues and a soul sing. Only the devil does not sing. The play was meant for the nuns of her own convent.

In 1165 she founded a second convent, in Eibingen, across the Rhine, above Rüdesheim. She was abbess of both.

If you read her biography, she is also a woman who took in people in need. A noblewoman, Sigewize, was ill or possessed, the two ran together. Pilgrimages and prayers had each time relieved her only for a moment. Her abbot asked Hildegard to take her in. Hildegard spoke with her at length, adjusted her food, held conversations with the evil spirit and drove it out. Sigewize became one of the sisters. After a while she was healed. This story appears in the biography that was written down after Hildegard's death, and so does the fact that the care left Hildegard herself weak and ill.

"Listen, king"

From the Rupertsberg Hildegard wrote letters all across Europe. About four hundred have been preserved. She corresponded with at least four popes, and with archbishops, bishops, abbots and abbesses. Ordinary people also asked her for advice. She answered, she said, out of the radiance of the living light.

One of her correspondents was Emperor Frederick I, who was called Barbarossa, Redbeard. He was at odds with Pope Alexander III and backed a series of antipopes against him, men who also called themselves pope. That is how a schism in the church came about. Hildegard wrote to the emperor that he too stood under God's judgment. In one of her letters, which Benedict XVI quoted, she wrote: *Listen, O King, if you wish to live!*

When I read this I keep thinking of the three-year-old girl who kept silent about the light. The woman who for years did not dare to speak was now speaking to an emperor. She did not do it because she thought herself great. She called herself weak, ashes of ashes, and she believed that someone else was speaking through her.

She was a woman in a convent, with no army and no land. She had only her pen and the conviction that she was passing on what she saw. Only after a defeat in 1176 did Barbarossa make peace with Alexander. Whether her letters contributed to that, no one can say.

An old woman in the pulpit

Between 1158 and 1171 Hildegard did something extremely rare for a woman of her time. She set out to preach. She spoke in convents, in town squares and in cathedrals, in Mainz, Würzburg, Bamberg, Trier, Metz, Cologne and Liège. According to the apostolic letter of 2012, she did so at the invitation of Popes Hadrian IV and Alexander III. When she finished her last journey in 1171, she was seventy-three.

She preached mostly against clergy and monastics who did not live as they had promised. She also spoke against the Cathars, a movement that wanted to purify the church and, in Hildegard's view, tore the church down in the process. Her way was a different one: conversion of the heart. Fifty-eight of her sermons have been preserved.

She did not go around her church. She went through the door that was opened to her, with the permission of the church leadership.

Would you, at seventy, still travel over bad roads to cities to call people to repentance?

The year without singing

In 1173 Volmar died, her teacher, confessor and scribe. A monk from the present-day Belgian town of Gembloux, Guibert, took over his task as secretary. It was to him that she wrote the letter about the living light.

Then came the last conflict. In 1178 a nobleman was buried in the cemetery of the Rupertsberg. He had once been placed under the ban, excommunicated, which meant he was excluded from the sacraments. But before his death he had confessed and received communion, and his own priest had buried him. For Hildegard he was reconciled with the church.

The church leaders of Mainz saw it differently and demanded that the body be dug up. Hildegard refused. Then they laid an interdict on her convent, a church penalty. No more Mass could be celebrated, the nuns could not receive communion, and they could no longer sing the hours of prayer.

For a woman who had lived for praise in song all her life, it was a heavy blow. The nuns obeyed, so as not to be wholly disobedient. They stopped singing and stopped the Mass. But Hildegard had seen what would happen if the man were dug up. In a vision she saw a terrible and pitiable danger, like a dark cloud before a threatening storm. She kept refusing.

She wrote the prelates of Mainz a long letter. In it she explained that the praise sung in church is rooted in the Holy Spirit. She referred to Psalm 150. Instruments and song teach a person inner truth through what he hears. Singing can release tears and sighs, she wrote, because it reminds us of a higher harmony. In paradise Adam had a voice that joined the song of the angels. Through his disobedience only a faint memory remained, as of a dream. The devil does everything he can to silence holy song. She warned the prelates to test their decision against justice and not against anger or revenge. Whoever forbade a church to sing without good reason and robbed God of His praise, she wrote, must repent. She asked them to discuss it thoroughly first.

It took months, and many letters went back and forth. A few months before her death the interdict was lifted. The nuns were allowed to sing again.

Hildegard fell ill in the summer of 1179. On September 17, 1179, she died on the Rupertsberg. She was eighty-one years old. She was buried in front of the altar of her convent church.

According to the stories handed down about her dying, the sisters saw two rays of light in the sky that crossed above her room. Two monks, Gottfried and Theoderic, wrote her biography, the *Vita*. Gottfried began it as early as 1174, while she was still alive. Guibert also worked on it, and Theoderic finished it. For this he also used what Hildegard herself had told about her life, so that the *Vita* is a mixture of her own memories and the account of the men who lived around her. Theoderic never met her. As far as is known, he added only the account of her death.

A saint without canonization

Soon after her death she was venerated as a saint. In 1227 Pope Gregory IX began an official inquiry. The report was rejected in 1237 because it said too little about miracles. Later popes tried again. The process was never completed. Still, a papal document from 1326 already called her "Saint Hildegard," and at the end of the sixteenth century her name entered the Roman Martyrology, the official calendar of saints of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1632, during the Thirty Years' War, Swedish troops destroyed the Rupertsberg. The nuns brought her relics, her remains, to Eibingen. In 1904 Benedictine nuns moved into a new abbey above Eibingen, which bears her name.

In the twentieth century a new interest in her arose. An Austrian physician, Gottfried Hertzka, took up her recipes. That is how what

is now called Hildegard medicine came about. She also became popular in esoteric circles. Much of what is sold under her name today comes from later times. Researchers of monastic medicine are critical of it. Whoever wants to get to know her is best off reading her own books and letters.

On May 10, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI declared her a saint. He did so in a special way, without a new process, because she had been venerated for centuries. On October 7, 2012, he proclaimed her a Doctor of the Church in St. Peter's Square in Rome. The Roman Catholic Church gives that title to people whose teaching it considers to be of lasting value for the whole church.

The living light

You do not have to be a Roman Catholic to learn something from Hildegard. I am not one myself. What touches me is her hesitation. She was forty-two, and she had known all her life what she saw. Still she did not dare to say it. She asked advice from Bernard, she laid it before the pope, she let herself be examined. She did not want to go on carrying it alone.

Pope John Paul II called her in 1979 a light for her people and her time. She herself would not have chosen that word. She preferred to write about another light. As an old woman on the Rupertsberg she wrote to Guibert about it. The light she had seen as a child was still there. She called it the shadow of the living light.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in 1098 in a noble family in the Rhineland; entrusted to Uda of Göllheim and then to Jutta of Sponheim; enclosed on the Disibodenberg (November 1, 1112); monastic vows (1115); magistra after the death of Jutta

(1136); the writing of *Scivias* (1141-1151) with the help of Volmar and Richardis, thirty-five visions; the letter to Bernard of Clairvaux and his short answer; approval by Pope Eugenius III around the synod of Trier (1147/1148), the examination by Albero of Verdun and her letter to the pope; the move to the Rupertsberg (around 1150), the consecration of the church in 1152 and the founding of Eibingen (1165); the departure and death of Richardis (October 29, 1152) and the letter to Hartwig; her books, music and about four hundred letters, including the one to Barbarossa; the preaching journeys between 1158 and 1171 and fifty-eight preserved sermons; the letter of Guibert of Gembloux around 1175; the interdict of 1178-1179; her death on September 17, 1179; the failed canonization processes in the thirteenth century; the destruction of the Rupertsberg in 1632; the canonization on May 10, 2012 and the title Doctor of the Church on October 7, 2012.

Only from own testimony (*Scivias*, her letters): the fiery light and the voice of 1141, her refusal and her illness; that she saw while awake and never fell into ecstasy; the seeing since her earliest childhood, at her fifth year according to the introduction to *Scivias*; the letter to Bernard with her fear and her question; the letter about the shadow of the living light; the rain of sweet drops that preceded the *Book of Divine Works*; her words to Hartwig.

Only from her biography and later tradition: the light of her third year; that Jutta alone knew her visions and passed them on to Volmar (a biographer, not a contemporary); her paralysis during the resistance of Abbot Kuno and the abbot's giving in, which is also preserved in her own circle and not confirmed from another side; the healing of Sigewize; the rays of light above her deathbed.

Unconfirmed or disputed: her exact birthplace (probably Bermersheim near Alzey; an older encyclopedia names Böckelheim on the Nahe); that she was the tenth child (seven older siblings are

known); the year of the move (1147 to 1150 in different sources) and the number of sisters (twenty, or eighteen according to an older source); the exact role of Bernard with the pope (later sources say he pleaded with the pope, but in a letter this is not recorded); whether she was the only woman who preached like this in the Middle Ages (an encyclopedia says so); the purpose of her *Lingua ignota*; whether Hildegard truly healed Sigewize, or whether a hagiographer let her show her power.

Interpretation: whether her visions came from God is a question of faith. In the twentieth century the neurologist Oliver Sacks wrote that her descriptions made him think of migraine. It remains a possible explanation from a physician who never met her, and Hildegard herself did not doubt the source. Modern Hildegard medicine and esoteric claims date from the twentieth century and go beyond what is in her own work.

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Sojourner Truth: the slave who spoke Dutch

On March 1, 1828, a court case began in the state of New York that almost no one would have thought possible. A woman who had still been property a year earlier demanded her son back. She could neither read nor write. In the court papers she appears as Isabella Van Wagenen. Her son Peter had been sold at about the age of five and taken to Alabama, far in the South, where slavery was still going strong. That was against the law of New York. Two lawyers from Kingston took the case. She won. Peter went free.

The eight pages of that case lay for almost two hundred years in the state archives in Albany. Archivist Jim Folts found them again, and in February 2022 the discovery was announced. Among them are a statement by Isabella herself, an order from the judge and the answer of the man who had sold her son.

Fifteen years after that case, Isabella gave herself a new name: Sojourner Truth. She became a traveling preacher, one of the best-known voices against slavery, and a woman who was received by the President of the United States. A bust of her stands in the Capitol in Washington. But her first words were spoken in Dutch.

"Mein Got, mein Got"

Isabella was born around 1797 in Hurley, in Ulster County in the state of New York. Her parents were named James, who was called Bomefree, and Betsey. They were slaves of the Hardenbergh family, a wealthy Dutch American family. In the census of 1790, Johannes Hardenbergh is registered in Hurley with seven slaves.

For a Dutch reader this may be the most surprising part of her story. The Hudson Valley had once been New Netherland. A century and a half later, many families there still spoke Dutch, or a form of it that was called Low Dutch. The Swedish traveler Peter Kalm wrote in 1749 that Dutch church services were held in the region. The slaves in those households spoke Dutch too. In her own life story Isabella says that her family belonged to the people who were called Low Dutch.

Until she was nine she spoke only Dutch. All her life she kept a heavy Dutch accent. When she later told how her mother had wept over children who had been sold, she fell back into that language. *Mein Got, mein Got*, her mother cried, according to that account.

Her mother had more children than Isabella ever got to know. Brothers and sisters had been sold before she was born. This is how Isabella told it later: in the evening her mother took her outside and pointed to the stars. Those were the same stars and the same moon that her brothers and sisters saw too, she said. And she taught her to pray.

That prayer stayed. Later the girl looked for a place by a little stream, on a small island under the willows, and prayed there out loud. The sound of the water, she thought, made sure no one could hear her. She spoke with God as with someone she knew well and met on equal terms. She asked for help and promised in return to be good. She promised it again and again, and each time she failed.

I find this uncomfortable to read. The language in which I write this book was the language in which this child was bought and sold.

A hundred dollars and a flock of sheep

After the death of her owner the family was divided. Her parents were separated from each other. Her father spent his last years going from one house of the family to another, until he died.

Around 1806, when Isabella was about nine, she was sold to John Neely. She went for a hundred dollars, together with a flock of sheep. The Neelys spoke English. Isabella could not understand them. In 1808 an innkeeper, Martinus Schryver, bought her for a hundred and five dollars. She stayed there for about a year and a half.

In 1810 she was sold to John J. Dumont in West Park, on the Hudson. A daughter of Dumont remembered later that on her arrival the girl spoke only Dutch. With the Dumonts she stayed for sixteen years.

This is how she told it herself later: she thought of Dumont the way a child thinks of a God. He saw everything, she believed, and she confessed her faults to him. That slavery was part of how the world was put together, she believed too.

Around 1815 she began a relationship with Robert, a slave from a farm nearby. His owner did not want that, and according to the National Park Service he beat Robert to death. Later Isabella married Thomas, another slave. A fellow slave performed the ceremony. They had five children, as her life story says.

Dumont's promise

The state of New York ended slavery in stages. For Isabella's generation, July 4, 1827, became the day she would be free. Dumont promised her that she could go free a year early if she worked well.

In 1826 he went back on that promise. She had hurt her hand and had been able to work less, he said, according to her account.

Isabella decided to go on her own. Early in the day she walked away, with her youngest child Sophia, a baby, in her arms. The older children she had to leave behind. Later she told Dumont that she had not fled in the dark. She had walked away in daylight, in her words, and only because he had promised her that year.

She ended up with Isaac Van Wagenen and his family, a Dutch American family. They were Methodists. When Dumont came to fetch her, Isaac Van Wagenen paid him twenty dollars for the rest of her year of service and five dollars for the child. Isabella wanted to call him "master" after that. According to her account he refused. There is only one Master, he said, and the One who is your Master is mine too. She took his last name.

Pinkster 1827

In Dutch New York, black families celebrated Pinkster every year, their word for Pentecost. It was a few days when slaves who were spread over different farms could visit one another. In the spring of 1827, shortly before her legal freedom, Isabella wanted to go back to Dumont's farm to celebrate Pinkster there.

What happened then, she told herself. She had been living with the Van Wagenens for a few months, and things were going so well for her that she had almost forgotten God. One day Dumont came to pick her up. At that moment, in the blink of an eye, she wrote, God was there. He was everywhere. She realized that He knew everything, including all her broken promises. She was convinced she would be destroyed. In fear she waited for a second glance. None came.

Then she cried out loud that she had not known how great God was. She walked back to the house, but she could not pray. She had told God nothing but lies, she thought, and she wished that someone else, someone better, could plead for her.

After that she saw someone who stood between her and God. It was a radiant figure, gentle and loving. She kept calling out: I know You. Then she heard the answer that it was Jesus. She saw Him, in her words, as a friend. She stayed with the Van Wagenens, and God no longer filled her with fear.

Her life story notes that her later ideas about who exactly Jesus was fit into no theological system. She had no education and could not read the Bible herself. Her faith began with that one experience: a God who was suddenly close, and a Jesus who stepped in front of her.

Do you recognize something of that fear and that relief? Many people who come to know God describe it this way. Isabella could not find words for it in books. She used her own.

A son in Alabama

Shortly before this, Dumont had sold her son Peter, then about five years old. The buyer was Eleazar Gedney of Newburgh, who passed him on to his brother Solomon. Through that family the child ended up in Alabama. Under New York law, a slave who was eligible for emancipation could not be sold out of the state.

When Isabella heard where her son was, she first went to her former mistress, Mrs. Dumont. She waved away her grief. Then she went to Mrs. Gedney. She laughed at her distress. Isabella said she would get her son back. God would give her the means, was her reasoning.

A stranger who saw her recommended the Quakers to her. They gave her shelter and sent her to the courthouse in Kingston, the county seat of Ulster County, to file a complaint. A lawyer had her swear an oath on a book, which amused the clerks, and issued a warrant. The constable first fetched the wrong man, but in the end Solomon Gedney stood before the judge and posted bail of six hundred dollars. A second lawyer asked five dollars to bring the boy back. Isabella raised the money through the Quakers and paid him more than he asked.

That was the lead-up. The archive documents that surfaced in 2022 confirm the core of it. On March 1, 1828, a case against Solomon Gedney began at the state's Supreme Court. A writ of habeas corpus was issued, a demand to bring a detained person before the judge. The judge ordered that Peter be set free.

At the hearing Peter at first wanted nothing to do with his mother. He begged to be allowed to stay with his master. The judge ordered that he be handed over to his mother. When she undressed him, she saw his body covered with scars and hard patches. He told her that a man in Alabama had beaten him and that a woman of that household had secretly rubbed grease into his wounds.

Through that whole case Isabella had done one thing, she said later: she simply prayed to God that He would make people listen. She was sure He moved the hearts of the clerks, the lawyers and the judges.

I cannot check whether it went that way. What is certain is that a woman who could still be sold a year earlier got a state court to bring her child back.

A prophet in New York

After the case Isabella stayed in Kingston for about a year. She joined the Methodist church there. Around 1829 she moved with Peter to New York City, where she worked as a housekeeper. At first she attended the Methodist church on John Street, then Zion's Church on Church Street, a congregation of black believers only. She went to camp meetings, open-air gatherings of Methodists and other revival groups, and began to speak there herself.

Those years also had a dark side. Through her employer Elijah Pierson she became involved with the group of a man who called himself the prophet Matthias. He claimed that the spirit of God the Father lived in him. Isabella lived in his community in 1833 and 1834. According to the PBS website, Matthias beat her. According to biographer Nancy Koester, she was at first allowed to preach in the group, until a new leader silenced women whenever men were present. After the group fell apart, Isabella was accused of poisoning and theft. According to the National Park Service she was acquitted.

Things were hard with Peter too. In New York he got into trouble with the police. In 1839 he signed on to a whaling ship. A few letters came. In 1842 the ship returned without him. Isabella never heard from him again.

Pentecost 1843

In 1843 Isabella was about forty-six. At Pentecost, she said, the Spirit called her. She had to leave New York, a city she called a second Sodom, and go east. She gave up her work as a servant and left.

On June 1, 1843, she crossed over to Brooklyn. Her belongings were in a pillowcase. In her purse were two York shillings. She had told no one why she was going, because she expected her children and

friends to object. Only to her landlady, Mrs. Whiting, did she say that she was no longer called Isabella but Sojourner, and that she was going east. Mrs. Whiting asked her why. She answered that the Spirit was calling her there and that she had to go, as her story has it. Only when she was far enough away did she look back. The city had become a cloud of smoke.

She also chose a new name. Sojourner means something like stranger, someone who is passing through. She would travel through the land. Truth she added because she had to proclaim the truth. This is how she explained it later herself: the Lord had given her the name Sojourner because she was to travel up and down the land and show people their sins. Biographer Nancy Koester links it to the biblical expression about strangers and sojourners on the earth. For someone who had carried the last name of an owner all her life, a name she believed she received from God was no small thing.

The first nights were hard. She looked for shelter, sometimes paid, and chose poor families over rich ones, because they were more hospitable. In the middle of Long Island, after many refusals, she met two men on the road. She lied that she was traveling with others. At an inn she refused a room, because then she would be locked in. She carried a bundle, a basket of food and little money. She worked where she could for her keep and accepted small sums, just enough for what she called the tax for Caesar.

That year she spoke at least twice at camp meetings of the Millerites, followers of the American preacher William Miller, who expected the return of Christ around 1843. According to her account the people there were excited and afraid. She calmed them with words and with singing. At Windsor Locks she told them to wait quietly in their tents and pray. The Lord came quietly and gently.

Another time, at a camp meeting near Northampton, a group of young men threatened the tents. Sojourner first hid behind a trunk and was ashamed of her fear. Then she walked alone to a raised spot and sang. A moment later she stood surrounded by men with clubs. She asked why they were threatening her, and spoke to them from a wagon. They promised to leave in peace, in a loud chorus, and she declared the promise sealed. They left together. For the rest of the meeting no one came back.

A traveling woman who preached was rare in those years. She had no church behind her and no ordination, no education and no papers. She had her voice, her knowledge of the Bible by heart, and her story.

A book she could not read

In 1844 she joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, a community in Florence, Massachusetts, a living community of opponents of slavery. There she met William Lloyd Garrison, the best-known abolitionist in the country, and the escaped slave Frederick Douglass. Abolitionists were people who wanted slavery abolished completely.

The community fell apart in 1846. Sojourner stayed in Northampton and began to tell her life story to Olive Gilbert, who wrote it down. In 1850 it appeared as *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, published with Garrison's support. With the proceeds she bought a house in Northampton.

The book is a dictated story. Nearly everything we know about her youth comes from it, seen through the eyes and the pen of someone else. Gilbert did not always understand what she heard. For example, she wrote "Mau-mau Bett" for Sojourner's mother. Historians

think the Dutch "mama Bet" was meant. As a result readers long thought her mother was named Mau-mau.

That same year Sojourner spoke in Worcester at the first national convention for women's rights. She also sold photographs of herself, with a caption saying that she sold the shadow to support the substance. With that, among other things, she paid off her house in 1853.

Akron, May 29, 1851

On May 29, 1851, Sojourner Truth stood at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio. What she said there became the most famous speech of her life, known as "Ain't I a Woman?" The problem is that two versions of it exist.

The first was written down by Marius Robinson. He was a minister, secretary of the convention and editor of the Anti-Slavery Bugle. On June 21, 1851, his report appeared in that paper. Sojourner was staying with Robinson and his wife at the time. The Library of Congress considers it likely that he went over the text with her. A short report in The Liberator of June 13, 1851, matches it. Robinson himself wrote that her performance could not be put on paper.

In Robinson's version she says she has as much muscle as any man and can do as much work. She has plowed, reaped and chopped wood. *I can't read, but I can hear*, she says. She had heard from the Bible that Eve led man into sin. And Jesus, she says, came from God who made Him and from a woman who bore Him. The men in the hall, in her closing line, were between a hawk and a buzzard. The sentence "Ain't I a woman?" does not appear in this version.

The second version appeared twelve years later, in April and May 1863, in The Independent and the National Anti-Slavery Standard. Frances Dana Gage had presided over the convention in 1851. She

wrote her version after Harriet Beecher Stowe published an article about Sojourner in April 1863. In Gage's text stands the refrain that everyone knows. She has Sojourner speak in the dialect of slaves from the South. And she has her say that she had borne thirteen children and seen most of them sold.

Here it grates. According to her own book, Sojourner had five children. She came from New York, not from the South. Her accent was Dutch. Historians at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio write that Gage gave her a southern stereotype. Historian Nell Irvin Painter examined both accounts in her biography of 1996. Her conclusion (my translation): we cannot know exactly what Truth said in Akron. She did find Robinson's version more reliable.

Even so, Gage's version became the famous one. From 1875 it appeared in later editions of the *Narrative*, and in 1881 in the great history of woman suffrage. Sojourner could not read it herself and, as far as is known, never protested.

I find this a lesson in caution, for this book too. The sentence most associated with her she probably did not say in that form. The thought behind it did come from her: a woman who as a slave had done heavy work asked why she should be less.

Silver Lake, 1858

In 1857 Sojourner moved to Michigan, first to Harmonia, later to Battle Creek. From there she traveled through the Midwest. There she met resistance that had nothing to do with her sermons, and everything to do with who she was.

In 1858 she spoke in Silver Lake, in Kosciusko County, Indiana. A hostile crowd insisted that she was a man in disguise. She was to show her breasts to the women in the hall. Sojourner bared them before the whole room. She said she had nursed many white babies.

The incident was reported locally and in Garrison's The Liberator. The historical blog of the state of Indiana calls it a symbolic rape.

In 1861 she was arrested in Angola, Indiana, for supposedly violating the state's law. She was released and arrested again. Later she said she had stood before a judge six times and had never been convicted.

The Christian magazine Christianity Today mentions that after an attack by a mob she walked with a cane for the rest of her life. The article gives no date or place.

"For Aunty Sojourner Truth"

During the American Civil War Sojourner helped recruit black men for the Northern army. Her grandson James Caldwell served in the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, one of the first black regiments.

In 1864 she went to Washington to work for the National Freedmen's Relief Association, an organization that helped freed slaves. On October 29, 1864, she met President Abraham Lincoln at the White House. In a letter she had written for her, on November 17 from Freedman's Village in Virginia, she told about it.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning. In the waiting room sat some twelve people, among them two black women. Sojourner found the waiting pleasant. She listened as Lincoln talked with others, and she saw that he treated black visitors just as kindly as white ones, perhaps even more kindly. He listened attentively to a sick black woman who was in danger of being put out of her house. He told her where she could get money, but he had already given what he could himself.

When it was her turn, the woman who had brought her introduced her as someone from Michigan. Lincoln sat at his desk. He rose,

shook her hand, bowed and said he was glad to see her. She told him that she had feared for him when he began, as for Daniel in the lions' den. God had saved him, she said, and thanks be to Him that he had been chosen to end slavery. He was the best president who had ever sat in that chair.

Lincoln replied that his predecessors, Washington among them, had been just as good. They had done the same thing when the time had been ripe for it. It was the Southerners who would not behave, he said, and that had given him the opportunity.

Together they looked at a Bible that the black residents of Baltimore had presented to him. Sojourner thought it was beautiful. She remarked that the government had once made laws that forbade black people to learn to read, and that they therefore would not have been able to read this book. Lincoln wrote in her book: "For Aunty Sojourner Truth," with the date and his name. He shook her hand and invited her to come back. She wrote that with him she felt as with a friend.

In Washington she also resisted segregation on the streetcars. In 1867 she warned that black women had to get their rights alongside black men, or the men would become the masters over the women. From 1870 she pleaded for government land for freed slaves. She spoke about it with President Ulysses Grant. The proposal never came. In 1872 she tried to vote in Battle Creek. She was sent away.

Oak Hill

In her last years Sojourner Truth lived in Battle Creek. The PBS website writes that in old age she felt drawn to spiritualism, a movement that sought contact with the dead. That too belongs to an honest picture of her. She was no theologian and followed her own path, with all the risks that brings.

Her trust in God, her life story says, had nothing dark in it. She loved the word she knew: *perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:18). She said she would always keep praying.

On November 26, 1883, she died in her home in Battle Creek. She was about eighty-six. According to the tradition passed on by PBS, her last words were a call to be a follower of the Lord Jesus. She was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek.

In 2009 she received a bust in the Capitol in Washington, the first African American woman to do so.

In the archive in Albany lie the eight pages of 1828. In them she is still called Isabella Van Wagenen, a woman with a Dutch accent who wanted her son back. The name under which the world would know her came only fifteen years later.

Somewhere in those pages stands a mother who could not read, and who knew all the same what she wanted. That is how it began.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth around 1797 in Hurley, Ulster County, as a slave of the Hardenbergh family; Dutch as her first language and a Dutch accent all her life; sale to Neely (c. 1806), Schryver (1808) and Dumont (1810); Dumont's broken promise and her departure with her baby in 1826; payment by Isaac Van Wagenen; legal freedom on July 4, 1827; the illegal sale of Peter to Alabama and the court case won in 1828 (archive documents found again in 2022); move to New York City; involvement with the group of Matthias (1833-1834); Peter's departure in 1839 and disappearance in 1842; the change of name in 1843; Northampton (1844); the *Narrative* (1850); the conventions in Worcester (1850) and Akron (May 29, 1851); the two versions of the speech and their publication dates; Silver Lake (1858) and the arrests in Indiana

(1861); the meeting with Lincoln on October 29, 1864; death on November 26, 1883 in Battle Creek; the bust in the Capitol in 2009.

Only from own testimony (*Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 1850, dictated to Olive Gilbert, and her letter of November 17, 1864): the stars her mother pointed to and the cry *Mein Got*; her prayers by the stream and her promises to God; how she thought about Dumont; the words to Dumont and from Van Wagenen; the vision of God and Jesus in 1827 and her cry about God's greatness; the visits to Mrs. Dumont, Mrs. Gedney and the Quakers, the bail of six hundred dollars, Peter's refusal in the courtroom and his scars; her prayer during the case; the calling at Pentecost 1843, the pillowcase, the two shillings, the conversation with Mrs. Whiting and the explanation of her name; the nights on Long Island; the calming of the Millerites at Windsor Locks and the young men near Northampton; what she said to Lincoln and what he answered (from a letter she had written for her); her last words.

Unconfirmed or disputed: what she said exactly in Akron; the sentence "Ain't I a Woman?" (only in Gage, twelve years later); the thirteen children from Gage's version (contradicting her own book); the death of Robert by beating (seen only in the National Park Service); the mob attack after which she walked with a cane (no date or place); the claim that she was the first black woman to win such a case (so The Low Countries magazine describes her; I could not check it myself); whether the stream and the willows reflect an African tradition of her mother (a PBS website thinks so, but it remains a conjecture); whether she joined the Methodists in Kingston already around 1828 or only in 1843 (the *Narrative* and the National Park Service differ); the attribution of her new name to Pentecost 1843 (an inner calling).

Interpretation: the *Narrative* was written down by Olive Gilbert and contains demonstrable misunderstandings, such as "Mau-mau

Bett" for "mama Bet." Her stories of her youth are valuable, but they come through the pen of another. Whether Jesus was truly present in the vision of 1827 is a question of faith. I read her along with her, as she told it.

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Amanda Smith: the washerwoman who was bought free twice

On a Sunday in September 1868, a black washerwoman sat in the Green Street Methodist Church in New York. She was thirty-one. In the pulpit stood John Inskip, a well-known preacher of the holiness movement. He preached about a clean heart, which a believer could receive from God by faith. He used images she would never forget: a lamp in a dark room, a breath you draw, the blink of an eye.

Amanda Smith was the only black person in the church that morning. She was afraid of white people, as she told it herself later. And yet in the middle of the service she cried out her joy out loud. She had received what she had been praying for for months. A wave of glory, she wrote, came over her, like a wide mantle of peace. During the last hymn she waved her arm and shouted it out. From the pulpit Inskip answered with an amen and a glory to God.

Inskip did not forget that day. After his death his wife wrote to Amanda that the day in old Green Street had never left his memory. He had thanked God that he had been allowed to be there.

A year later Amanda began to preach. She had never been in school for more than a few months. She was never ordained or paid by a church. She would speak at camp meetings in America, in churches in England, in cities in India and in villages in Liberia. She was the first black woman to travel the world as an evangelist.

It began on a farm in Maryland, where she was born a slave.

Brooms by candlelight

Amanda opens her autobiography, which she published in Chicago in 1893, with her birth in Long Green, Maryland, on January 23, 1837. Long Green lies in Baltimore County, in the northeast of the United States. Maryland was a slave state then. Black people could be bought and sold there as property.

Her father was named Samuel Berry. He belonged to Darby Insor. Her mother, Mariam Matthews, belonged to the farm next door, to the family of Shadrach Green. Two slaves on neighboring farms, with children who belonged to the owner of the mother.

Samuel received a small payment for his work. At night he made brooms and mats out of corn husks, which he sold at the market. At harvest time he worked long days in the fields. In this way he saved enough to buy his own freedom. After that he saved for his wife and children.

About how the rest of the family became free, Amanda tells a story she had from her family. The young mistress of her mother, whom she calls Miss Celie, had come to faith at a Methodist camp meeting. When she died young, she asked on her deathbed whether Samuel might have his wife and children. That her father bought the family free is stated in every biography.

Amanda was still very small at the time, she writes. She remembered nothing of slavery itself.

A station on the Underground Railroad

The family moved to York County in Pennsylvania, a state without slavery. Around 1850 they lived there on a farm. More children were born. Amanda would end up being one of thirteen brothers and sisters.

Their house became a station on the Underground Railroad. That name was given to a secret network of homes where slaves who had fled the South could hide on their way north or to Canada. Anyone who helped them took a risk. Slave catchers came by the Berry family's house too.

Amanda hardly went to school. Her parents taught her to read. She cut big letters out of the newspaper and learned to recognize words that way. All told she was in school for about three months, she wrote later. At the age of thirteen she went to work as a maid for white families.

In those years she went to a Methodist revival meeting. When the call was made to come forward, she went. She was the only black girl in the hall, she said. A woman named Mary Bloser prayed with her. But the faith did not last long. She stopped attending the Bible class, began to doubt and even read a book by an unbeliever. An aunt then spoke sharply to her. According to her own account, something broke open then.

From those same years comes a story to which she gives a whole chapter in her autobiography. One of her sisters, Frances, who had been born free, was enslaved in Maryland. Amanda borrowed fifty dollars to buy her free. The chapter is titled: how I bought my sister Frances and how the Lord paid the debt.

Today, or I die

In September 1854 Amanda married Calvin Devine. She was seventeen. Calvin was a good man, according to her, as long as he did not drink. He drank often.

A year and a half later she was working as a servant for a Quaker family, the Mifflins, about a mile outside Columbia in Pennsylvania. She was saving for a spring dress. She gave up that money when she began to pray. For weeks she prayed and fasted, day and night. She was burdened by her sins. She asked the sun, the moon, the stars and the wind to tell Jesus that she was a poor sinner, because they had always obeyed God.

On Tuesday, March 17, 1856, she stood at the ironing table. A voice in her said that God had not seen her earnestness and that she might as well give up. She decided to pray one more time. One voice said: pray. The other said: don't. Then she said out loud that she would. The word ran, she wrote, through her whole body.

She set the table, the kettle and the food ready and left only the bread and butter. Then she went to the cellar to pray, determined to die there if she got no answer. She cried out for mercy. She heard the voice repeat what she had heard before. She promised God that she would serve Him for the rest of her life. After her third prayer she told the Lord that if He helped her, she would believe Him.

At that moment peace and light flowed through her. The burden was gone. She felt new, she wrote, from top to toe.

She told her mistress nothing. Mrs. Mifflin had asthma, and Amanda was afraid that excitement could harm her. She kept her joy to herself until Sunday, her day off in town, where she could tell others.

What she did next shows who she was. She no longer sought a feeling. She sought God. From that day she had two goals, a biographer writes on the basis of her book: to get to know God better, and to tell others about Him.

Have you ever prayed like that? With a date attached, and a limit?

Five children, one daughter

Hard years followed. In 1862 Calvin Devine went as a soldier into the Northern army, in the American Civil War. He did not come back. With him Amanda had had two children. The first died as a baby. Her daughter Mazie stayed alive.

Around 1863 or 1864 she married James Henry Smith in Philadelphia. James was a coachman and a deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the AME. That was a church founded in 1816 by black Methodists in Philadelphia, because in the white Methodist churches they were treated as second-class members. It became one of the most important black churches in America.

The marriage did not become a home. James had promised to become an evangelist, but according to Amanda nothing came of it. In 1865 they moved to New York. When James moved again in 1868, she did not go along. They had three children: Nell, Thomas Henry and Will. All three died young.

About the death of Will, Amanda tells it herself. He was, according to her, the brightest and most promising of her children. While he lay ill, she wrestled with God. She fasted until she could honestly say that the Lord's will be done. He died early in the morning in her arms. She had no money for the funeral. A Christian woman she hardly knew gave her the twenty dollars it cost.

In the meantime she had to work. She was a cook and she was a washerwoman. She washed and ironed for others, with the tub and the irons. Later she called herself the washerwoman evangelist.

When James died in November 1869, Amanda was thirty-two. She had lost two husbands and four of her five children.

Everything on the altar

In those same years Amanda heard about the holiness movement. That was a current within Methodism. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, had taught that a Christian, after conversion, could also receive a second grace. God would cleanse the heart from the inclination to sin, so that a believer could love Him with an undivided heart. Wesley called it perfect love. After 1860 that teaching gained new strength in America, with large camp meetings in the open air. In 1867 a national association was founded for it.

Amanda longed for that second blessing. At first she received vague advice from an elder, and the search took a long time. According to her own account she finally understood that she had to give up everything. She laid, as she put it herself, her all on the altar.

Then came that Sunday in September 1868 in Green Street Church. On the way to the service a voice kept saying in her: go on. Inskip read from Ephesians 4. She sat there, she wrote, and suddenly thought of her baby at home, and still she went on. When the wave came, she could no longer keep it to herself.

Afterward, on her way home, she met black women whom she was proud of. Three prominent sisters of the congregation asked where she had been. She told them what God had done: the Lord had sanctified her soul. They had no answer. One of them, Sister Scott, said coolly later that she hoped Amanda would keep it. She said nothing more.

I find this one of the loveliest things about her story. The fear of white people ran deep, after everything her family had been through. In a white church she found the freedom to be out loud who she was.

Two letters in the fire

In November 1869 Amanda knew that she had to preach. She was sitting in an AME church in Brooklyn, during the sermon of a brother named Gould. There she saw, as she told it later herself, a star. It became a white tulip. Then it became a G, and then an O. A voice said clearly that she was to go and preach. Go. She took it as an assignment.

A woman who preached was a problem for many churches in those days. A black woman who preached, even more so. Amanda went anyway. She had also been afraid. In Philadelphia she did not know what to do, and at the decision to go to Salem in New Jersey, she felt as if she would die. She left for Salem and stayed there until June 1870. In October 1870 she became a traveling evangelist.

In Salem she preached on Acts 19. She asked the people whether they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. A brother had introduced her with irony. A revival came that spread over twelve miles. In the house of the Huff family, five members of the household were brought to faith in a single night.

Her means were scarce. She told how she went to the grocer with thirteen cents, in New York, around 1870. She bought bread, potatoes, bacon and firewood with it. The shopkeeper gave three cents back. She herself had gone hungry so that her daughter could eat. During the camp meeting at Oakington, in July 1870, she did not know how she would pay the rent. She trusted the Lord. On the train a man handed her a two-dollar bill, saying he thought she

could use it. At the love feast of that same meeting the leaders asked for money for the tent. She prayed quietly that she could give ten dollars. Then Brother John McGlynn stood up and pledged exactly that amount: ten dollars for that colored sister.

A woman who heard her speak in Philadelphia in that time, Mary Denman, wrote later that Amanda had not yet put away her tub and her irons. She stood there in her washerwoman's work clothes. Denman also wrote about a night at a camp meeting in Sea Cliff. She was seeking the baptism with the Holy Spirit and had woken up. She called Amanda into her tent. Amanda prayed with her and said that God would ask nothing for which He did not give strength. It came down to one word, Denman wrote: saying yes to God.

She traveled alone, by train, and wore a plain bonnet and a brown or black dress in the Quaker style, with a carpetbag. She sang and she testified. At the large camp meetings of the holiness movement she became a well-known voice, among white visitors too. There they called her the singing pilgrim. In 1873, at the national meeting in Landisville, Pennsylvania, she led prayer services. According to her biographer Adrienne Israel she said there that since her sanctification she no longer wanted to be white. She was glad that God had made her as she was. In 1874 she spoke in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. There a woman asked her whether she would rather be white. She answered that she would rather be black and wholly saved.

A speckled bird

It did not go like that everywhere. Many churches stayed closed to her. Local newspapers sometimes printed protests. On trains and in hotels she noticed what her color meant. Sometimes she had to wait until all the white travelers had gotten off.

Among her own people it was hard too. She called herself a speckled bird, a phrase from the prophet Jeremiah. She was a woman, she was poor, she dressed like a Quaker. She did not fit anywhere completely.

In 1872 she went to the general conference of the AME in Nashville, Tennessee. Men in the church discouraged her. They were afraid she had come to plead for the ordination of women. That question was never put on the table there. Amanda herself wrote that she had never thought of it. The thought of ordination had never occurred to her, she wrote. She already had her ordination, she said, from Him who said to His disciples: *You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit* (John 15:16).

She never left the AME. According to one encyclopedia, her example helped bring that church in 1884 to give women a license to work as evangelists. Amanda herself did not ask for it.

Across the sea to Keswick

Amanda was afraid of the sea. She had known that for a long time, so when the invitation from England came, she first waved it away as something for fine people. But alone in her room a fear came over her, she said. She threw herself down and asked what was the matter. A voice said: you are afraid of the ocean. She saw a shipwreck before her, and Mazie's grief. She cried out that she gave her child to the Lord. Earlier, when she understood that Mazie might be called to Africa, she had stayed on her knees in tears until she truly surrendered her. Mazie is Yours, she said, and You can take care of her.

About the money she did not need to worry, she discovered. At Ocean Grove a lady offered to pay for Mazie's clothes and schooling. On Martha's Vineyard, when she did not know whether to go

against a minister's advice, she opened her Bible in the woods. She went, despite her own objection that she was a stranger and a black woman. On the way someone dropped a two-dollar bill into her lap, then more, until she had seven dollars. Her boat ticket was paid for by strangers, and her meal too. A stranger offered her a place to sleep. In the tent on Sunday she quoted a prophecy from Malachi, with a gesture toward the door. A proud woman from Providence walked out, but later came to faith and testified of a clean heart. Four months later a man in Worcester told her that the word had struck him like an arrow and saved him from falling away. It pays to obey, she said.

In 1878 she did board the ship *Ohio*, on her way to England. She was going to the holiness conference in Keswick, in the north of the country. Her daughter Mazie went along to study there.

On board, passengers kept wondering what a black woman was doing alone on her way to England. She prayed that God would take the curiosity away from them. From that hour no one asked her a question again. At the captain's request she led a service in the saloon. She sang, she prayed and spoke on John 14. Afterward people who had at first been cold thanked her. On board she made friends with Quakers, who asked her to hold services for the passengers. In Liverpool a rude doctor tried to block her way. She prayed, and an official helped her through. She waved politely when her carriage drove past him.

In England she spoke in the open air, in halls and in Baptist and Methodist churches. She also preached in Scotland and Ireland. Friends paid her expenses. In Birmingham a bond grew with an association of women that would later support her work in America.

Was it courage? Amanda would say it was obedience. She prayed, and she went.

Kneeling on the grass in Calcutta

In England she met a missionary, Lucy Drake, who persuaded her to go to India. In November 1879 they arrived in Bombay, present-day Mumbai. India was then a colony of Great Britain. Methodist missionaries from America worked there among Indians and among British and Anglo-Indians in the big cities.

Amanda traveled along mission stations and churches. She spoke about holiness and about the fight against drink. She saw how European traders imported strong liquor, and that never let go of her. In India she also met a new kind of opposition: many Indians thought it wrong that a woman proclaimed the gospel in public.

She prayed for the country itself too. At Bassim there was a mission station that lay far from the railway. She prayed that a railway would come. Skeptics laughed. Within two years there was a station, about two miles from the mission. Is anything too hard for God, she wrote. In September 1880 something else happened. At Naini Tal the mountainside collapsed. She herself felt a tightness that day, a sense that someone was in great danger. A man, Mr. Mooney, barely escaped death, at the hour she felt her fear.

One of the men who worked with her was James Mills Thoburn, later Methodist bishop for India. In 1891, from Calcutta, present-day Kolkata, he wrote the introduction to her autobiography. In it he tells of an open-air meeting. An excited and hostile crowd pressed in. Amanda knelt on the grass and began to pray. The crowd fell silent and stayed where it stood. So testified Thoburn, who was there. When she spoke on a square in Calcutta in April and May 1881, several English soldiers sought the Lord.

Thoburn also wrote that she had an extraordinary power of discernment. She saw through errors that educated men had fallen into. He admitted that he had learned more about preaching from her than from anyone. A bishop who writes that about a woman who had been in school for three months says something about her. And something about him too.

Eight years in West Africa

In 1881 Amanda set out again, by way of England to Monrovia in Liberia. Liberia was a country on the west coast of Africa, founded by Americans for freed slaves and their descendants. Two groups lived side by side there: the Americo-Liberian elite on the coast and the African peoples in the interior. Amanda worked there and in neighboring Sierra Leone for about eight years, among others with the Methodist missionary bishop William Taylor.

She founded branches of the Band of Hope, a movement that taught children not to drink liquor. She held revival services, cared for the sick and helped start schools, including a Christian school for boys. She got malaria again and again. She stayed.

Her money came in its own way there too. She decided not to lean on America any longer. Soon afterward a letter came with a banknote of five pounds, and after that people gave from India and elsewhere. God could provide for her without America, she wrote. In January 1882 her trunk was emptied by thieves in Sierra Leone. The captain asked how she stayed so calm. She said she was sorry about it, but that she would not get furious. In one of the congregations in Clay-Ashland, twenty-six people came to faith in a single week, among them a few boys who worked for the household. In May 1883 a sick man, Thomas Anderson, lay dying, abandoned by his old friends. He was filled with the Spirit, Amanda told, and said that his Jesus had just passed by. She believed he received the

full baptism before his death. A Martha Payne wrote in 1883 from Monrovia about her own path. After Amanda had preached about holiness, she had spoken the words: Lord, sanctify me.

She took in two children who no longer had parents, Bob and Frances. When she left in 1889, she took Bob with her to America. Frances she left with friends.

Here I want to be honest. What Amanda wrote about Liberia and Sierra Leone sometimes shows the outlook of an American Christian of that time. She often saw Western schooling, Western clothing and Western customs as obviously better. Historians point this out. They also point out that she rejected the idea that black people were worth less. She came out of slavery. She knew what that idea could do.

An orphanage near Chicago

In 1890 she came back to America, sick with malaria and rheumatism. She was fifty-three. She went to live near Chicago and wrote her autobiography. The book became more than five hundred pages thick and appeared in 1893.

Her last great work was for children whom no one had. With her own savings and with gifts she bought land in Harvey, a town south of Chicago. On June 28, 1899, a home and industrial school for black orphans and abandoned children opened there. Later it was called the Amanda Smith Industrial School for Girls. To pay for it she published a monthly paper, *The Helper*, and kept preaching and singing in churches.

The home always had a hard time. There was too little money, there were conflicts with staff, there were complaints from neighbors and failed inspections. The fundraising wore her out. In 1912 she retired to Sebring, Florida, to a house that a benefactor had had built for her.

Bought free twice

Amanda Smith died on February 24, 1915, in Sebring, of a stroke. She was seventy-eight. She was buried in Illinois. The *Chicago Defender*, a black newspaper that fought for civil rights, called her at her death the greatest woman her people had given to the world.

Three years later her school in Harvey burned down. According to later sources two girls died in it, and the home closed for good.

She left no church and no movement that bears her name. She did leave a book, and the memory of people who had heard her sing, from Ocean Grove to Monrovia.

There is a saying of hers that is often quoted. She said she had been bought twice and set free twice, and so had every right to shout for joy. The first time her father bought her free, with brooms he bound at night. The second time it happened in a cellar, on a Tuesday afternoon in March.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on January 23, 1837 in Long Green, Maryland, as a slave; parents Samuel Berry and Mariam Matthews; purchase of freedom by her father and the move to York County, Pennsylvania; marriage to Calvin Devine in 1854, who did not return from the Civil War; marriage to James Smith in Philadelphia; five children, of whom only Mazie reached adulthood; work as a cook and washerwoman; sanctification in September 1868 in the Green Street Church in New York under the preaching of John Inskip, and the letter from Inskip's wife; the death of James in November 1869; beginning as an evangelist in 1869 and 1870; never ordained or paid by a church; visit to the AME general conference in Nashville in 1872; England in 1878; India from November 1879; West Africa from 1881 to 1889; return in 1890; au-

tobiography in 1893; orphanage in Harvey, opened June 28, 1899; move to Sebring in 1912; death in February 1915; the fire of 1918.

Only from own testimony (*An Autobiography*, 1893, via the text on archive.org and Documenting the American South, in fragments): the deathbed request of Miss Celie; the buying free of her sister Frances; the details of her conversion on March 17, 1856, the voices and the prayer in the cellar at the Mifflin family's; the cry and the reaction of Inskip in the Green Street Church, and the conversation with the three sisters; the death of Will and the twenty dollars; the vision of the letters G and O in November 1869, where some sources speak of letters of fire and her own book of a star, a tulip and the letters; the conversation in Ocean Grove about black and saved; the thirteen cents, the two-dollar bill and the ten dollars from Brother McGlynn; the Salem revival; the fear of the sea and the surrender of Mazie; the trip to Martha's Vineyard; the service aboard the *Ohio*; the railway to Bassim, the landslide at Naini Tal and her premonition; the events in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the dying of Thomas Anderson and the five pounds; her words in Landisville (via her biographer Israel). The chapter about Frances I could not read myself; Christian biographers retell it from her book.

Testimony of others: Amanda kneeling in Calcutta and the verdict on her discernment (James Thoburn, introduction of 1891); Mary Denman on the tub and the night in Sea Cliff; Martha Payne from Monrovia; the letter from Inskip's wife.

Unconfirmed or disputed: the place of the cellar where she came to faith (the summaries name her workplace or her own house; her book names, according to the fragments I read, the home of the Quaker family Mifflin near Columbia); the year of her second marriage (1863, 1864 or 1865); the age at which she became free (very small according to herself, three years according to one source); the exact date of her death (February 24 according to most sources,

February 25 according to others); the number of girls who died in the fire of 1918 (one source); the place of the church where she saw the G and the O (Fleet Street in Brooklyn according to a summary of her book); the years of the stories about Martha's Vineyard and the crossing, which I could only work out approximately from the text.

Interpretation: that her example moved the AME in 1884 to recognize women as evangelists is the reading of a historian. Her judgment of Africans in Liberia and Sierra Leone is seen by historians as partly colored by colonial thinking. Whether the voices, the star and the letters came from God is a question of faith. I believe it along with her.

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Lilias Trotter: the painter who gave her brush to God

In October 1876 an English widow and her daughter were staying at a hotel in Venice. In the same hotel was John Ruskin, the best-known art critic in England. The mother showed him her daughter's watercolors. Ruskin was fifty-seven. His visitor was twenty-three.

He looked, and later he wrote what he had seen. It was, in his words, *extremely right-minded and careful work, almost totally without knowledge.* A compliment with an edge to it. But he asked her to go drawing with him in the city. He took her to the church of La Salute to draw marble. She learned everything, he noted, at the moment he showed it to her.

Her name was Lilias Trotter. Years later Ruskin would want to train her to become one of the great painters of her day. She said no. She left with two friends for Algiers, with no mission society behind her and without a word of Arabic. She would stay there for forty years and die there, in an old Turkish house above the city.

She did keep painting. Only for someone else.

A sketchbook at five

Isabella Lilias Trotter was born on July 14, 1853, in London, in the wealthy West End. Her parents were named Alexander and Isabella Trotter. It was a large family. Her father already had six children from a first marriage, and Lilias was the seventh child of nine. Her half-brothers became a scholar, a banker, an officer and a clergyman. There was plenty of money.

In 1858, when she was five, her parents gave her a sketchbook. The family traveled to Switzerland and Italy. It was the life of a girl from the Victorian upper class, with a good upbringing and few worries.

Then came the first break. Her father fell ill and died after two years of sickness. Lilias was twelve.

Broadlands and the girls of Victoria Station

In her early twenties the faith of Lilias became personal. In 1874 she went with her mother to a gathering on the Broadlands estate. Christians came together there from what was then called the Higher Life movement, a current that called for a life of complete surrender to Christ. Out of that movement grew the Keswick Convention, an annual conference that Lilias stayed faithful to all her life.

A year later, in 1875, the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody held large campaigns in London. Lilias became one of the volunteers who talked with seekers after the services.

She did not stay in the hall. She worked for the young YWCA, the Christian association for young women, at the Welbeck Street Institute, a home for working girls. She helped open the first affordable restaurant for women in London. And she went to Victoria Station, where women worked in prostitution, to talk with them.

"I cannot give myself to painting"

After Venice, Ruskin kept following her. With her brother, sometimes with her sister too, she visited his house Brantwood by Lake Coniston in the English Lake District. In August 1879 he wrote her a letter with an invitation for Thursday the twenty-first, or another day if that suited her better. That letter is now in the Armstrong Browning Library in Texas. His admiration was great. A sketchbook that she made in Norway in 1876 he gave to the University of Oxford. It is in the Ashmolean Museum. The small sketches are about two by four inches. Ruskin said you could only read them with a magnifying glass, and he praised them for their Christian simplicity.

Ruskin wanted her to stop her work among the poor and give herself to art alone. According to what her later biographer Miriam Rockness drew from the letters, he promised her that she could then become the greatest living painter.

Lilias wrestled. In a letter she described that time as an almost constant state of suffocation and stupor. She loved drawing. She loved what Ruskin taught her. But she also saw that she could not give her life to art and to the Kingdom of God at the same time. She prayed for days. Afterward she wrote, as her biographer renders it: she saw it now as clear as day.

In May 1879 the decision fell. She wrote: *I cannot give myself to painting in the way he means and continue to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness."* Later she wrote about it to her friend Blanche Pigott, from Windermere. She felt, she wrote, that in those few days she had lived years. Then she went back to London, to the YWCA, to Bible classes and meetings for working women, in Oxford too.

Have you ever had to leave something lying that you were good at, and that others praised you for? Lilias did not put her brush away.

She kept drawing and painting all her life. She only refused to let art become her master. She kept sending Ruskin sketches. Ruskin kept hoping.

In a lecture at Oxford in 1883 he admitted something. He showed her Norwegian sketches to his students as an example. In his own textbooks he had always said that women could not draw or paint. Her work made him doubt that. From the mouth of the most powerful art critic in England that was no small thing. It was also a window on the world she grew up in: a woman first had to prove she could do more than draw nicely. He wrote out a first proof of his *Lectures on English Art* for her, dated March 27, 1883.

A heart that was not strong enough

In 1884 Lilias underwent an operation. After that her heart was affected. According to Pigott she lived for a time as a half invalid. She wrote that she felt she was standing still.

Pigott writes that in her prayer she heard the words "North Africa" again and again. It sounded, she wrote, in her soul. In May 1887 she was sitting in a missionary meeting. Someone asked whether there were people in the hall whom God was calling to North Africa. Lilias stood up and said softly that He was calling her. So it stands in her earliest biographies, which lean on her own letters and diaries. She had already given up her post at the Welbeck Street home, which had worn her out. She had counted the cost.

On July 14, 1887, her thirty-fourth birthday, she applied to the North Africa Mission. That mission society was already working in the region. She was turned down. At the medical examination her heart proved too weak for a hot climate. So the rejection had to do with her health, not with the fact that she was a woman. Because she

could support herself, she was allowed to work alongside the North Africa Mission, without being a member.

She decided to go at her own expense.

Row above row

To understand where she was going, you need to know something about Algeria in those years. In 1830 France had conquered the city of Algiers, present-day Alger, in Arabic El Djazaïr. A long war followed. The resistance leader Abd-el-Kader governed a large part of the country until 1847, when the French armies defeated him. By 1888 Algeria was a French colony. French settlers lived in new neighborhoods.

The Roman Catholic Church was already there. In 1868 Cardinal Lavigerie had founded the White Fathers in Algiers, an order for mission in Africa. Algerian women lived for a large part indoors, in the closed world of family and household. A man from outside did not come in there. A woman sometimes could.

On March 5, 1888, Lilias left Waterloo Station in London. Lucy Lewis traveled with her. Pigott mentions a fourth woman, Katie Stuart, who sat in the compartment with them. In the carriage they knelt together to entrust their loved ones to God. At Southampton Blanche Haworth came aboard, and with the night mail they traveled to Marseille. Most later sources speak of three women. All three were unmarried, well educated and had money of their own. Lilias was thirty-four. She knew no one in Algiers.

When their ship approached the harbor at night, they saw the lights of Algiers. The pilot's boat made a track of living fire through the glowing water. The next morning the Arab city rose before them, in cream-colored light, row above row against the slope. That image

Lilias gave in her diary of the old city. On the quay stood people distributing Bibles, and a boarding house became their first shelter.

Pincushions

The three women first lived in a boarding house and in May 1888 found an apartment in the Rue Dupuche, in the French quarter. Every day they studied Arabic. They also learned to do the housekeeping themselves. Their first prayer meeting dedicated the apartment to God, one room each day. On Ascension Day came the news that her sister Jaqueline had died. The household work and the Lord's Supper helped her bear it, she wrote.

The door to the women opened through the children. Whoever treated the children kindly was sometimes allowed in. Children on the doorstep were given sweets. And then there were the small gifts. In January 1891 Lilias wrote how precious the pincushions were, and how they opened one house after another to them.

It was not quick work. Later she described the first years, according to Rockness's biography, as running their heads against stone walls. On April 8, 1891, the first convert was baptized, in the river, by a missionary named Lambert. A young man named Ahmed came to faith. Eighteen Arabs attacked him. He did not hit back. The mission sent him to Tunis for his safety. At their meetings groups of restless boys sometimes appeared. Only later did the French prefect give them a permanent permit to meet together.

She set the Friday mornings apart to pray for an outpouring of the Spirit. In December 1893, after long prayers for the villages, she wrote that helplessness was what prevailed. Every morning she read her Bible in a hidden corner of the Fortification Woods near the house. In her circle people later saw what those quiet hours did for her.

I find this one of the most honest sides of her story. She did not arrive with a plan that worked. She arrived with a pile of cards with Bible verses, a few pincushions and a difficult language she still had to learn.

A house in the Casbah

In April 1893 they bought an Arab house in the Rue du Croissant, in the Casbah, the old Arab city. In October of that year they moved in. Now they lived among the people for whom they had come. Sunday classes began for water carriers. Men read the Bible cards aloud to each other.

That same year they began journeys into the interior. They went to Biskra and El Kantara, on the edge of the Sahara. In 1894 Lilias went on to Touggourt and to the oases of El Oued. In 1895 she traveled with Blanche Haworth by camel through mountain villages. In her diary she described how they met a marabout, a local Muslim holy man, who read aloud from the New Testament they had given him to a group of twenty men. A man worth going to, she wrote, with a soul full of hunger in his face.

It was a journey with few resources. At a well they had three eggs and too little dry wood to bake bread. Blanche made dumplings on a spirit lamp. The next day food came from the sheikh and the villagers. In the morning more than twenty men listened, later nearly forty, among them two who wanted to debate. Blanche asked how their sins were taken away. Through prayer, fasting and alms, they said. Her next question was whether the sins were then really gone. In a market town they met a Tuareg merchant from Ain Salah. Blanche greeted him in his own language and they gave him a New Testament. Later he came back to the inn, and at the door he received an explanation in the simplest words. In thanks he gave them a wooden spoon and a case with leather fringe. One man in

a village told them that he believed only in Him, that there could not be two ways. That their prayer for the Tuaregs seemed to be answered, Lilias wrote in her diary.

On that journey they both fell ill with influenza. Blanche got a high fever. Lilias collapsed the next day and lost her voice, so that she could only whisper and left the work to Blanche. They drank muddy water and broth from boiled chickens. When Blanche relapsed, their guide Abdulla bought a sheep. A caid gave them bread that a French officer had left behind.

About the women in the villages near Biskra she wrote with great warmth. She saw in them people who could know God. In the diary fragments I read, it is about people, about their houses and their children. At the house of the sheikh's brother the stairs consisted of two palm trunks with notches, and hands reached down to help them up. In the house of a bride the young woman sat like a statue, with henna-colored lips. When a woman appeared in the morning with her face at the tent, two men followed with bowls of milk and flatbread.

In 1896 tension arose between France and Great Britain. For English missionaries in a French colony that had direct consequences. Their travels were restricted. They were allowed to work only in Algiers itself. Algerians withdrew, afraid of being seen with English people.

According to Rockness, who read the diaries thoroughly, the local authorities bought a house across the street and held classes there for three years to draw people away from the missionaries. Spies and gendarmes are said to have followed the women into the desert.

On March 13, 1896, Lilias wrote in her diary that God uses such times to let human strength drain away from us, so that there is room for the strength of the Spirit. The spring after that she drew flowers she had not seen in three years. And she described how

two or three days of sirocco, the hot desert wind, turned everything brown, as with the breath of an oven. During those years she wrote journals with watercolors for her supporters at home. *The daisies have been talking again,* she wrote once. She read two textbooks, she said: the Bible and creation.

In those years she also made books. In *Parables of the Cross* she used her drawings of plants to say something about the spiritual life: buds that open when the old husk falls away, flowers that wither so that seed can come. The book turns on the thought that dying is the way to life. She referred to the words of Jesus about the grain of wheat: *unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain* (John 12:24). The last image is a new sprig of wood sorrel growing out of seemingly dead twigs. She connected it with the word from Revelation that our works follow us, and wrote that every life passes on vitality, like the old twigs. When exactly the book appeared, the sources differ. In 1899 *Parables of the Christ-life* followed.

The House of Grace

In 1906 the relationship between England and France improved, and more freedom came. That year Lilias bought Dar Naama, which means House of Grace. It was an old Turkish palace in El Biar, a district high above Algiers. It became the headquarters of the work. Conferences came, camps for young people, meetings about Bible translation, and sometimes Arab families lived there temporarily.

In 1907 the group received a name: the Algiers Mission Band. That year five new workers joined. Lilias became the leader. According to those who described her life, she did not seek that role, but she did not avoid it either. She recruited and trained workers and

opened stations along the coast and later in the interior, including Blida and Bou Saâda.

It began as work of women among women and children. When men later joined the Band, they began to work among boys and men as well. An unmarried woman leading a mission organization with men and women was rare in that time.

She had ideas ahead of her time. She wanted a coffeehouse on a Christian basis, Bible readings in a rhythmic recitation with a drum, the way people in Algeria were used to hearing texts, and an embroidery house for girls. From about 1904 her team translated Bible portions into spoken Algerian Arabic, and they printed texts by hand. The American missionary Samuel Zwemer, whom she met in 1908, called her a pioneer of Christian literature for North Africa. In 1912 the magazine *El Couffa* began. In 1915 she worked for a year at the Nile Mission Press in Cairo, a Christian publishing house.

Look to Jesus

In 1901 Lilias wrote a diary entry that later appeared as a small booklet under the title *Focussed*. The core was that you must fix your gaze on Jesus, so that the rest falls into place by itself.

In 1918 the American Helen Lemmel read that booklet. She was fifty-five and tired, she told later, and a teacher at the Moody Bible Institute. The call to turn the gaze of your soul toward Jesus touched her. Suddenly, she wrote, she stood still, as if she had been commanded to listen. The words and the music came at the same time. The same week she wrote the song, which later became known by its refrain: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus." In the 1920s it was sung at the Keswick Convention, the conference that Lilias herself had attended so often. Many people who sing that song today do not know that it began in a diary in Algiers.

In 1918 Blanche Haworth died, who had worked with her for thirty years. Lilias went on. In 1920 the Band had, according to later sources, thirty regular workers and fifteen stations. There were journeys to Tunisia, and in 1924 a conference in Jerusalem.

The seven secrets

Lilias saw that many Algerians in the south were deeply tied to Sufism, the mystical current within Islam. Sufis live in brotherhoods and seek along a path of steps toward union with God. She took that longing seriously.

For them she wrote, in Arabic and English, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*. The book is built on the seven "I am" sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. She set those beside the seven steps that members of Sufi orders traditionally take. She wanted to show that the longing for God they were aiming at found an answer in Jesus. The book later appeared with the Nile Mission Press. A scholarly reissue appeared in a series on European views of Islam.

I find it striking how she wrote. She connected with what she knew of her neighbors, with their words and their searching. You can differ about whether such a bridge is wise. But she built it with respect.

A room as a command post

In 1925 she became bedridden. The last three years of her life she lay in Dar Naama. Her room became, as Christian History calls it, the control post of the mission. Above her bed hung a map of Algeria and Tunisia. Her diary served as a logbook. From bed she led a large part of the work, she wrote, drew and prayed.

In 1924 Belle Patrick had become her secretary. In those last years her last book appeared, *Between the Desert and the Sea*, with sixteen

watercolors of the desert, the oases and the coast. In the foreword is a sentence that fits her whole life. (My translation) many things begin with seeing in this world of ours.

Her prayer for a local Algerian church was not answered during her lifetime. People came to faith, mostly women. But a congregation of Algerian Christians she did not see.

What kept her on her feet, she wrote, was God Himself: she could do without everything as long as she had Him. She had left an art career and a healthy heart lying. She kept writing and painting. Every day something new came, she wrote.

A chariot with six horses

On August 27, 1928, Lilias Trotter died in Dar Naama, seventy-five years old. Around her stood her Arab friends and her coworkers. She was buried in Algiers.

About her last hours her biographers tell a story. The people at her bedside sang a hymn she liked. She said she saw a chariot with six horses. Someone asked whether she saw many beautiful things. She answered that yes, she saw very many beautiful things.

At her death the Band had, according to the sources, more than thirty workers and between twelve and fifteen stations. In 1962 or 1964 the Algiers Mission Band merged into the North Africa Mission, the society that had once turned her down. Her watercolors are in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and at Wheaton College in the United States. Her diaries and sketchbooks are still read there.

Ruskin had been right about her talent. He saw a young woman who learned everything at the moment he showed it to her. He did not see that she had also learned to see something else.

In one of her journals from Algeria is a watercolor of a small boat on a lake, under a narrow crescent moon.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on July 14, 1853 in London; meeting with Ruskin in Venice in 1876 and his praise for her work; the Oxford lecture of 1883; her choice in 1879 not to give her life to art; work for the YWCA and among women at Victoria Station; rejection by the North Africa Mission for medical reasons in 1887; departure to Algiers in March 1888 with Lucy Lewis and Blanche Haworth; the house in the Casbah (1893); travel restrictions after 1896; purchase of Dar Naama (1906) and the name Algiers Mission Band (1907); work at the Nile Mission Press (1915); the death of Blanche Haworth in 1918; bedridden from 1925; death on August 27, 1928 in Dar Naama, El Biar.

Only from own testimony (letters and diaries, via Pigott and Rockness): the hearing of "North Africa" in prayer and the standing up in the meeting of May 1887; her letter about painting, her struggle and her words that she saw it clearly; the arrival at night with the track of living fire; the pincushions; the convert Ahmed and the baptism of 1891; the Friday morning prayers and her diary entry of December 1893; the journey of 1895 with the marabout, the Tuareg merchant, the illness and the hospitality in the villages; her diary of March 13, 1896; the daisies; her wish to see what God does with the weakest ray.

Only from tradition or via biographers: Ruskin's promise that she could become the greatest living painter (Rockness); the house across the street and the spies and gendarmes (only via Rockness); the chariot with six horses and her last words (her biographers, who were present); the news of the death of her sister Jaqueline

(Pigott); the stories about the meeting with Lemmel come from Lemmel herself.

Unconfirmed or disputed: the year of her father's death (1865 according to the Christian History timeline, 1866 according to Pigott); the name of the hotel in Venice; whether she made her decision about painting in May 1879 (so Christian History and Christianity Today put it) or whether her letter about it was written in August from Windermere (Pigott); the presence of a fourth woman, Katie Stuart, at the departure in 1888 (only Pigott); the year of publication of *Parables of the Cross* (around 1890 or around 1895) and of *Between the Desert and the Sea* (1927, 1929 or without a year); the years in which Lemmel's song was written and sung at Keswick (1918 to 1924 in different sources); the number of stations at her death; the year of the merger with the North Africa Mission (1962 or 1964).

Interpretation: the rejection by the North Africa Mission concerned her health. About resistance to her leadership as a woman the sources I read are silent, and I leave it at this fact; the only explicit bias is that of Ruskin, which he himself adjusted in 1883. Whether the words "North Africa" came from God is a question of faith. I read her along with her, as she wrote it.

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Mother Maria Skobtsova: the nun with the open door

At a café terrace on the boulevard Montparnasse in Paris, a nun sat in the early 1930s. She wore the full black habit of the Russian Orthodox Church, and in front of her stood a glass of beer. At another table sat a young Russian emigrant who was studying medicine, Anthony Bloom. He looked at her and decided never to come anywhere near that woman. He told it that way himself, years before he became known as Metropolitan Anthony.

It was Mother Maria, and the student felt what many people felt about her. What do you do with a nun who sits in the middle of the city, among the pubs and the poor, and pays no attention to what a nun is supposed to do?

She had been a poet, a revolutionary, the mayor of a small Russian town on the coast, married twice and the mother of three children. She became a nun without a convent. On February 8, 1943, the German police burst into her house on the rue de Lourmel, in the fifteenth arrondissement of Paris. Two years later she died in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. In 2004 the Patriarchate of Constantinople declared her a saint.

Her life began on the Baltic Sea, far from Paris.

A child who wanted to be a nun

Elizaveta Yurievna Pilenko was born in December 1891 in Riga. At that time the city belonged to the Russian Empire, and it is now the capital of Latvia. Her family was of the nobility. She grew up in the south, in Anapa on the Black Sea, and later in the Crimea.

In those years Russia was an empire with a tsar and a state church: the Russian Orthodox Church. For many readers outside Russia that church is unfamiliar, so here is a short explanation. The Orthodox churches are the churches of the Christian East. In 1054 Rome and Constantinople, today's Istanbul, finally drifted apart. The West went on as the Roman Catholic Church, from which the Protestant churches later came. The East became the Orthodox Church. It has no pope. There are several independent churches, such as the Russian, the Greek and the Serbian, each with its own leader, a patriarch or a metropolitan. The Patriarch of Constantinople holds a place of honor among them. Orthodox Christians celebrate an age-old, sung liturgy. They pray with icons, painted images of Christ and the saints. And they have a strong tradition of monastic life.

Elizaveta grew up in that church. According to the life of the saint published by the Orthodox Church in America, at the age of seven she asked her mother whether she was old enough to become a nun. The answer to that question she would not receive until many years later.

When she was about fourteen, her father died. The girl who wanted to be a nun lost her faith. What she said then has been preserved in one sentence (my translation): If there is no justice, there is no God.

She was bright and strong-willed. She had trouble getting high marks, even though she was brilliant, and in circles around the Russian church she was a favorite of a feared, strict church official. The loss of her father never let go of her completely.

The poets of St. Petersburg

In 1906 her mother Sofia moved with the children to St. Petersburg, then the capital of Russia. Elizaveta found herself in circles of young writers and radical thinkers. She got to know Aleksandr Blok, one of the best-known Russian poets of that time.

As a young girl, so Jim Forest tells in his sketch of her life, she once went to see him without warning. Blok looked at her and advised her to run from people like him, the dying ones, as he called them. She answered that she wanted to fight against death and against evil. According to her own memories, they became such good friends afterward that she became his conversation partner.

In those years Elizaveta was searching for something to live for. She taught workers at the Putilov factory, hoping to give them something. One of her students told her that the lessons were mostly a road to an office job, to a life as a clerk. She lost heart and stopped.

In 1910 she married Dmitri Kuzmin-Karavaev, a lawyer and poet who sympathized with the Bolsheviks, Lenin's communists. Later she said it was a marriage entered into more out of pity than out of love. That is what her life as a saint says. In 1912 her first collection of poems appeared, *Scythian Shards*.

Meanwhile something was happening deep inside her. Atheism turned out not to be enough. She asked to be admitted to the lectures of the Theological Academy of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Petersburg. For a woman that was unheard of.

She was admitted, as the first woman, several sources write. What the men around her thought of it has not been handed down.

In 1913 her marriage broke down. In that same year her daughter Gaiana was born.

In 1916 she wrote to Blok that she wanted to proclaim the simple word of God. We know that letter from her life as a saint. She had not found God in a sermon. She found Him again, slowly, as she kept on searching, and what drew her was Christ Himself, the man. A line attributed to her expresses it: He also died, He sweated blood, they struck Him in the face. She could believe in a God who knew that.

Mayor between Red and White

In 1917 the Russian Revolution broke out. The tsar fell, and the Bolsheviks seized power. A civil war followed between the Reds, the communists, and the Whites, their opponents. Elizaveta had gone back to Anapa. She had become a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, a left-wing revolutionary party that stood apart from the Bolsheviks.

At the Soviet congress of 1917 her party took a beating. Trotsky, one of the Bolshevik leaders, told its members that their role was played out and that they belonged in the dustbin of history. Elizaveta went back to Anapa.

In February 1918 she was elected deputy mayor in Anapa. When the mayor left, the running of the town fell to her. A young woman carried the responsibility for a town in wartime.

When the White Army took Anapa, she was arrested. The Whites saw her as a collaborator of the Reds. She had to appear before a judge, and that judge was Daniil Skobtsov, a former teacher of hers.

Her defense has been handed down. Red or White, she said, my position is the same: I will stand up for justice and for the relief of suffering. Skobtsov made sure she was set free. She went to thank him, and soon afterward they married.

The Whites lost the war. Around 1919 and 1920 the family fled: Elizaveta, Daniil, Gaiana and her mother Sofia. Elizaveta was pregnant. In Georgia in 1920 her son Yuri was born. The journey went on via Constantinople to Yugoslavia, where in 1921 her daughter Anastasia came into the world. In 1923 they arrived in Paris.

They were not the only ones. After the revolution large groups of Russians left their country. Paris became one of the places where they ended up. There noble families, officers, writers and priests lived side by side, often poor, often without papers, often homesick for a country that no longer existed.

A bed in Paris

Elizaveta earned money by making dolls and painting silk scarves. She became a member of the Russian Student Christian Movement, a network of young Orthodox emigrants. In 1930 she became its traveling secretary. In that way she came to Russians all over France, including those who lived in poverty or had ended up in psychiatric institutions.

A story from that time comes from Anthony Bloom, who had it from a friend. She came to Le Creusot, a steel town, to Russian workers who had counted on a lecture. But those men had other worries first. They had no need for Dostoevsky, they said, they needed clean linen and clean rooms. Elizaveta rolled up her sleeves. For days she washed, ironed and mended. When the men asked for a lecture after all, she had already won them over.

In March 1926 little Anastasia fell ill. She had influenza, and according to one of the sources also meningitis. She did not get better. She was four or five years old. According to an Orthodox account of her life, her mother kept watch at her bedside for a month.

At her father's death, years earlier, Elizaveta had lost her faith. At her daughter's bedside something else happened. Jason Landsel writes in Plough that there she glimpsed something of eternity and understood what repentance means. In her own diary it says (my translation) that she now wanted a true, purified path. A review of her collected writings says that after the death of one of her children she felt called to be a mother to everyone.

Have you ever lost something you thought you would never get over? I do not ask it to draw a lesson. Elizaveta did not draw a lesson from it either. She began to live differently.

Her marriage to Daniil broke down in those years. Yuri stayed with his father. Gaiana went to a boarding school in Belgium. Elizaveta moved to the center of Paris to work among the poorest.

Make the world your monastery

In March 1932 she took her monastic vows in the church of Saint-Serge in Paris, the center of Russian Orthodoxy in the city. It was Metropolitan Evlogy, the leader of the Russian Orthodox community in Western Europe, who gave her the habit. She was given the name Maria. Daniil had agreed to a church divorce.

Evlogy had encouraged her, but on one condition, which she herself wanted too: she would not be shut away in a convent. According to the Orthodox Church in America he told her to make the world her monastery. She herself spoke of monastic life in the world. The metropolitan said of her monastic vow that she took it in order to give herself without reserve to social service.

There is a scene with Evlogy that stays with me. On a ride on the Paris metro, so Jim Forest tells it, Maria spoke to him about her discouragement. Just at that moment the train came out of the tunnel into daylight. *You see,* said Metropolitan Evlogy, *it is the answer to your question.* He paid the rent of 5,000 francs for the house she was looking for in 1932.

For the Orthodox Church this was new. A nun was supposed to live behind walls, in prayer, far from the street. Mother Maria lived in the middle of Paris and took people into her home. According to an article in the Gale encyclopedia not everyone was happy about that. Some Orthodox leaders were troubled by her independence, by how outspoken she was and by her presence on the street. She ran a house without an abbess who could settle quarrels, and another nun, Mother Evdokia, found the house a church bohemia. Maria herself was critical of convents that turned inward. She wrote a play about it, *Anna*. In her diary there is a sigh (my translation) that I do not forget. *Piety, piety,* she wrote in her journal, *but where is the love that moves mountains?*

About her habit she said herself (my translation) that it made many things simpler and brought them within her reach.

Whether the criticism of her had to do with the fact that she was a woman, the sources do not say. So I leave it there. What is clear is that she chose a path that did not yet exist for a woman in her church.

A bed in the cellar

She began in 1932 with a house for young women at 9 villa de Saxe. In 1935 the work moved to a larger building at 77 rue de Lourmel. It became a shelter for emigrants without work, without money or without a place to stay. Around 1937 several dozen women lived

there and up to a hundred and twenty meals a day were handed out, according to her life as a saint.

What did a day there look like? She gave up her own room to guests. She herself slept in the cellar, on a narrow iron bed. Upstairs a room became the chapel, where she painted the icons for the iconostasis, the wall of icons in an Orthodox church. The dining room was also the lecture hall. Every morning she went begging for food, or she bought for little what nobody had donated. Her co-workers sought out the homeless in a café at Les Halles, the great market of Paris, which stayed open all night. For the price of a glass of wine you could sit there until daybreak.

In the psychiatric hospitals she found that five to ten percent of the Russian patients were not ill at all. At her urging they were released.

One story that is typical of her is about 25 francs. A guest who was an addict stole the money. Mother Maria did not accuse her. At the table she said that the money had simply gone missing and that she had found it again. It is dangerous to accuse someone, she remarked. The girl burst into tears.

She herself had a saying she liked to tell, about a ruble that never runs out. However much love you give, she said, you never have less of it. On a day when about forty visitors had come, she exclaimed, tired, that she could not send them away.

In 1935 she founded Orthodox Action with others. One of them was the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, who according to Forest thought up the name. The theologian Sergei Bulgakov, her confessor, was also involved. Orthodox Action had two homes for the poor, a house in Noisy-le-Grand where people could recover from tuberculosis, and a school.

One thought kept coming back in her writings. She wrote that every human being is an icon of God who became man in the world. For an Orthodox believer that says a great deal. You kiss an icon, you bow before it, you treat it with reverence. That is how she wanted to look at the drunkard at her table. About giving love she wrote that it had to be love to the end and without exceptions.

In 1936 another blow came. Gaiana had gone back to Russia, then the Soviet Union. There she died, twenty-three years old. Of what and where exactly, cannot be found in the sources. Of her three children only Yuri was now still alive.

Baptismal certificates for the neighbors

In October 1939 Evlogy sent a young priest to the house: Dimitri Klepinin. A month earlier the Second World War had begun. On June 14, 1940, the Germans marched into Paris. Many fled the city. Before the occupation someone had asked her whether she would leave Paris. She said (my translation): if the Germans take Paris, I will stay here with my old women. Where else would I send them?

Mother Maria, Father Dimitri and their co-workers stayed.

In June 1941 the Germans arrested about a thousand Russian emigrants in a single day, among them people from her circle. From 1942 Jews had to register and wear a yellow star. At the rue de Lourmel Jews knocked on the door with a question: could they get a certificate saying they had been baptized? With such a paper they had a chance of escaping the persecution.

Father Dimitri gave them. Several sources tell that the house hid Jews and helped people get out of the country. According to one source it also helped escaped Soviet prisoners of war and members of the French Resistance. Mother Maria herself was amazed that the

Germans had not yet come. Her house was full of people, many of them Jews. It is amazing, she said, so it is handed down.

About the Jewish star she wrote a poem with the title *Israel*. It begins with the line *Thou art persecuted again, O Israel.* She described the star as two triangles. When Christians around her said the star was not their problem, she answered (my translation) that there is a Christian question as well, alongside the Jewish question. The age of confessors had arrived. In the early church, confessors were Christians who suffered for their faith without dying.

Three days in the Vélodrome

On July 16 and 17, 1942, the French police in Paris rounded up 12,884 Jews. About 6,900 of them were locked up in the Vélodrome d'Hiver, an indoor cycling track. According to various sources a large part of them were children, about two thirds. They sat there for days, with hardly any water and a few toilets. After that they went via Drancy to Auschwitz.

Mother Maria went inside. Several sources tell that she was there for three days. The police and the garbage collectors knew her, one of the sources writes, and that is how she got in. She brought water and food with her. She comforted the children and their parents.

Then the well-known story. With the help of the garbage collectors she is said to have smuggled children out in garbage cans. They were taken to the rue de Lourmel and from there on to the south of France. That story is told in many accounts of her life, and I tell it the way it is told. The number of children varies, from three to four to unknown. It is in the box at the end.

Picture it: a nun in a black habit walking into a cycling track where thousands of people are locked up.

I can say no such thing

And then came February 1943. On February 8 the German police burst into the house on the rue de Lourmel. They were looking for Mother Maria. She was not there. Instead they took her son Yuri, twenty-two years old. In his pocket they found a letter in which he asked Father Dimitri for a false baptismal certificate. His grandmother Sofia Pilenko was still allowed to embrace him and bless him. It was the last time she saw him.

According to a Russian source Mother Maria went to the Gestapo herself the next day. She was told that her son would be released. That promise was not kept. On February 9 Father Dimitri was picked up, on February 10 she herself, together with 34 other women. Her co-worker Ilya Fondaminsky was arrested as well.

From Father Dimitri's interrogation a fragment has been handed down. The Gestapo officer Hans Hoffmann called him a friend of the Jews and asked him to promise that he would never help Jews again. The priest answered: *I can say no such thing.* He was a Christian, he said, and had to act as he did. Then he held up his cross and asked the officer whether he knew that Jew. He was struck in the face. That is how the Orthodox accounts of their lives tell it. Fedor Pianov, who was later imprisoned with Father Dimitri, remembered that an SS man struck the priest while Yuri looked on, crying. The priest told him that Christ had been mocked even worse. After the liberation Pianov wrote that the year with Father Dimitri had been a gift from heaven.

Yuri wrote a letter from Compiègne. He was completely calm, he said, even a little proud to share his mother's fate. He asked everyone he had hurt for forgiveness.

Mother Maria went east via the prisons of Romainville and Compiègne. In Compiègne she saw Yuri one more time. He and Father

Dimitri were sent to Buchenwald and then to Dora, a camp where prisoners had to work underground on rockets. In early 1944 they both died there. Father Dimitri died, according to one source, of pneumonia.

She went to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women, north of Berlin. She was transported in a sealed cattle car. She became prisoner number 19263 and ended up in Block 27.

An oasis at the end of the day

She held out for almost two years. How she did it, we know from fellow prisoners who survived the camp. Solange Perichon later said that Mother Maria was never downcast and never complained. At the end of a day she could say: well, another day done. Perichon also said that she let nothing of secondary importance come between herself and other people.

Rosane Lascroux said that everyone loved her, and that Mother Maria somehow gave them a family. *She exercised an enormous influence on us all.* Jacqueline Péry described the circles of conversation around her bed. *Here was an oasis at the end of the day,* she said. It seemed like a paradise, she wrote. There Mother Maria talked about her work in Paris and about her hope that the Catholic and the Orthodox Church would one day be one. She led Bible studies and prayer meetings and encouraged women who could no longer see a way forward. One of the women, Sophia Nosovich, heard her say: *No, no, whatever you do, continue to think.* Nosovich wrote that her strength came from the richness of her inner life, and not from submissiveness.

She pulled the iron roller of the camp, twelve hours a day, and worked in a knitting workshop. As her health declined, friends had to hold her back from giving away her bread. About the chimneys

of the camp she remarked, so it is told: *But it is only here, immediately above the chimneys, that the billows of smoke are oppressive.*

An Orthodox source tells that in that time she embroidered an icon of Mary, the mother of Jesus, with her crucified Son, and that for it she traded her bread for thread in her last months. This story appears in the introduction to her collected writings. Another source adds that she embroidered a version of the Bayeux Tapestry, as a sign of hope for a new invasion in Normandy.

You may wonder what moved a woman who had lost everything to make an icon in a camp. Her own answer would probably have been that she already saw an icon in every person around her.

In January 1945 she was transferred to the Jugendlager. Blankets, coats, shoes and stockings were taken away and no medicine came in anymore. On March 3 she was brought back to the main camp.

The last day

In March 1945 the order came that prisoners who could no longer walk were to be killed. According to one of the sources, friends hid her for a time above a ceiling whenever there were selections. Before her death she asked a fellow prisoner to carry a message to Sergei Bulgakov, to Metropolitan Evlogy and to her mother. She accepted the suffering, she wanted to say, and if she died, she saw it as a blessing from above.

On March 30 she was selected for the gas chamber. She died in Ravensbrück on March 31, 1945. That was the day before Easter, in the Orthodox Church Great and Holy Saturday. On Easter Day the Red Cross entered the camp. A little more than a month later the war in Europe was over.

There are two versions of how she died. In the first she was selected because she could no longer walk well. In the second she stepped forward of her own free will and took the place of another woman, according to many tellers a Jewish woman, who had been chosen for the gas chamber. Jacqueline Péry believed that Mother Maria had taken the place of a desperate fellow prisoner.

That second version is the best known. It appears in lives of the saints, on memorial plaques and in speeches. I must honestly add that I have found no eyewitness who saw it happen. A study of her martyrdom says it plainly: no one knows exactly how her last hours went. The Orthodox Church in America also writes that the accounts differ. A Russian article speaks of a legend.

Geneviève de Gaulle Anthonioz, who was herself a prisoner in Ravensbrück, later said of her (my translation): Mother Maria did not undergo her death, she gave her life. Whether she meant that last day or her whole life, the source leaves open. I think both can be true.

A street by the rue de Lourmel

Mother Maria has no grave.

After the war Yad Vashem in Jerusalem recognized her as Righteous Among the Nations, the title of honor that Israel gives to non-Jews who saved Jews at the risk of their own lives.

On January 16, 2004, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople declared her a saint, together with her son Yuri, Father Dimitri Klepinin and Ilya Fondaminsky. On May 1 and 2 of that year this was celebrated in the Russian Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Paris. Orthodox Christians remember her on July 20. In the Episcopal Church in the United States she also has a day of remembrance.

On March 31, 2016, the day on which she had died seventy-one years earlier, Paris got a street bearing her name. The rue Mère-Marie-Skobtsov lies in the fifteenth arrondissement and comes out on the rue de Lourmel. In 2020 a memorial was placed in the Russian cemetery of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, near Paris.

Whoever walks down that short street today comes to the rue de Lourmel after a few steps. There stood a house with a door that opened for anyone who knocked.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in 1891 in Riga (the exact day differs by source and calendar); childhood in Anapa; the death of her father and her atheism as a teenager; the move to St. Petersburg in 1906; marriage to Dmitri Kuzmin-Karavaev (1910) and divorce; admission as the first woman to the theological lectures in St. Petersburg; her time as mayor in Anapa in the years of the revolution (the years vary from 1917 to 1919); her trial before Daniil Skobtsov and marriage to him; flight via Georgia and Yugoslavia and arrival in Paris (1923); the death of Anastasia (1926) and of Gaiana (1936); monastic vows in March 1932 before Metropolitan Evlogy; the house on the rue de Lourmel and Orthodox Action (1935); help to Jews with baptismal certificates and shelter; her presence in the Vélodrome d'Hiver in July 1942; the arrests in February 1943; the death of Yuri and Father Dimitri in Dora (1944); her death in Ravensbrück at the end of March 1945; recognition by Yad Vashem; canonization by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2004; the street name in Paris (2016).

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the question at the age of seven whether she could become a nun; her saying about justice after the death of her father; the letter to Blok from 1916 and the meeting when she was fifteen (in Forest); the saying about Red

or White; Trotsky's words at the congress; the month of keeping watch at Anastasia's bedside; Evlogy's charge to make the world her monastery and the metro scene; the stories of Anthony Bloom about the terrace on Montparnasse and about Le Creusot (Bloom heard the latter from a friend); the story of the 25 francs, the ruble and the forty visitors; her sayings about the star and the confessors; the interrogation of Father Dimitri by Hoffmann, including the cross (Forest does not name the source of the fragment); Yuri's letter from Compiègne; the testimonies of Perichon, Lascroux, Péry and Nosovich; the message to Bulgakov, Evlogy and her mother; the embroidered icon and the Bayeux embroidery in Ravensbrück; the hiding above the ceiling.

Unconfirmed: the plan to assassinate Trotsky (according to Wikipedia she was angry that he had shut down her party's congress; colleagues talked her out of it; a reliable second source is missing); who the father of Gaiana was; the number of children rescued from the Vélodrome in garbage cans (three, four or unknown); that in the gas chamber she took the place of another prisoner (no eyewitness found; sources speak of differing accounts and of a legend); the exact date of her death (March 30 or 31, 1945); the year of the recognition by Yad Vashem; where and of what Gaiana died; whether Mother Maria's mother Sofia was also arrested (sources differ about her role in the arrests).

Interpretation: the criticism she received concerned, according to the sources, her independence and her monastic life outside the walls. Whether her being a woman played a part in it, the sources do not say.

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19. Jason Landsel, "Mother Maria of Paris", Plough

Gladys Aylward: the housemaid who bought her own ticket

In the prison of Yangcheng, men were screaming. They were beating each other to death. So Alan Burgess tells it in *The Small Woman*, the book he wrote with her cooperation. The prison governor came running to her, gasping, the small English woman who was known in the town as the foot inspector, and asked her to go inside. The men had taken axes from the workshop.

Gladys asked whether he was mad, so the story goes. She went. Inside stood a prisoner with an axe. Gladys held out her hand and told him to give it to her, and right now. He gave it. Then she made the men line up and told them they should be ashamed. The men lined up. She promised that she would ask the governor to deal with them sensibly, and that she would come back.

Her name was Gladys Aylward. She was a small woman from North London, a housemaid by trade, turned down by the mission society she had applied to. She went to China anyway, at her own expense, by train. There she became a Chinese citizen. The Chinese called her Ai-weh-deh, the virtuous one. She died in 1970 in Taiwan, still among children no one else had.

Her own story begins in Edmonton.

A postman, a maid and a faraway land

Gladys May Aylward was born on February 24, 1902, in Edmonton, a working-class district on the north side of London. Her father, Thomas John Aylward, was a postman. Her mother, Rosina Florence, also worked for the Post Office. At around fourteen Gladys left school. She went into service as a maid, and later became a parlormaid: the maid in a wealthy house who opened the door and waited at table.

Somewhere around the age of twenty Gladys came to faith, at a revival meeting. After that she read about China, about millions of people who had never heard of Jesus, and it would not let her go. The story goes that she tried to get friends and family excited about mission in China, until her brother Lawrence told her that in that case she should go herself. For Gladys it was no joke.

Too old to learn Chinese

In 1928 or 1929 she applied to the China Inland Mission in London. That was a large Protestant mission society that sent men and women to the interior of China. Anyone who wanted to go first had to complete a training course.

Gladys was given a preparatory course of three months. She made hardly any progress with the Chinese and the lessons. After that she was not trained any further. According to the reference work *Women in World History*, the chairman of the committee praised her sincerity and her courage. But he thought her too young in Christian experience and training, and too old to learn Chinese. She was twenty-six. Burgess adds that the principal also spoke of her weak

knowledge of doctrine. Gladys answered politely that she understood, and that she was grateful she had been allowed to come.

How do you deal with a no like that? Gladys went on with the work she knew, as a maid, and began to save. She could not pay for a voyage by ship to China. A train ticket across Europe and Russia was cheaper.

Burgess describes an evening in her room in London. On the dressing table lay her Bible and the money she had saved. She knelt and prayed, in words preserved in the book, roughly like this: *Oh God, here's my Bible! Here's my money! Here's me! Use me, God!* It is the prayer of a woman who had nothing to hide behind.

The committee looked at languages, at schooling and at what a candidate would be able to endure in a foreign country. On those points Gladys scored badly. What no form could measure was how stubborn this small woman was.

A train through a war

In October 1930 she left from Liverpool Street station in London. *Women in World History* gives October 18, other sources October 15. Her own gravestone in Taiwan says she came to China in 1930.

She was heading for an older missionary she had never met: Jeannie Lawson, a widow of seventy-three who worked in the interior of China.

According to Burgess she had about two pounds in a traveler's check sewn into her corset, and some coins. When a ticket clerk warned her that the route through Siberia was dangerous, she said they would do her no harm, she was only a woman. The journey went east on the Trans-Siberian Railway. At the end of that line she got stuck in an armed border conflict between the Soviet Union and

China. In the snow she had to get off the train and walk. She was held by the Russians. Burgess tells that her passport was altered, so that it no longer said "missionary" but "machinist," and that a Russian girl helped her escape from Vladivostok. A Japanese captain took her along without charging her. In Japan the British consul helped her further, and on a following boat she reached China, at Tientsin, today's Tianjin. According to a British Christian newspaper the whole journey took about five and a half weeks.

For the details of that journey we depend on her own story. Nobody else was there.

The inn of the eight happinesses

From Tientsin she traveled south to the province of Shanxi, in the north of China. The last stretch, from the city of Tsehchow (now Zezhou) to the mountain town of Yangcheng, took almost two days in a sedan chair carried by mules. Yangcheng now belongs to the city of Jincheng. The old mule road to the town is still there.

China in those years was a republic, but a divided one. The government of Chiang Kai-shek was fighting the communists. In the mountain villages girls still had their feet bound, an age-old custom in which the feet of young girls were kept small. The government had forbidden it.

On her arrival Jeannie Lawson turned out to be a gruff old lady. Who are you, was her first question, so Burgess writes. The house was almost falling apart. It had been bought cheaply, Jeannie said, because it was haunted, and the people of the town threw mud at the two women.

Jeannie Lawson had a plan. The town lay on a route along which caravans of mules passed. Together with Gladys she turned the old building into an inn for the mule drivers. They called it the Inn of

the Eight Happinesses, after eight virtues, among them love, loyalty and truth. Gladys joked that it sounded just like the Red Lion, and the name stuck. Gladys's own idea was that if she could only talk to those men, they would carry the message hundreds of miles further. In the evenings they told the guests stories from the Bible. Jeannie opened the first evening with the words that the story of that night was about a man called Jesus Christ. The stories were free.

The cook, Yang, told stories too, but he mixed up the Bible figures. Once he had Jesus bring the animals into the ark, and later he credited the feeding of the five thousand to Noah. Gladys wrote Chinese words phonetically in a notebook and learned Bible stories by heart in Chinese. When the mule caravans came by and refused to go into the courtyard, she pulled the animals in by the reins herself.

Working together did not always go smoothly. According to an American biographical sketch Gladys left after a few months of conflict, and came back when Lawson fell ill. About a year after her arrival Jeannie Lawson had a fall. According to Burgess it happened in Chin Shui, when the rotten railing of a balcony gave way and she landed about twenty feet lower on a heap of coal. Gladys found her and called her name. Thank God you are here, Jeannie whispered. An English doctor at the hospital in Luan said her back was broken. Jeannie begged to be allowed to go back to Yangcheng. Gladys took her home in a sedan chair, and there she died, the day after she got home. One of the sources gives 1931. Gladys now stood alone, in a town whose language she spoke only halfway.

Foot inspector of Yangcheng

She learned the language from the mule drivers. It became the local Chinese of Shanxi, not the language of the schoolbooks. Whoever had turned her down in London for being too old to learn Chinese had been wrong.

Then came a request from the mandarin of Yangcheng, the highest official of the district. A decree of the central government forbade the binding of feet, and someone had to go to the villages to check whether it was being obeyed. He asked Gladys. She became the foot inspector of the district. Her pay was a measure of millet a day and a coin for vegetables.

Gladys warned the mandarin that she would try to win the whole province for Jesus. He did not care, he replied. She gladly accepted the job.

In the first village she took the bandages off the feet of a little girl. As she worked she told her that feet are meant for walking on, not for shuffling around on. She rubbed the child's foot and said the nursery rhyme about the five little piggies going to market. The child giggled, and the other women laughed along. Village after village she visited, she undid bandages, and at the same time she told her stories.

There are more stories from these years. The mandarin called on her to help with the riot in the prison, where this chapter began. The outcome is well preserved in Burgess's book. The men, among them a former Buddhist priest who was their spokesman, told her what was wrong. Gladys promised to come back. Afterward she pleaded for better conditions for the prisoners. They were given looms, a grindstone, cloth and rabbits. The prisoners got a Sunday church service, which lasted three hours. The men called her Ai-weh-deh.

She also took orphans into her home. The best known is a girl a child dealer wanted to sell. The price fell from two dollars to a shilling, and in the end Gladys paid ninepence. The dealer called her *Lady with the heart of pity!* The girl was named Mei-en, beautiful grace, but everyone called her Ninepence, after the amount. She later per-

suaded Gladys to give food to a hungry boy, a boy of about eight who was called Less, because the girls ate less in order to share. He stayed ten years. Then came a toddler who had gotten lost by the river, Bao-Bao. Then came a refugee boy from after a flood of the Yellow River, Francis. A man tried to kidnap Ninepence for a wicked uncle who wanted the family's money. Less bit him in the arm, and the mandarin had the man arrested. At the trial, Burgess tells, the mandarin let Gladys say only yes or no, depending on a nod of his head. She became Ninepence's official guardian, and the money of the grandparents, almost two hundred dollars, was kept for her education.

Ai-weh-deh

In 1936 Gladys Aylward became a Chinese citizen. She gave up her British passport. With the help of the mandarin she sent in her papers. According to Burgess she would rather be a Chinese foreigner than a foreign devil.

For a Western missionary at that time this was a remarkable step. Most missionaries stayed under the protection of their own country, with a consul who could step in if things went wrong. Gladys chose to belong to the people among whom she lived.

The people of Yangcheng gave her a name: Ai-weh-deh, in Chinese □□□. It sounds like Aylward and means the virtuous one. In the archive of the SOAS library in London there are still letters to friends and family from 1936 on, photographs from May 1936 and a Chinese dress. Whoever sees those pieces sees an English woman who had become Chinese.

A price on her head

In the late 1930s the Japanese army invaded Shanxi. In the spring of 1938 Yangcheng was bombed by Japanese planes. According to Burgess the townspeople watched the silver planes, while Gladys prayed upstairs. A bomb hit the inn, nine people were killed in the street, the floor collapsed and a beam pinned her down until helpers dug her out. She was wounded. She took charge at the East Gate. I need all of you, she shouted angrily. With the mandarin and the prison governor she set up a relief committee. The Buddhist temple took in the wounded, another temple the homeless.

Gladys took sides. According to various stories she passed on information about Japanese troop movements to the Chinese army. That caused tension with other missionaries. In nearby Tsehchow the Welsh missionaries David and Jean Davies worked. David thought that missionaries should stay strictly neutral, so as not to endanger their work and their people. Gladys did not see herself as a foreigner. China was her country, and she felt it was her duty to help it.

Who was right? I think the honest answer is that both attitudes cost something. Neutrality protected the mission posts. Taking sides made Gladys a target. According to the story of her biographer the Japanese spread a pamphlet with a reward of a hundred dollars for her capture, together with the mandarin and a well-known merchant.

From the same time comes a short note she is said to have written to a Chinese general who advised her to withdraw with his troops. Her answer (my translation): Christians never retreat. She stayed. But she could not stay with the children.

First she brought about forty Christians, among them children, to a hidden village, Bei Chai Chuang. An orphan boy of nine, Timo-

thy, and a girl of seventeen traveled with her to Chin Shui. A little slave girl, Sualan, joined them, and the released prisoners walked behind them. When Japanese advance troops reached Chin Shui, she walked back. In a letter to her mother she wrote, so Burgess tells, that these were her people and that God had given them to her.

A hundred children and a river

She decided to bring the orphans west, to Sian, today's Xi'an, in the province of Shaanxi. There was a government orphanage there, out of reach of the Japanese army. There were about a hundred of them: about twenty big girls, seven big boys and many younger children. Two porters of the mandarin carried millet for the first days.

When was this? Here the sources contradict each other. A number give 1938. *Women in World History*, the archive description of SOAS and the Boston University database of mission history give 1940. According to *Women in World History* the group reached Sian at the end of April 1940. That a group of about a hundred children crossed the mountains with her, all the sources agree.

They walked over the mountains. The first night they slept in a Buddhist temple, where rats ran over the children. After that they slept outside, in a rock shelter and in a farmer's yard. The millet ran out. Later a group of soldiers shared their food with them. Two older boys, Teh and Liang, whitewashed rocks to mark the route and wrote short Bible verses on them. Two Japanese fighter planes flew over without firing, and Gladys was just about to blow her whistle to make the children scatter when she saw that they were Nationalist troops. The girls' feet were covered in blisters. The children kept complaining: Ai-weh-deh, my feet hurt. Ai-weh-deh, I am hungry.

On the twelfth day they came down to the village of Yuan Ku and saw the Yellow River. There were no boats. The general had stopped the shipping five days earlier. The children asked where the boats were. On the fourth day, when there was still nothing, Sualan, the little slave girl who knew the story of Moses, asked why God did not open the water of the Yellow River for them.

I am not Moses, Sualan, Gladys answered. Then they knelt together to pray.

What happened next we know from her own story, as Burgess wrote it down. An officer of the Nationalist army appeared, who asked her who on earth she was and whether she was mad. They were refugees on their way to Sian, said Gladys. All of China is a battlefield, she said wearily. He whistled three times. Three times a whistle came back from the other side. Two figures pushed a boat out onto the river. In three trips the boat took the children across, and the officer helped Gladys into the last boat. He called out his good wishes. She could not thank him enough.

In other tellings of the story the children sing on the bank, an officer hears them and arranges a boat. That is how it appears in several Christian biographies. In both versions they pray, and help comes.

Whether it went exactly like that, nobody can check anymore. A river, a hundred children, an officer with a whistle: it is the kind of story that kept coming back in Gladys's ministry. She counted on God at moments when there was nothing left to arrange.

After the river the journey went on, partly on coal trains. At Sian they were not let in at first. An old man said they would never get into the city, because the gates were closed. A guard on the wall shouted that the city was full of refugees. Gladys leaned against the gate and wept. The New Life Movement then arranged for the children to go to an orphanage in Fufeng. There Gladys collapsed.

In a village she had not been able to get any food down, she had a headache, and she lay down on the bed. There she thought of a sermon on John 4, about the water that leaves you thirsty again. Then she slipped into delirium. Christian women took her on an ox cart to the Scandinavian-American mission. She had typhus, and was exhausted and undernourished. For weeks she lay in the hospital in Sian, in the care of two English missionaries. In Burgess's afterword are the doctor's diagnoses: relapsing fever, typhus, a spot of pneumonia, malnutrition and exhaustion. She recovered, but her health was never again what it had been. Sometimes the children found her on the doorstep, unable to say where she lived.

About God she wrote in 1968, as it is quoted, that whatever you suffer for Him, He repays with love and care.

After that she stayed in China. In 1944 she worked in Tsingsui, in 1945 in Chengdu in the province of Sichuan, as a Bible woman at a Chinese seminary. A Bible woman was, in Protestant missions, a woman who made house calls and gave Bible teaching to women. According to another source she also worked in a leper colony in Sichuan.

Around the end of the 1940s she returned to England, for an operation. The year differs: some sources give 1947, others the spring of 1949, when family had collected the money for her trip. Soon afterward the communists took over power in China, and for foreign missionaries the country closed. After almost twenty years Gladys was back in the country where she was born, and she could no longer enter the country where she was at home.

The small woman of the BBC

In England she met Alan Burgess, a writer who worked for the BBC. He made a radio play about her, and in 1957 his book *The Small*

Woman appeared. It was written with her cooperation, and it became a bestseller.

The book is the source of nearly all the vivid stories about her. You have to know that when you read it. Burgess was a good storyteller, and good storytellers add color. A Briton who traveled to Yangcheng in 2006 with the book in his hand looked for the deep ravine that Burgess described on the south side of the town. He did not find it.

Gladys herself became famous through it, which she had not sought. According to a biographical sketch on an American Christian site it happened to her discomfort. She spoke in churches and at schools. In 1963 she was a guest on the British television program *This Is Your Life*. She was also received by Queen Elizabeth, and came in a Chinese dress. Her own version of her life appeared shortly after her death, written down by Christine Hunter, under the title *Gladys Aylward: The Little Woman*.

A pack of lies

In 1958 Chinese children walked across the mountains of Snowdonia, in North Wales. They came from Liverpool, from one of the largest Chinese communities in Europe. They walked barefoot, and the rags around their feet were dyed red, as if they were bleeding. A film crew from 20th Century Fox filmed them. In front of the camera they played orphans fleeing from the Japanese army, somewhere in the north of China. The lead role went to the Swedish film star Ingrid Bergman.

The film was called *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. It became a success. The woman it was about was at that moment thousands of miles away, in Hong Kong and Taiwan, among refugees and or-

phans. When she heard what had been made of it, she was furious. According to a film history source she called the story a pack of lies.

Burgess sold the film rights. According to *Women in World History* Gladys herself had signed an agreement with 20th Century Fox. What would be made of her life, she did not know. She said later that she never received a final script.

The film departed from the facts on many points. Ingrid Bergman was a tall, blonde Swede. Gladys was small, had dark hair and spoke with a London accent. The film made a love story out of it between her and a Chinese officer, Colonel Lin Nan, played by the Austrian Curd Jürgens. He was portrayed as half European. Gladys considered that an insult to the real man and his Chinese descent. She had never had a romance with a colonel, she said, and she had never kissed a man. Her journey through Russia was reduced to a few rude soldiers. At the end of the film the main character leaves the children to follow her colonel. The real Gladys stayed with the orphans until the end of her life.

Her faith also largely disappeared from view. The studio did not want to tie her to any church. In the film Bergman is never in a church and gives no religious lessons. According to Bergman herself a scene in which Gladys prays was cut from the film.

Gladys felt that her work was cheapened and that the events were twisted. She felt tainted by the film, so a film history source tells. She wrote letters to the press, but she never went to court. According to a Christian magazine she also earned no money from it. She probably never saw the film herself.

Many people know Gladys Aylward from the film. The woman you see there, with a love story and without prayer, never existed. The true story is in the book by Burgess and in what she told herself. Her life went on for twelve more years after 1958.

Hong Kong, Taiwan and the children

In April 1957 she sailed on the ship *Chusan* from London to Hong Kong. She was fifty-five. She worked there among refugees from the Chinese mainland and helped set up a shelter for them. She was not allowed to stay. She was no longer a British subject, and Hong Kong was a British colony.

She left for Taiwan, the island where the government of Chiang Kai-shek had settled after 1949. The sources give 1957 or 1958. In Taipei she started an orphanage, the Gladys Aylward Children's Home. There she once again took children into her home, and worked with refugees. The work still exists, under the name Bethany Children's Home.

She was now a woman in her sixties, with a health that had been damaged by the war. She kept traveling to ask for money and attention, and in 1963 she came to England once more. After that she went back to Taipei.

A grain of wheat in Taiwan

Gladys Aylward died in January 1970 in Taipei. Most sources give January 3, *Women in World History* gives January 2 and flu as the cause. She was sixty-seven. In London a school in Edmonton was named after her shortly afterward.

She was buried in the cemetery of Christ's College in Guandu, on the edge of Taipei, on a hillside. Her gravestone says that she came to China in 1930 to proclaim the gospel. It also carries a text from the Gospel of John: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.* (John 12:24)

Maybe you have been turned away from something you thought God was calling you to. Gladys Aylward was told in London that she was too old and had too little schooling. She bought a train ticket. Her grave lies on a hillside in Taiwan, with the grain of wheat in the stone.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on February 24, 1902, in Edmonton, London; work as a maid; rejection by the China Inland Mission after a trial course (1928 or 1929); independent journey by train through Siberia to China, departure in October 1930; cooperation with Jeannie Lawson in an inn for mule drivers in Yangcheng (Shanxi) and Lawson's death shortly afterward; appointment as foot inspector by the mandarin; Chinese citizenship (usually given as 1936); the name Ai-weh-deh; the journey with about a hundred orphans over the mountains and the Yellow River to Sian; typhus after arrival; return to England at the end of the 1940s; the book *The Small Woman* by Alan Burgess (1957); the film by 20th Century Fox (1958) with Ingrid Bergman, shot in England and Wales, and her objections to it (love scenes, the half-European colonel, twisted events); work in Hong Kong and the orphanage in Taiwan; death in Taipei in January 1970; burial at Christ's College in Guandu, with John 12:24 on her gravestone.

Only from own testimony or later tradition (mainly Burgess): the remark of her brother Lawrence; the prayer in her room in London and the words of the ticket clerk; the details of her journey through Siberia and Russia (passport, escape from Vladivostok, the Japanese captain); the words and scenes around Jeannie Lawson (the mud, the fall from the balcony, her last words); the stories of the cook Yang; the condition that as foot inspector she could talk about Jesus; the scene in the first village; the details of the prison

riot; Ninepence, Less, Bao-Bao and Francis; the naturalization story; the bomb hit on the inn; the note about Christians never retreating; the Japanese pamphlet with a reward of a hundred dollars; her letter to her mother; the journey and everything at the Yellow River (Sualan, the officer with the whistle; elsewhere the children sing and an officer arranges a boat); the gates of Sian; the delirium in Fufeng; her spying work for the Chinese army; the meeting with Queen Elizabeth; the thought about God repaying suffering (1968).

Unconfirmed or disputed: the year of departure (1930 according to most sources and her gravestone, 1932 in others); the year of the journey (1938 or 1940) and its duration (twelve or twenty-seven days; Burgess gives twelve days to the river); the year of her citizenship (1936, 1937 or 1941); the year of return to England (1947 or 1949); the year of settling in Taiwan (1957 or 1958); her date of death (January 2 or 3, 1970); whether she ever saw the film; the ravine near Yangcheng that a visitor in 2006 could not find.

Interpretation: the film *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* is not a source for her life. The book by Burgess was written with her cooperation, but there too some things are exaggerated.

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Kathryn Kuhlman: the woman who said she healed no one

A woman stood up in a church service in Franklin, a small town in the oil-rich west of Pennsylvania, and said she was healed. She told them she had had a tumor and that it had disappeared while the preaching was going on. It was April 1947, according to the historian Amy Collier Artman. Another encyclopedia gives 1946.

Kathryn Kuhlman, who stood on the platform, had not prayed for the sick. She had preached about the Holy Spirit. Later she told how she herself was an astonished onlooker. A moment later a man stood up who said something similar.

That day began what she herself saw as the start of her healing ministry. From then on she drew full halls year after year, in Pittsburgh, in Los Angeles, in front of the camera. And she kept saying that she healed no one herself.

Who was she, then? An honest answer must also name the years she would rather have forgotten. It began in a small town on the Missouri.

A town with German names

Kathryn Kuhlman was born on May 9, 1907, in Concordia, in the American state of Missouri. Her parents, Joseph Adolph Kuhlman and Emma Walkenhorst, had German roots, like many farming families in that region. Kathryn was one of four children.

The America of her youth was a land of small churches and traveling preachers. In summer evangelists came to the villages with a tent. Women were not allowed to preach in most churches in those years. Still, there were always a few women who did it anyway, mostly in the new Pentecostal and Holiness movements, which were less bound by old rules.

Around her fourteenth year Kathryn came to faith, during an evangelistic meeting. The sources differ about the place. In the interview she gave in 1973, she said she was converted at fourteen in Concordia, in a church where she felt the Holy Spirit and knew she was born again. What exactly she experienced, we know only from what she herself told about it later.

Kathryn's older sister Myrtle was married to Everett B. Parrott, a traveling evangelist. When Kathryn was sixteen or seventeen, around 1924, she left school and went with them. She stayed with the couple for about five years. At first she sang and told her testimony, later she also spoke herself.

In those years she took two years of classes at Simpson Bible Institute in Seattle. According to Artman she got high marks for the Bible subjects. For homiletics, the subject in which you learn to preach, she failed. She received no diploma. One biographer, Wayne Warner, writes that she was suspended in 1926 after a late-night date. Other sources do not mention that.

I find it a touching detail. The woman who would later address millions of people did not pass the subject of preaching. She stuttered as a child, according to a tribute in Light Magazine, and that would explain the drawn-out way in which she later pronounced words like God and Spirit.

A pool hall in Boise

In 1928 the Parrotts' team was in Boise, the capital of Idaho. Everett could not lead a meeting, and Myrtle and Kathryn took over. The pastor who had invited them encouraged Kathryn to go on alone from then on. She did. The team's pianist, Helen Gulliford, went with her.

According to her first biographers she preached her first sermon of her own in a run-down pool hall in Boise. The story comes from circles around her ministry.

For five years the two young women traveled through the thinly populated states of the West: Idaho, Utah, Colorado. It was the time of the great Depression. In Idaho Kathryn asked permission to preach in village churches that were boarded up. Some nights she slept, so the tribute in Light Magazine tells, in a turkey coop. In 1933 they stayed six months in Pueblo, in Colorado, in an empty warehouse of the Montgomery Ward department store. After that they moved on to Denver. Many Americans had no work and no money, and whoever preached lived off what people gave.

The tabernacle in Denver

In Denver Kathryn stayed longer than anywhere else. She started a radio program there called *Smiling Through*. In 1935 she took over an old garage for trucks, which she named the Denver Revival Tabernacle. A sympathetic biography speaks of about two thou-

sand members. She was not yet thirty and led one of the larger independent congregations of the city.

An independent congregation belonged to no denomination. Kathryn had herself ordained by the Evangelical Church Alliance, a small evangelical association that recognized preachers without a church affiliation. When that happened is unclear: Artman gives 1933, another source 1968. In her interview of 1973 she said she had received ordination there and had remained a Baptist.

In 1934 she lost her father, who was killed in an accident.

Burroughs Waltrip

In 1935 a guest speaker came to the tabernacle: Burroughs A. Waltrip, an evangelist from Texas. He was married. He had a wife and two sons.

A relationship developed between Kathryn and Waltrip. In the years that followed he divorced his wife and left his family behind. He moved to Mason City, in the state of Iowa, and built a church there with a radio station, the Radio Chapel. Friends of Kathryn begged her not to marry him. She believed, writes one encyclopedia, that she was in love and that God had brought them together to preach.

On October 18, 1938, they married in Mason City. It was a quiet wedding, almost secret. When the news became known in Denver, most of her congregation left. The Radio Chapel went under in debt, and in May 1939 Waltrip gave his last sermon there. Rumors of adultery went around. They were never proven, but they stuck to her.

Here I want to be careful. What happens between two people, an outsider sees only halfway. Waltrip's wife and his two sons were left behind, and that is a fact. Kathryn herself later saw it that way.

Her biographer Jamie Buckingham wrote that she called her part in the breakup of his family her greatest regret. She was thinking above all of the grief of his children. Light Magazine writes that she later called the marriage the greatest mistake of her life.

A dead-end street

The couple traveled together for a few years as evangelists through the Midwest. On the announcements her name stood first beside his, by the middle of the 1940s it again said only Kathryn Kuhlman. In 1944 they separated. She moved east, without him.

About that parting she later told a story that her followers know well. She was walking, she said, down a street with a sign saying it was a dead end. There she gave everything over to God. At that place, she said, Kathryn Kuhlman died: at four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. Where that street was and in what year it happened, she never said clearly. We know the story only from her own mouth, passed on by people who stood close to her, among them Benny Hinn and Jamie Buckingham.

The official divorce followed in 1947 or 1948. It was Waltrip who filed for divorce. He argued that she had left him. In an interview with the Denver Post in 1952 she openly agreed with him: she had refused to go on living with him. About his further life little is known with certainty.

Have you ever done something you knew was not right, and carried it through anyway because you thought it came from God? Kathryn Kuhlman kept silent about it for the rest of her life, or spoke of it only briefly. In any case she never excused it.

It is not about golden vessels

At the end of the war Kathryn came to Franklin. About the year the sources differ: 1944 or 1946. She preached there in the Gospel Tabernacle and began a radio program on a station in neighboring Oil City. People kept coming back. She decided to stay.

There the service took place with which this chapter began. The woman with the tumor, the man who stood up shortly afterward. Whether the woman really had a tumor and whether it disappeared cannot be checked. There are no medical records. What is certain is that from then on Kathryn began to do her work differently. She held no prayer lines, in which the sick come forward one by one to be touched. She had seen such an arrangement in tent meetings, with long lines and filled-in cards, and she hated it. It had once made her cry, she said, all night. She preached, and during the service she named ailments from the platform that she said were being healed at that moment. People who recognized themselves in it came forward to tell about it. Sometimes she stretched out her hand toward someone, and then people fell to the floor, "slain in the Spirit," sometimes for minutes.

About herself she said this: God does not look for golden vessels, she said. He looks for vessels that surrender. According to Light Magazine she put it this way: the secret is surrender to the Lord.

Carnegie Hall on the North Side

In 1948 she began services in Carnegie Hall, a concert hall on the North Side of Pittsburgh. She would stay there for twenty-three years. Her office was on the sixth floor of the Carlton House hotel downtown. From there she directed a radio, television and evangelistic work that reached the whole country.

Pittsburgh was a city of steel and factory workers, with many Roman Catholic and Presbyterian churches. In August 1953 she celebrated five years of preaching in western Pennsylvania in the Syria Mosque, a large hall in the Oakland district. According to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette more than six thousand people came. Some had waited all night to get a seat.

What she looked like on such an evening is described by the Pittsburgh Press in 1953. She was slim and tall, often wore a white chiffon dress and had curls like Shirley Temple. Journalist Ann Butler called her an excited human dynamo, charged with electric self-confidence. Her dark, husky voice held a hall spellbound. Her week had a fixed rhythm: on Monday evening she led Bible study in the First Presbyterian Church downtown, on Friday she held the healing service in Carnegie Hall, and on Sunday she often stood in the Stambaugh Auditorium in Youngstown, Ohio.

A foundation came into being, the Kathryn Kuhlman Foundation. Whether that was in 1954 or in 1957 differs by source. Later the foundation supported mission posts in other countries.

What stands out in the reports is how little she wanted to talk about herself during the services. She spoke about the Holy Spirit, of whom she said He did the work. She was only an instrument. In the interview of 1973 she said, “I am absolutely dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit.” She also defended the sick. Many preachers told someone who did not get better that he had too little faith. Kathryn refused that. According to Artman she said that sick people were often wrongly blamed for that.

There were things that stood out in her services. Part of the work happened in silence: long moments without words, in which, according to witnesses, people were healed without anyone touching them. She sometimes asked healed people to push their own

wheelchair across the platform. And she invited doctors to sit on the platform or in the front rows.

A line of witnesses

One of the doctors who, according to Light Magazine, regularly sat on the platform in the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles was Dr. Martin Biery, a surgeon for spinal cord injuries at a veterans' hospital in Long Beach. He told what he had seen: frozen backs that moved again, a leg shortened by polio that visibly grew longer while Kathryn prayed, and a boy with a knee condition who could bend his knee fully again on the spot. The magazine gives no medical files with it.

Another story, said to have appeared in a Pennsylvania newspaper in 1950, is about Carey Reams. He had not walked since 1945. A land mine in the war had put him into a partial coma for six weeks, with a broken pelvis, broken jaw, broken back and broken neck. He had been through 41 operations and had lost more than forty pounds. Kathryn, so the story goes, told him to throw away his crutches. He walked across the platform and through the aisles. The day after, he helped load a truck with heavy furniture. Eleven years later his complaints were said not to have returned. This story also comes without files.

Roberts Liardon, the author of *God's Generals*, attended three of her meetings as a boy and met her once. He describes people being healed on the other side of the hall without anyone touching them, and how in a word of knowledge she accurately pointed out people in certain seats.

These are testimonies. You can believe them or leave them, and the box shows what can be checked.

Come on in

In 1962 her book *I Believe in Miracles* appeared, with stories of people who said they were healed. It became a bestseller. From 1965 she made more than five hundred episodes of a television program with the same name. In her last ten years she also held a service every month in the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The magazine Time on September 14, 1970 called her a Lourdes all by herself.

In this way she came into contact with people who had never attended a tent meeting. Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Roman Catholics. In 1968 the Presbyterian minister Donald Shaw told on her program how he had been touched by the power of God in a service in Carnegie Hall. He struggled with pride: what would my colleagues think of me? Then he prayed: Lord, whatever it is, I want it. He went down under the power of God. Kathryn cried out: a dead Presbyterian minister has come alive in Christ.

At the end of a broadcast she told the ministers across the country that they could not stop it. Do not fight it, she said. Come on in.

A physician at a university hospital, Dr. Kahn Uyeyama, told in 1969 that he had been a humanist and an agnostic until he received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. After that, he said, he saw that many of his patients had been healed. In her television studio, with wicker chairs in a replica garden, she sat beside David du Plessis to talk about the church coming together. And she interviewed Corrie ten Boom and Dennis Bennett.

That call shows what her greatest influence would become. The charismatic renewal, in which believers from ordinary churches began to seek the gifts of the Spirit without leaving their church, got a face in her. On October 11, 1972, she was received in Rome by Pope Paul VI. That far her work now reached.

A man's job?

In July 1973 the magazine Christianity Today published an interview with her. The editors had sent forty-one questions. She answered them on audiotape, about three and a half hours long.

She did not want anyone to call her a faith healer. "I have never healed anyone," she said. All healing came, in her view, from God, and God did not always heal in the same way. Why one got better and the other did not, she did not know. Healing of the soul she thought more important than healing of the body. She told about a dying lawyer who was not healed physically, but found Christ and died in peace. That too she called healing. She hurt for those who left unhealed, but the answers belonged to God.

The editors also asked about her as a woman in the pulpit. Her answers are surprising. She said that her calling was as certain as her conversion, and that she was glad to be a woman. She also called her work really work for a man. In her words, she would not wish this job on any woman. She believed that men were God's first choice, and that she worked harder than most men. Asked why there were so few women preachers, she said you would just have to ask God.

She called herself a preacher, not a pastor. Critics pointed out that in Denver she had very much been a pastor, and in Pittsburgh in fact too. She defended the view that men should lead in the church and that wives should submit to their husbands. Her own life looked different. Artman writes that it is unclear whether Kathryn saw that tension herself, or whether this was a way of protecting herself against the criticism that a woman on a platform received anyway.

Artman puts it sharply: she lived the liberated life while contradicting the women's movement. I am not going to resolve that tension here. Readers from different churches will think differently about it. What does stand out: she did not turn it into a battle. She preached.

The most ordinary person in the world

In 1974 Kathryn Kuhlman sat in the television studio of The Tonight Show, the best-known talk show in America. Host Johnny Carson tried to describe what she did with a hall full of people. He used words like hypnotic and charismatic. She shook it off. She was, she said, just the most ordinary person in the world. Carson did not believe her. She was not that ordinary, he said. The audience laughed.

It was a strange conversation. There sat a woman in her sixties, with a voice that everyone in America knew. She had her own television program and a radio program that reached the whole country. Her book *I Believe in Miracles* had sold more than a million copies. Every month she filled a hall of seven thousand seats in Los Angeles. People came from all over the country because they were sick and hoped to get better. And she kept saying that she herself could do nothing. In that conversation she said that psychosomatic complaints were the hardest to heal, and the hall applauded.

Artman describes her as tall, attractive and fashionable, with a touch of sauce in her white high-heeled shoes with ankle straps. Critics found her way of speaking artificial. Artman sees timing and humor in it, and a down-home style of speaking that Wayne Warner called Missouri cornbread. Her sermons were well constructed and largely traditional. No denomination or Christian organization stood behind her.

A doctor in the hall

Not everyone believed what happened in her services. In 1974 came the hardest report. The surgeon William Nolen, a physician from Litchfield in Minnesota, attended one of her services. He noted the names of eighty-two people who said they were healed. Twenty-three of them later came to Minneapolis to be examined. Nolen

followed them for months. His conclusion in the magazine McCall's was that not one of them had been truly miraculously healed. A woman who said she was healed of cancer in her spine died a short time later. His book *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle* appeared in 1974.

Nolen's research was widely read and also contested. Another doctor pointed out that Nolen had attended only one service and had not followed everyone. Christian doctors and writers collected files of healings that in their view did hold up. A journalist estimated that over the years two million people said they had been healed in her services. Nobody has been able to check that number.

Kathryn herself did not answer with numbers. She kept saying that she did not know why one was healed and another not. She tied healing to the cross, with the words of Isaiah: *The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5).

In 1975 another kind of trouble came. Her personal assistant Paul Bartholomew took her to court for breach of contract. Accusations were made about jewelry, art and money. She denied them. Shortly afterward she announced that the case had been settled before the trial.

Tulsa, February 1976

Her heart had been weak for some time. According to a sympathetic biography a heart problem was diagnosed in 1955. In July 1975 she had complaints again, in November a relapse followed. She underwent open-heart surgery in Tulsa, Oklahoma. There she died on February 20, 1976. She was sixty-eight years old.

About her last days moving stories go around in her own circle. According to Light Magazine Oral Roberts was about to pray for her healing in the hospital, but she made it known that she wanted to

go to heaven. He did what she wanted. Around her dying a scent of roses is said to have hung. These are stories of people who were there, and they have not been independently recorded.

In Pittsburgh a memorial service was held in the First Presbyterian Church downtown. The church was full, a choir of ninety-five singers sang *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and staff of the foundation walked down the aisles with red velvet bags for the offering. There she had given Bible study on Monday evenings for years, and after Carnegie Hall she held her services there as well. She was buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. In the park of Concordia, the town where she was born, hangs a memorial plaque. In 1976 the mayor of Las Vegas proclaimed a Kathryn Kuhlman Day, when she arrived there.

What remained

The foundation went on for forty more years and closed in 2016. Her books are still sold. Many later healing preachers say they were shaped by her.

Historians see something else above all. Amy Collier Artman describes her as the woman who took Pentecostal faith out of the tents and gave it a place in ordinary churches. Under her influence the charismatic movement became calmer, less focused on emotion and on speaking in tongues as the only proof of baptism in the Spirit. Presbyterians and Catholics could belong without leaving their church.

Kathryn Kuhlman fit no category. She was a woman who went up into the pulpit and said it was a man's job. She brought thousands of sick people together and said that she did not heal them. She had a marriage behind her that began with the pain of another family, and she herself later called that a mistake.

Perhaps you wonder whether God can use such a person. The Bible is full of people about whom you could ask the same question.

Somewhere along a road stood a sign. Dead end, it said. According to her own story, that is where the rest of her life began, on a Saturday afternoon at four o'clock.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on May 9, 1907, in Concordia, Missouri; work with her sister Myrtle and brother-in-law Everett Parrott from about 1924; Simpson Bible Institute without a diploma; her own ministry from 1928 with Helen Gulliford; work in Denver from 1933 and the Denver Revival Tabernacle; marriage in 1938 to the divorced evangelist Burroughs Waltrip and the departure of many congregation members; separation in 1944 and divorce at his request; work in Franklin, Pennsylvania; services in Carnegie Hall, Pittsburgh, from 1948; *I Believe in Miracles* (1962) and the television program; meeting with Pope Paul VI (1972); the interview with Christianity Today (1973); the research of William Nolen and his book (1974); the lawsuit of 1975; death on February 20, 1976, in Tulsa after heart surgery; burial in Glendale.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the details of her conversion; the first sermon in a pool hall in Boise; the turkey coop; the story of the dead-end street and her surrender at four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon (via Benny Hinn and Buckingham, among others); her regret about the marriage (via her biographer Buckingham and Light Magazine); the first healing testimony of a woman with a tumor in Franklin and her astonishment about it; all the individual healing stories from her books and services, including the stories about Carey Reams and the observations of Dr. Biery (Light Magazine, without medical files or independent checking); the testimonies of Donald Shaw and Dr. Uyeyama (from Artman's article);

the description by Roberts Liardon; the stories about her deathbed (Oral Roberts, the scent of roses).

Unconfirmed or disputed: the church where she came to faith (Methodist or Baptist; Light Magazine mentions her mother's Methodist church and a baptism in her father's Baptist church); the year of her ordination (1933 or 1968); the year of the meeting with Waltrip (1935 or 1937), of the divorce (1947 or 1948), of her coming to Franklin (1944 or 1946) and of the foundation (1954 or 1957); the suspension in Seattle (only one biographer); the rumors of adultery (never proven); that Waltrip later died in prison (only Light Magazine, unchecked); the figure of two million healings (estimate of a journalist).

Interpretation: whether the healings in her services were the work of God is a question of faith. Among the twenty-three people he followed, Nolen found no lasting healing of a physical illness; others collected files that in their view did hold up. A medical examination can describe a recovery, not a cause.

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Elisabeth Elliot: the widow who went into the village of the killers

On January 8, 1996, an older American woman sat in a hammock in the rainforest of Ecuador, on the Curaray River. Around her the Waorani crowded together to see her. They laughed and called out over each other how old she had become. They called her by her Wao name, Gikari. They did their best to pronounce the names of the people who had come with her, and they shook hands as if it were a party. It was exactly forty years since five missionaries had been killed here with spears.

Two men came and sat beside her, Minkayi and Kimo. They had stood at those spears. They talked with her for a long time and told her what had happened since she left. Both men had become Christians. The New Testament had been translated into their language.

So Elisabeth Elliot wrote it down herself in an epilogue to her best-known book. She was sixty-nine. She lived on a rocky coast in Massachusetts, far from the jungle, and more than forty years earlier she had lost a husband to these very people.

She was no hero by nature. She was a girl who wanted to learn Greek.

The prayer of a twelve-year-old girl

Elisabeth Howard was born on December 21, 1926, in Brussels. Her parents, Philip Howard and Katharine Gillingham Howard, were American missionaries in Belgium. At home they called her Betty, her mother sometimes Bets. Before her first birthday the family went back to the United States. She grew up near Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, one of six children.

Her father became editor of the Sunday School Times, a well-known evangelical weekly. Books and writing were part of the family. According to her biographer Lucy Austen, Betty waited by the door every evening until her father came home. He could be short with people, but he apologized after every outburst. He showed magic tricks and taught the children to recognize bird calls. Each child had a call of his or her own, and Betty's was the wood pewee, a small American bird. Her mother taught the children to live frugally: a tiny dot of toothpaste, bits of soap saved in a wire basket. In summer the family went to an old house in the White Mountains in New Hampshire, lit by kerosene lamps. Betty's love of nature stayed with her all her life.

She was stubborn, says Austen, from babyhood on. She often did not cry when she was spanked. At seven or eight she stole a Mickey Mouse watch from a stair railing, to feel what it was like to do something wrong. The guilt became so heavy that she brought the watch back and left it on the back steps. She kept a diary from a young age, in big round letters, with a note that it was forbidden to boys. In the family game around Winnie the Pooh she was Eeyore, a little apart and with a different way of looking at things.

At ten she went forward at an invitation after a sermon on being born of God. At twelve she wrote down a prayer. (My translation) Lord, I want You to do with me what You want. Austen has read the diaries.

She went to a Christian boarding school in Florida, the Hampden DuBose Academy. In 1944 she began at Wheaton College near Chicago, an evangelical university. She chose Greek as her major. She wanted to translate the Bible into languages that had never been written down.

Greek at Wheaton

In the Greek classes there was also a boy named Jim Elliot. In her last year of study the two got involved with each other. They did not marry for a long time yet.

After Wheaton Elisabeth took a year of extra training at the Prairie Bible Institute in Alberta, Canada. She received language training with Wycliffe Bible Translators, the organization that records languages in order to translate the Bible into them. She taught and worked in Alberta, in Florida and in New York. There she helped with a magazine of the Plymouth Brethren, a Protestant movement of independent congregations without ministers.

A suitcase full of words

In 1952 Jim and Elisabeth left for Ecuador. They went separately. Ecuador lies on the west side of South America, on the equator. It has a coast, a high Andes range with the capital Quito, and in the east a large rainforest that connects to the Amazon. The country was predominantly Roman Catholic. In the jungle lived indigenous peoples who had hardly any contact with the state.

Jim went to the Quichua in the east. Elisabeth went west, to the Tsáchila, called Colorados by outsiders, in San Miguel de los Colorados. Their language had never been written down. She wanted to do that.

What happened that first year we know mainly from her own book *These Strange Ashes*, which she wrote much later. Her most important language helper was murdered. After almost a year of work she left her notes behind in a suitcase. That suitcase was stolen. Everything she had gathered about the language was gone.

What do you do when you are sure God sent you somewhere, and the work comes to nothing? She wrote that book about this question, years later, when she could look at it from a distance.

Shandia

In 1953 Jim and Elisabeth decided to marry. The wedding took place in Quito. Jim's mission station Shandia, in the east, had been damaged shortly before by a flood. For a time they worked together among the Quichua in Puyupungu. In 1954 they went back to Shandia.

On February 27, 1955, their daughter was born. Elisabeth learned the lowland Quichua language and helped in the mission. Meanwhile Jim began, together with four other missionaries, to make plans for a people who lived deeper in the jungle.

A sandbar called Palm Beach

That people call themselves Waorani. The word means "people." The Quichua, their neighbors, called them auca. It is a term of abuse: it means something like wild or savage. It was taken over by Spanish speakers, by missionaries and by newspapers. The Wao-

rani themselves do not want that name. In this chapter I use it only where it appears in titles or old sources.

The Waorani had reason to be afraid of outsiders. Since the 1940s oil companies had been pushing into their territory, and there had been violent clashes. In 1948 four Waorani women were abducted by workers of a hacienda, a large estate. One of them was a young woman named Dayuma. There was also violence within the people itself, from which some fled to the outside.

At the beginning of January 1956 mission pilot Nate Saint flew four men to a sandbar in the Curaray: Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian and Pete Fleming. They called the place Palm Beach. On January 3 they built a prefabricated tree house there and prepared the strip of sand as a landing strip. The men swam in the river, read novels aloud to each other and practiced Wao sentences. Saint kept his fixed daily radio contact with his wife. Ed McCully wrote his wife a note about the camp and about what they still needed.

On January 6 three Waorani came to them, a man and two women. The missionaries called them George, Delilah and Mintaka. In broken Wao they offered food and showed the guests the little yellow plane. Nate Saint took the man along for a flight over his village, and the people below recognized him and waved. Mintaka stayed talking with the men until late in the evening. Elisabeth wrote to her mother in those days that she had been rather peaceful since Jim left.

On Sunday, January 8, a group of six men and four women came in the early afternoon. Jim and Pete walked into the water to greet them. All five men were killed. Nate Saint's watch stopped at 3:12 in the afternoon. His wife waited at the radio in Shell Mera for the half past four call that never came. On January 11 Elisabeth wrote to

her parents (my translation) that she did not know what she would do if Jim was dead, but that the Lord knew and that she had rest.

On the evening of Thursday, January 12, five young women sat together in Shell Mera, a mission station on the edge of the jungle. Since Sunday they had heard nothing from their husbands. That day a major of the American Air Force had flown over the river in a helicopter. That evening he told the women that there were no survivors.

One of those women was Elisabeth Elliot. She was twenty-nine. Her husband Jim lay dead with four other missionaries at a sandbar in the river. Their little daughter was not yet a year old.

On January 13 a search party of missionaries, Quichua and Ecuadorian soldiers reached the sandbar. They buried four bodies. The fifth had been carried off by the river. The next day the widows flew over the place and dropped wreaths on the graves.

The magazine Life carried ten pages on the death of the five on January 30, with photographs. The story went around the world.

God's categories are not always ours

Elisabeth stayed in Ecuador. She went back to the Quichua and took over part of Jim's work. Years later, in 1973, she told a hall full of students at the Urbana missions conference how that went. When her husband was killed by Indians, she said, she was left in an unnamable position. There was no other missionary man who spoke the jungle Quichua language. So she did it. And the door to the Waorani, which had slammed shut for the men, opened, to their astonishment, to two women. *It didn't look to me like a woman's job. But God's categories are not always ours.*

She said it without complaint and without a battle cry. I read it as a sober statement of fact. There was work, and the men who would have done it were no longer there.

The widows first asked someone else to write the book about the five men. He did not manage it. In the fall of 1956 Elisabeth took over. In May 1957 *Through Gates of Splendor* appeared. It became a bestseller at once. A year later followed *Shadow of the Almighty*, about the life of Jim. Christianity Today later put the first book on its list of the books that have most shaped the evangelical world.

So a young widow in the jungle became the voice of a story that was read all over America. Her own name was on the cover. The story was about her husband.

Dayuma's aunts

Dayuma, the woman who had been abducted in 1948, now lived outside the rainforest. She had gotten to know the missionary Rachel Saint, the sister of pilot Nate Saint. Rachel learned the Wao language from her. Dayuma became the first Waorani to become a Christian.

In 1957 Elisabeth met two aunts of Dayuma, who had fled the violence within their tribe. In 1958 they were reunited with Dayuma. Those three women cleared the way. In the fall of 1958 Dayuma and her family invited Elisabeth, her little daughter and Rachel to come and live with them.

The girl was three. Elisabeth took her to a small group of houses in the rainforest, where the men also lived who had killed her father.

How do you decide something like that as a mother? I do not know, and the sources do not tell what went on inside her. What they do tell is what she did. She stayed. She lived there, with interruptions,

until 1961. She compiled the first word list of the Wao language. She helped with medical care and learned from the inside how the Waorani lived and believed.

She wrote a book about it, *The Savage My Kinsman*. There is already a twist in the title. In the book she took the side of the men who had killed her husband. She admitted that at first she felt revulsion at what she called crude and at a language she could not follow. But about the people she had called savage she later wrote that in some way they were immortal in their nakedness. A Waorani man, she wrote, can kill his neighbor, but he does not fight with him. She wrote that the Waorani were trying to keep their own way of life and their own freedom. She asked the question an outsider would ask: is this the best they can do? Her answer was that they were doing very well.

Two strong women in one village

In the stories that went around in America, Elisabeth and Rachel were two heroines who carried on the work together. The reality was harder. The historian Kathryn Long of Wheaton College worked through the archives for her book *God in the Rainforest* (2019). According to her the two women clashed constantly: in character, in theology and in how they wanted to do the work. The determination that carried them through everything made living together difficult. Rachel even began to doubt whether Elisabeth still stood behind the core points of the Christian faith.

Long points to something else. Rachel was officially the linguist. But Elisabeth was the one with the gift for languages.

In December 1961 Elisabeth left the settlement of Tewæno. She went without fuss to another station. She worked for about two more

years among the Quichua near Shandia. In 1963 she went back with her daughter to the United States, to Franconia in New Hampshire.

She was thirty-six. She spoke four languages, had lived in three cultures in the jungle, and had become a wife, a mother and a widow. In America she was a heroine. In Ecuador her work was marked above all by loss.

Rachel Saint stayed in Ecuador until her death in 1994. What happened to that people afterward is also part of this story. In 1968 a large part of the Waorani were brought together in a protected area around the mission station. In 1969 sixteen people died there of polio. Oil companies gained access to their land. Long describes how the relocation both protected the Waorani and did harm. In her book there are no simple heroes and no simple villains.

A novel no one expected

In 1966 Elisabeth published something her readers did not expect from her: a novel. *No Graven Image* is about a young missionary, Margaret Sparhawk, who goes to South America. She gives a sick man penicillin. He has a reaction and dies. Margaret has to face the fact that her own ambition played a part in what went wrong.

Her main character sees a visiting administrator photograph people pushily and hand out tracts to Quichua who cannot read. Margaret comes to respect the people around her and concludes that the white man was not the master of everything good. When Pedro dies, she sees that she was in the jungle partly for her own standing: because she, Margaret Sparhawk, had come. The book pricked the image of the missionary as hero. It showed that the work was more complicated than the supporters at home thought. The New York Times was full of praise for it. Part of the evangelical readers were not. According to an article about the book, donations dropped.

Harold Lindsell, editor in chief of Christianity Today, praised the style. But he had trouble with a book that gave no answers, and he wondered aloud whether the author was still an evangelical.

She was a widow who had written a martyr story, and now she asked questions about that story. I find that courageous. She could have gone on telling what everyone wanted to hear.

Widowed a second time

In 1969 Elisabeth married Addison Leitch, a professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. They were married for four years. In 1973 he died of cancer. For the second time she stood alone.

That same year she spoke at Urbana, the large missions conference for students, the speech I quoted from above. The director of the conference said later that she was the first woman to give a keynote address there, not a testimony. Her brother, then himself a leader of Urbana, received criticism for the choice to invite her. Her popularity led him to ask her again. The organization called her one of the most powerful speakers Urbana had had. She came back in 1976, 1979 and 1996. In 1979 she spoke about the price of knowing God and trusting Him. That price sometimes seemed high to her, she said, but it was infinitely worth it. From the fall of 1974 she taught at Gordon-Conwell, the seminary where her husband had worked. In the mid-1970s she was an adviser on the style of the New International Version, a new English Bible translation.

In 1977 she married Lars Gren, a hospital chaplain. He also became her colleague and business manager.

She wrote book after book. A biography of Amy Carmichael, the missionary in India. *Passion and Purity* (1984). And *Let Me Be a Woman*, about being a woman. Christianity Today later summa-

rized it this way: she encouraged women to be content with being a woman as God intended. In 1981 she became writer in residence at Gordon College.

That gives a striking picture. The woman who was the first woman to give a keynote at Urbana, and who did work in the jungle that men had wanted to do, wrote that God intended man and woman to be different. I leave it here at what she wrote and did. Readers from different churches will look at it differently.

From 1988 to 2001 she spoke daily on the radio in *Gateway to Joy*.

A story she had to keep telling

In January 1996 Elisabeth wrote a new epilogue to *Through Gates of Splendor*. She began it in a small house with large windows on the rocky coast of Massachusetts, looking at a white sea under a white sky, where fishermen were hauling up their lobster pots. She wondered whether others were already tired of the story, and whether she should keep telling it now that people kept asking for it.

She had put that doubt to Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch woman from the Haarlem watchmaker's house, who in later life traveled the world to tell her own story. Corrie admitted that she had sometimes prayed to be allowed to tell something new. The Lord's answer was that this was the story He had given her. *This is the story I gave you. You tell that one,* Corrie said to Elisabeth.

Then Elisabeth described what she had experienced in the hammock on the Curaray, with which this chapter began. There she had been greeted by people she had gotten to know in 1958 to 1960, and she thought back to the time when she lived among them with her little daughter.

She wrote that the story of the five missionaries is only one event in the great history. God goes on working in it, she wrote, in us, through us, for us and in spite of us. For herself she found rest only in His will, which was far greater than all her ideas about what He was doing.

Have you ever experienced something you would rather not have been given? Elisabeth Elliot wrote about it without making it prettier. She left room for questions. And she kept on worshiping God.

The last decade

For the last ten years of her life Elisabeth had dementia. She died on Monday, June 15, 2015, at her home in Magnolia, Massachusetts. She was eighty-eight. On June 23 there was a memorial service in the chapel of Gordon College, where she had been writer in residence. She was buried in the cemetery of Hamilton.

Her papers lie in the archive at Wheaton, the place where she once came to study Greek in order to write down languages that nobody had written down yet. One of the first word lists of Wao she began herself, in a settlement in the rainforest, with her little daughter beside her. Forty years after the spears she sat again on the Curaray, in a hammock, among the people of the men who had thrown them. In their language the New Testament now lay.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on December 21, 1926, in Brussels to missionary parents; study of Greek at Wheaton from 1944; departure for Ecuador in 1952 and work among the Tsáchila; marriage to Jim Elliot in 1953 in Quito; birth of their daughter in 1955; the death of the five missionaries on January 8, 1956, and the news to the widows on January 12; *Through Gates of*

Splendor (1957); the stay with her daughter and Rachel Saint among the Waorani from the fall of 1958 to December 1961; tensions with Rachel Saint (according to the historian Kathryn Long); return to the US in 1963; *No Graven Image* (1966) and the criticism of it; marriages to Addison Leitch (1969, died 1973) and Lars Gren (1977); teaching at Gordon-Conwell from 1974; *Gateway to Joy* (1988-2001); about ten years of dementia; death on June 15, 2015, in Magnolia.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the prayer at twelve and the childhood stories (from her diary and family tradition, via her biographer Austen); the murder of her language helper and the stolen suitcase with notes (from her own book *These Strange Ashes*); her saying about God's categories and the rest of her speeches (Urbana 1973 and 1979, as Urbana summarizes them); the visit to the Waorani in 1996, the conversion of Minkayi and Kimo and the conversation with Corrie ten Boom (from her own epilogue of 1996); that she was the first woman with a keynote at Urbana (according to the organization itself).

Unconfirmed: the precise reason why she left Tewæno in December 1961; the exact date of her wedding (not in the sources consulted); the year of *The Savage My Kinsman* (1959 or 1961) and of *Let Me Be a Woman* (1976 or 1977), the sources differ; one source gives June 14, 2015, as the date of death.

Interpretation: whether the death of the five men and Elisabeth's stay with the Waorani were good for that people is an open question among historians. The coming of mission and oil brought the Waorani peace between groups, but also disease and loss of land.

Sources for this chapter

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Afterword

An abbess who wrote down what she saw. A slave woman who got her son back. A washerwoman who knelt on the grass in Calcutta. A painter who said no to Ruskin. A nun with an open door. A housemaid with a train ticket. An evangelist who said she healed no one. A widow who went into the jungle with her little daughter.

They lived in different centuries and belonged to different churches. With a few of them I had to write down things that are less beautiful. With a few of the best-known stories I had to say that they are not certain. I have tried to show them as they were.

Together with the women from volume 1 there are sixteen of them. Behind them stand thousands who were never written down. Mothers, sisters, housemaids, washerwomen, women who prayed. They too belong to that great company.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us. (Hebrews 12:1)