

HEROES OF FAITH FROM AROUND THE
WORLD
VOLUME 1

From Every Nation

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

*A great multitude which no one could number,
of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.*

Revelation 7:9

WIM KAMPHORST

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Contents

Introduction: from every nation	2
Kiai Sadrach: the Javanese man who sat down beside the missionary	5
Pandita Ramabai: the scholar who came back with ox carts	17
William Wadé Harris: the barefoot prophet	30
Josephine Bakhita: the slave who chose her Master	43
Gil Sun-ju: the man who prayed before daybreak	54
Sundar Singh: the sadhu in the yellow robe	66
John Sung: the doctor who threw his diplomas into the sea	79
Janani Luwum: the shepherd who stood firm	92
Afterword	104

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

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

This book can be read and downloaded free of charge at wimkamphorst.nl.

Introduction: from every nation

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

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

This book is about them.

WHY THIS BOOK

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

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

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

HOW THIS BOOK WAS MADE

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

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

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

A GREAT MULTITUDE

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

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

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

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

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

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

It began with a poor boy called Radin.

A BOY WITHOUT A SURNAME

He was born around 1835 in a village near Demak, on the north coast of Central Java. His parents were poor farmers. The sources disagree about the exact year: 1835 is mentioned most often, but 1837 and 1840 also appear. His name was Radin, a single name, as with many Javanese people.

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

As a young man Radin traveled between various *pesantren*, Islamic boarding schools, in East Java. One of the sources, which relies on the work of the French historian Claude Guillot, places him in Jombang between 1851 and 1858. After that he went back to Semarang, the great port city. He lived in the *Kauman*, the quarter around the great mosque, and added the name Abas to his own. Radin Abas: this was how he showed that he was a serious Muslim.

A CHRISTIAN VILLAGE IN EAST JAVA

At some point in those years Radin Abas came to Mojowarno. This was a village in East Java that had been built by Javanese Christians. The sources I have been able to read do not say exactly when he was there or what he saw.

Another encounter mattered more. *Kiai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung* was a Javanese Christian teacher on the slopes of Muria, a mountain

north of Demak. He had founded Christian villages there himself, with Bondo at their center. Tunggul Wulung was not a missionary from Europe. He was a Javanese man who spoke about Jesus in a Javanese way. According to the sources, it was this man who persuaded Radin Abas.

What moved a young Muslim teacher to become a Christian? We do not know it from his own lips. As far as is known, Sadrach left no writings describing his conversion. An Indonesian blogger does mention a handwritten book of some two hundred pages that is said to be kept by his descendants in Karangjasa. I have found no one who has studied it.

BAPTISM IN BATAVIA

Radin Abas went to Batavia. There he worked as an assistant to Frederik Lodewijk Anthing, a Dutch lawyer and former government official who preached the gospel among the Javanese as a layman. On April 14, 1867, Radin Abas was baptized in Batavia. He chose the name Sadrach.

It is a name from the book of Daniel. Shadrach was one of the three young Jews at the court of Babylon who were given a Babylonian name and stayed faithful to their God. Why Radin Abas chose this name in particular is not stated in any source I read. So I leave it at the fact that he bore it.

After his baptism he went back to Tunggul Wulung and became leader of the congregation in Bondo. He did not stay long. One historian mentions a second marriage of Tunggul Wulung as a possible cause.

MRS. PHILIPS IN TUKSONGO

In 1869 Anthing sent him south. In Tuksongo, near Purworejo in the residency of Bagelen, lived Christina Philips-Stevens. She was an Indo-European woman, of mixed Dutch and Javanese descent, who on her own initiative preached the gospel to the Javanese around her. She taught them the basics of the Bible, the Ten Commandments, the Twelve Articles of the faith and the Lord's Prayer.

Sadrach became her student and soon her helper. From around 1870 they traveled the villages together. According to the Dutch researcher Max Rooyackers, the group of Christians around her doubled in about a year. In 1871 sixty-five Javanese were registered.

Around that time Sadrach settled in Karangjasa, about twenty-five kilometers (fifteen miles) south of Purworejo. The sources differ on the year: 1870 or 1871.

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

A CHURCH CALLED A MOSQUE

In 1871 the community in Karangjasa built a church. The building had the shape of a Javanese mosque, and that is also what it was called. A student at Universitas Gadjah Mada describes it as very simple, with a thatched roof, bamboo walls and an earthen floor. According to the same source, the congregation was called together with a kentongan, a hollow wooden or bamboo drum used in Javanese villages, instead of a bell. The leader was called imam.

The growth was great. Between 1870 and 1873 an estimated two and a half thousand Javanese were baptized. Congregations sprang up

in Karangjasa, Banjur, Karangpucung, Kedungpring and Karangjambu.

How did he do it? Sadrach worked the way a kiai worked. He entered into public debate with other teachers, sometimes for days on end. The agreement was that whoever lost would become the student of the winner. If Sadrach lost, he would return to his former teaching. Rooyackers names four traveling teachers whom he defeated in debate in this way. The first to be baptized was a Kiai Ibrahim; after him came a Kiai Kasanmetaram.

In 1876 Christina Philips-Stevens died. She had been ill for years. From then on Sadrach stood alone. Around that time he married and took the name Surapranata. A source from the New Apostolic Church says that the Javanese only called him that from 1899 onward.

SMALLPOX, AND THREE WEEKS IN A CELL

Then the Dutch mission arrived.

In 1882 a missionary named Bieger arrived in Purworejo. He came on behalf of the mission and was expected to lead the Javanese Christians in the area. Those Christians already had a leader. Open conflict followed.

That same year Sadrach was arrested. The charge was that he was obstructing vaccination against smallpox, a campaign of the colonial government. According to the Indonesian theologian Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, the charge came from the head of the local administration, W. Ligtoet. An Indonesian journalist writes that the missionaries were behind it. I cannot establish who is right. The sources also say little about Sadrach's own position. Singgih writes that he had biblical objections to vaccination.

What happened is certain. Sadrach spent three weeks in the prison of Kutoarjo. After that he was placed under house arrest for three months. He had to serve that house arrest in the home of Bieger, the missionary with whom he was in conflict. Then the governor-general released him, because the evidence was not convincing.

A source from the New Apostolic Church relates that his followers at that time said they would follow him even to death. That story comes from within the movement itself.

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

“PANDITA MARDIKA”

After Bieger came another missionary, Jakob Wilhelm. He chose a different path. Wilhelm saw Sadrach as his equal and worked together with him. He led the congregation in Karangjasa with Sadrach’s support, not against him.

From those years comes the name the community gave itself: *golongane wong Kristen kang mardika*, the group of free Christians. Wilhelm called himself *pandita mardika*, free minister. The word *mardika* means free. Singgih reads it as a statement about identity: these Christians did not want to be the Christians of the colony. Another source writes that they did not recognize the ministers of the Indies Church, the Protestant state church, because those ministers were paid by the colonial government.

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

I have to be honest here about what I do not know. What Wilhelm and Sadrach preached together in those years, how their services sounded, what exactly Sadrach taught his people: on all this I have

only read summaries by historians. Partonadi himself, the thesis that knows the most about him, I have not been able to open.

A REQUEST FOR BREAD AND WINE

One tension remained. In the Protestant churches only ordained ministers were allowed to baptize and to administer the Lord's Supper, the meal of bread and wine in which Christians remember the death of Jesus. Sadrach had never been ordained. According to the sources, he asked repeatedly whether his congregations might receive the sacraments from their own leaders. This was refused every time. The Netherlands Missionary Society never ordained him as a minister.

For the mission this was a question of order and pure doctrine. For the Javanese Christians in Bagelen it was a question of whether they were allowed to take part as full members. European missionaries also felt that there was too much that was Javanese and too little that was Christian in Sadrach's congregations. The word that came up often was syncretism: a mixture of religions.

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

DECEMBER 1891, PURWOREJO

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

In December 1891 he gave his verdict in Purworejo. According to Guillot, he told the missionaries that they had to separate themselves from Sadrach, because Sadrach would poison their

work. A resolution was drawn up stating that Sadrach was a heretical teacher. Wilhelm signed it. The Indonesian historian Tedi Kholiludin writes that he did so reluctantly, and that the resolution was in essence Lion Cachet's.

On March 3, 1892, Wilhelm died.

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

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

CHOOSING IN 1893

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

These were not the only numbers that circulated about him. At one point Partonadi mentions 7,552 followers, against at most two thousand converts made by the mission in fifty years. Guillot gives more than seven thousand for 1898. A church source mentions five thousand or fifteen thousand. At his death there are said to have been

twenty thousand. All these figures come from different counts and different years, and they cannot be checked. At the very least they show that it was a matter of thousands.

APOSTLE FOR JAVA

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

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

Sadrach attended services in Magelang. In 1899 he was ordained an apostle in Batavia by the apostle G.J. Hannibals. From then on his followers called him the apostle for Java.

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

A GRAVE UNDER THREE ROOFS

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

He died in November 1924 in his house in Karangjasa, next to the church that was called a mosque. He was about eighty-nine. Most sources give November 14; one source gives the night of Novem-

ber 14 to 15, and the New Apostolic Church gives November 19. According to the English Wikipedia, his family and the regents of Kutoarjo and Kulon Progo, Javanese administrators, attended the funeral. He was buried in Karangjasa, in a grave with a triple roof, a cungkup, as the Javanese build for someone they honor.

His adopted son Yotham succeeded him. He did not have his father's presence, writes an Indonesian journalist. In 1933 a large part of the community rejoined the mission. Partonadi speaks at that point of ten to twenty thousand members.

AT THE SAME HEIGHT

Singgih calls Sadrach's life a tragic story. I understand why. A man who brought thousands of Javanese to Christ was called a heretic by the church of those who baptized him and had to find a place outside it.

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

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

Two men, two chairs. The same height.

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth around 1835 near Demak; Islamic schooling in pesantren and the name Radin Abas; the influence of Kiai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung; work for F.L. Anthing and baptism in Batavia on April 14, 1867; collaboration with Christina Philips-Stevens from 1869 and her death in 1876; settling

in Karangjasa around 1870-1871; rapid growth and public debates; the arrival of Bieger and the arrest in 1882 (three weeks in a cell in Kutoarjo, then house arrest, release for lack of evidence); collaboration with Jakob Wilhelm and the name “free Christians”; the photograph on equal chairs; Lion Cachet’s verdict (December 1891) and the break with the mission; ordination as apostle in 1899 by G.J. Hannibals; death in November 1924; succession by Yotham.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his followers’ statement that they would follow him even to death (New Apostolic Church); the names of the first kiais to be baptized; details of church customs (*kentongan*, *imam*), which come from a single student source; the handwritten book kept by his descendants; the presence of regents at his funeral.

Unconfirmed: the exact year of birth (1835, 1837 or 1840); the year he settled in Karangjasa; the date of death (November 14, 15 or 19, 1924); all the numbers of followers, which range from five thousand to twenty thousand; who was behind the arrest of 1882; the reason he left Bondo; whether Lion Cachet meant Sadrach by “den ‘Goesti’ ”.

Interpretation: whether Sadrach’s congregations were syncretistic or an honest Javanese form of Christian faith is still debated among historians and theologians today. A first source for further research is Sutarman Partonadi’s thesis, along with the newspaper archives of Delpher, the Dutch digitized newspaper collection.

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Pandita Ramabai: the scholar who came back with oxcarts

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

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

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

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

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

EIGHTEEN THOUSAND VERSES

Ramabai Dongre was born on April 23, 1858. Her father, Anant Shastri Dongre, had an ashram, a place for study and prayer, on the wooded slopes of the Western Ghats, near Karkal. That is in present-day Karnataka, in the southwest of India. The family belonged to the Chitpavan Brahmins, a high caste from the Marathi-speaking region around Pune.

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

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

Ramabai grew up on the road. Several sources mention that she knew eighteen thousand verses of the Bhagavata Purana by heart. That number keeps coming back and probably goes back to Ramabai herself. I have not been able to check it anywhere else.

THE FAMINE OF THE 1870s

In the 1870s a great famine struck the south of India. The sources do not agree on the exact year: some give 1874, others 1876 or 1876 to 1878. What is certain is that Ramabai lost her father, her mother and her sister to it. They died of hunger. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia writes that her parents died within about six weeks of each other.

She was a teenager. With her older brother she travelled on, as the family had always done, and together they recited the ancient texts.

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

PANDITA AND SARASVATI

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

The city's scholars heard about a young woman who spoke Sanskrit and knew the ancient texts. They had her speak in the senate hall of the university. Afterwards she received two honorary titles: Pandita, scholar, and Sarasvati, after the Hindu goddess of knowledge. Frykenberg writes that she became famous throughout the country. She kept the title Pandita all her life, even after she had become a Christian.

In Bengal she also came into contact with Christians for the first time. A copy of the Gospel of Luke came into her hands. What she

understood of it at the time, we do not know. Later she wrote that she had lost her old faith and was searching for something better with a hungry heart.

A LAWYER FROM A LOWER CASTE

In 1880 her brother died as well. That same year Ramabai married Bipin Behari Medhavi, a Bengali lawyer. He came from a lower caste, the Kayasthas. A marriage between a Brahmin woman and a man of a lower caste could not take place according to Hindu rites, so they married under civil law. In those days that was highly unusual.

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

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

She moved to Pune, then called Poona, at the invitation of the reformer M.G. Ranade. Within a few months she founded the Arya Mahila Samaj, an association that stood up for the education of women and against child marriage. Before a British education commission led by William Wilson Hunter she pleaded for the education of girls. Hunter had her statement translated, and in this way made her known in Great Britain.

In Pune she also often talked with Nehemiah Goreh. He was a Brahmin like her, and had become an Anglican Christian. Anglican means: connected to the Church of England.

A WOMAN AT THE WELL

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

With the sisters she came to know the Christian faith up close. According to an American church commemoration text, she worked in London alongside sisters who cared for women coming out of prostitution. She herself later said that the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John convinced her. There Jesus talks at a well with a Samaritan woman, an outsider with a past. Ramabai wrote that after reading it she realized “that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour he claimed to be”.

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

In September 1883 Ramabai and Manorama were baptized in Wantage. Her baptismal name was Mary Rama. The news reached India too. The newspaper *The Mahratta*, on November 4, 1883, dismissed her conversion as something she had done for money.

“A CONSCIENCE OF MY OWN”

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

In a letter of May 12, 1885, to one of them, she wrote: "I have a conscience, and a mind and judgment of my own."

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

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

A SCHOOL IN BOMBAY, MARCH 1889

In 1886 Ramabai crossed to America. In Philadelphia she saw her cousin Anandibai Joshi graduate, the first Indian woman to earn a medical degree. She stayed for two years. She travelled, spoke in churches and halls, and in 1887 wrote *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, about the lives of women in the high castes. From December 1887 Ramabai Associations sprang up in the United States, from Boston to San Francisco. They pledged ten years of money for a school for Indian widows.

In March 1889 Ramabai opened the Sharada Sadan in Bombay, now Mumbai. It was a boarding school for widows and girls from high castes, and the school was explicitly neutral. She had promised not to convert the pupils. Hindu reformers such as Ranade and the scholar R.G. Bhandarkar sat on the advisory board. Shortly afterwards the school moved to Pune.

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

There she told the men in the hall that her voice was small, “for you have never given a woman the chance to make her voice strong!”

A few pupils wanted to become Christians. Ramabai sent them to a Christian mission for that. When this became known, the advisory board resigned and parents took their daughters away. The American Ramabai Association had an inquiry carried out and cleared her of trying to convert her pupils. The support of the Indian reformers was gone.

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

A BURDEN THAT FELL AWAY

In 1891 something happened inside Ramabai herself. She had been baptized for eight years. Then she read the book *From Death unto Life* by the English preacher Haslam. She later described how a great burden fell away from her as she read. Historians speak of a second, evangelical conversion. From that moment she also became an evangelist: she wanted others to come to know Jesus the way she now knew Him.

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

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

BARE, STONY, TREELESS

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

In 1895, according to Frykenberg, she went into the country on foot disguised as a sanniyasini, a wandering Hindu ascetic, to rescue destitute women. Her first attempt to rescue seven women nearly cost her her life. I have found this story only in Frykenberg.

Then came the famine years with which this chapter began. Around 1896 and 1897 famine struck western and central India, and plague broke out in Pune. Ramabai brought the children she rescued from the famine areas to Kedgaon. In 1898 the American support for the Sharada Sadan came to an end. The work now became openly Christian and was given the name Mukti Mission.

Around 1900, according to various sources, roughly fifteen hundred to two thousand people lived there. Those numbers come from the mission itself. There were schools, a kindergarten, a hospital, looms, a printing press and farmland. A shelter was set up for women coming out of prostitution, Kripa Sadan. Mukti took in girls and women of every caste, including women with disabilities.

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

FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY WOMEN IN PRAYER

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

In January 1905 Ramabai called on the residents of Mukti to pray for revival: a time in which God brings people to repentance in great numbers. According to the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal church that preserves this history, five hundred and fifty women began to pray together twice a day. Other accounts speak of just over five hundred. Ramabai also asked who was willing to set their studies aside for a while and go and preach in the villages. Thirty young women came forward. They met daily to pray for the Holy Spirit.

JUNE 30, 1905

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

The next evening, June 30, Ramabai spoke quietly to the women. According to one account, about a thousand women began at the same time to confess their sins out loud. Ramabai stopped speaking and let it happen. There was weeping and praying, some prayed for hours, others made up songs on the spot.

The revival continued in waves until 1907. Teams of women from Mukti went out to other mission stations, and revivals came there too, among other places in Pune, Dhond, Allahabad and Banga-

lore. Minnie Abrams, a teacher at Mukti, invited the missionary Albert Norton to attend a prayer group. Norton wrote that a Marathi-speaking woman prayed fluently in English, a language she did not know, and that other women prayed in languages that no one in Kedgaon understood. According to the Assemblies of God, there was speaking in tongues in 1906.

In this way Mukti became a name in the young Pentecostal movement, the stream that emphasizes baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts such as speaking in tongues. American Pentecostals came to see it. Historian Edith Blumhofer writes that Ramabai valued their support but would not let herself be tied to their doctrine. She herself did not speak in tongues. She said that she did not “make a special point of the gift of tongues.” When the revival died down, Mukti and the Pentecostals went their separate ways. The Mukti Mission still exists, without a Pentecostal identity.

A BIBLE FOR THE WOMEN OF PUNE

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

She did this work together with others. Her pupils helped, and women from Mukti printed and bound the books. Clementina Butler, an American missionary writer, called it “the only Bible in the world produced entirely by women”.

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

A WOODEN CROSS IN KEDGAON

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

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

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

She died on the land she had once called bare, stony and without water. Her grave is marked by a wooden cross.

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth on April 23, 1858, in a Brahmin family near Karkal; instruction in Sanskrit by her father; the family's wandering life; the death of her parents and sister in a famine in the 1870s; the titles Pandita and Sarasvati in Calcutta in 1878; the marriage across the caste boundary with Bipin Behari Medhavi in 1880 and his death from cholera in 1882; the Arya Mahila Samaj; the journey to England in 1883 and the baptism in Wantage in September 1883; deafness as the reason she could not become a doctor; Cheltenham; America from 1886 to 1888; Sharada Sadan in 1889 and the loss of Hindu support after conversions; the care for famine victims and the Mukti Mission in Kedgaon; the beginning of the revival in 1905; the Bible translation from Hebrew and Greek; the Kaisar-i-Hind Medal in 1919; her death at Mukti on April 5, 1922.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the eighteen thousand verses; the role of John 4 in her conversion; the experience of 1891 after reading Haslam; the fire a girl is said to have seen on June 29, 1905, the thousand praying women on June 30 and the speech in unknown languages (accounts by the mission and visitors); the disguise as a sannyasini in 1895 and Manorama's journey to Australia (one source each).

Unconfirmed: the exact year of the famine in which her parents died (1874, 1876 or 1876-1878); the year of Manorama's death (1920 or 1921); the start and end year of the Bible translation; all numbers of residents and rescued children, which come from the mission itself.

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

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William Wadé Harris: the barefoot prophet

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

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

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

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

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

A GREBO BOY IN THE MINISTER’S HOUSE

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

Into that world Harris was born, around 1860, in the village of Half-Graway near Cape Palmas. Nobody knows the exact year; the sources give something between 1860 and 1865. His Grebo name was Wadé. His father was not a Christian and followed the traditional religion of the Grebo. His mother was a Methodist, according to one source. Harris later said himself that he had been “born a Methodist”.

When he was about twelve, an uncle, the Methodist minister John Lowrie, took him to Sinoe, further along the coast. There the boy learned to read and write, in English and in Grebo. He also learned bricklaying. As a young man he sailed several times on ships along the West African coast, as a laborer, as far as Nigeria.

Around 1881 or 1882 he came to faith in a Methodist service, under the preaching of a Liberian minister named Thompson. He was baptized and began to preach as a layman. A few years later he

moved to the Episcopal Church, the American branch of the Anglican church. In 1888 he was confirmed by Bishop Samuel Ferguson. Around the same time he married Rose Farr, the daughter of a teacher at the Episcopal boarding school in Half-Graway. The sources differ on the year. They had six children.

A BRITISH FLAG ON PUDUKE BEACH

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

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

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

He was around fifty. He had lost his work, his church had withdrawn his license as a lay preacher, and his people had lost the fight. What is left for you when everything you have worked for has collapsed within a few years?

THREE TIMES WATER ON HIS HEAD

It happened in that prison. Around June 1910, as Harris later told it, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. It happened three times. The angel told him that he would be a prophet, the prophet of the last days. The Spirit came upon him, Harris said, like water on his head, and that too three times.

The instructions were concrete. He was to put off his Western clothes, down to his patent leather shoes, and wear a white robe. He was to drink no more alcohol. He was to go out to preach and to baptize. He later saw his role in the light of Elijah, the prophet who took on the idols of his day. He called himself a black Elijah.

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

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

SIX SHILLINGS

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

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

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

ACROSS THE CAVALLY RIVER

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

Harris walked along the coast and the lagoons, the area between Grand-Lahou and Bingerville. He spoke English and Grebo, not French and not the languages of the lagoon peoples. He preached through interpreters, often clerks of European trading houses. The two women sang. He set Christian words to melodies the people knew.

His message was short. There is one God. Burn your fetishes. Keep Sunday as a day of rest. Be baptized. He taught people the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. Whoever gave up their fetishes could be baptized at once. In this he differed from the mission churches, which required months or years of instruction before someone was baptized. Harris baptized with water from his bowl and laid the Bible on people's heads.

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

“BURN THE FETISHES”

According to oral tradition in the Ivory Coast, in 1913 Harris cried out in the village of Louzoua: “Brûlez les fétiches”, burn the fetishes. That is how a villager remembered it, and that is how it appears in a 2016 study by Gabriel Leonard Allen. Isichei gives an English version of the same idea: “God has sent me to burn the fetishes.”

Whole villages did it. The Catholic leader Moury wrote in 1914 of entire peoples destroying their fetishes and asking for baptism. Stories quickly grew up around the prophet. He was said to have healed the sick and to have had power over the rain. Opponents were said to have gone mad. Hidden images were said to have burst into flame by themselves. A man who lied about a fetish he had hidden was said to have died within a few hours. Isichei explicitly presents such stories as legends. They have never been verified, and that is how I pass them on too.

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

TWELVE APOSTLES IN EVERY VILLAGE

Harris stayed nowhere for long. What did he leave behind in the villages he passed through? In each new congregation he appointed twelve men as “apostles” to lead the group. He had houses of prayer

built. He let village chiefs keep the leadership, so that existing ties stayed intact. And he told the people that Christians with Bibles would come later to teach them further.

According to tradition, he also told them they could pray and sing in their own language, because God would understand them.

He encouraged people to send their children to school. The French lieutenant governor Gabriel Angoulvant wrote in 1915 about the enthusiasm with which children in Jacqueville went to school.

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

A LAWYER IN AXIM

In 1914 Harris crossed the border into the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, a British colony. He preached there for about three months, mainly in Apollonia, the coastal region in the far west. A Methodist minister, Charles Armstrong, found some eight thousand people there in early August 1914 who had been baptized by Harris.

In July 1914, in the small town of Axim, the prophet had a long conversation with Joseph Casely Hayford. Hayford was a lawyer and one of the best-known African nationalists of the Gold Coast. He was impressed by the man's humility and spiritual power. In 1915 he wrote the first book about him. For historians that book is valuable: it is an account by someone who spoke with Harris himself, in the middle of his greatest year.

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

In the autumn of 1914 Harris had his base in Kraffy, in the Ivory Coast. Meanwhile, the First World War had broken out in Europe.

DECEMBER 1914

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

In December 1914 Harris and the women traveling with him were arrested, on the initiative of Lieutenant Governor Angoulvant. They were locked up and badly beaten. Helen Valentine, the young widow who had set out with him from Cape Palmas a year and a half earlier, died from the effects of those beatings. That is how Shank records it.

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

Afterward the French government banned preaching in languages other than French. Houses of prayer his followers had built were burned down.

How do you look back on a winter like that? In eighteen months Harris had baptized more people than the Catholic mission had in more than fifteen years. He paid for it with his freedom, and one of the women who sang with him paid with her life.

EIGHT TIMES AT THE BORDER

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

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

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

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

church in the Ivory Coast dates its beginning to 1914, the year of Harris.

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

BEGIN AGAIN

In 1925 Harris had a stroke. He only partly recovered. A year later the Methodist missionary Pierre Benoît visited him. Harris had just returned from a journey on which he had baptized more than five hundred people. Benoît took back a “testament”, a statement from the old prophet that, according to Shank, leaned strongly toward the Methodists and was meant to lead doubters into the Methodist church. According to Isichei, Benoît described Harris as a man who lived in a supernatural world that was more real to him than the visible one.

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

In December 1928 one more visitor came. It was Jonas Ahui, the choir singer from Petit-Bassam who had been baptized in Bingerville in 1914. He had traveled to Liberia because he was worried. In his region the old religion was coming back, and the British Methodists were active. Harris gave him his blessing, his cross-staff and his Bible, and a letter for Ahui’s father. He charged him to begin again.

In April 1929 William Wadé Harris died at Spring Hill in Liberia, nearly seventy years old. He was utterly poor, Shank writes. He died in his daughter’s house, according to Isichei. The local Episco-

pal minister led the funeral. Another source gives October 10, 1929, as the date of death, and his gravestone even says 1928. What is certain: he died in Liberia, and outside the villages of the Ivory Coast and Ghana almost nobody knew who he was.

A CROSS-STAFF IN PETIT-BASSAM

Ahui did what he had been asked, though it took a while. In 1931 the Harrist Church was founded in the Ivory Coast. After an illness in 1936 that nearly killed him, Ahui began actively leading the work, in defiance of the colonial government. For fifty-seven years he was the church's chief preacher, until he died in 1992. The church spread to Liberia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo and Benin. Shank estimated the number of adherents in 1986 at about two hundred thousand, and Isichei arrived at the same figure in 2003. In Ghana his work lived on in the Church of the Twelve Apostles. Other prophetic movements in the Ivory Coast saw him as their forerunner.

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

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

In churches that trace themselves back to him, such as the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Ghana, four signs still stand today: a bowl, a Bible, a gourd and a cross. They are the things a barefoot man carried across the Cavally in July 1913.

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the vision of Gabriel in prison and what was said there (only Harris's own account); the prediction about Rose and the six shillings; the sayings "Brûlez les fétiches" and about praying in one's own language (oral tradition in the Ivory Coast); his answer in Kraffy; the conversion of the soldier and the boy at his arrest (one old account).

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

Interpretation: the estimate of 100,000 to 120,000 baptized comes from French colonial administrators and has been adopted by later historians; precise counts do not exist. The sources differ on his year of birth, the year of his marriage, the death of Rose, the date of his expulsion and his date of death (April or October 1929; the gravestone says 1928).

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Josephine Bakhita: the slave who chose her Master

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

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

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

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

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

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

A VILLAGE IN DARFUR

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

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

About her early years we know almost nothing except what she later told herself. According to the Canossian archivist she had a twin sister and her childhood was peaceful. The Vatican biography also says something striking about that time: as a child she had already experienced God in her heart, without knowing who He was.

THE GIRL WHO FORGOT HER NAME

When she was still small, two men seized her out in the fields. How old she was differs from source to source. The Vatican, the Dictionary of African Christian Biography and Pope Benedict XVI put it at about nine. The Canossian Sisters, the archivist in Schio and Pope John Paul II say seven. She herself did not know for sure.

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

She was sold and sold again, at the slave markets of El Obeid and Khartoum. How many times, the sources do not agree. Benedict XVI wrote five times. Other sources speak of four sales or of eight owners. According to her own account she once tried to escape. She was caught.

SCARS THAT REMAINED

She suffered most in the house of a Turkish general. I will not describe it at length. It is enough to know what the sources say together: she was beaten, and her body was cut with knives in a way that never faded. Vatican News speaks of one hundred and fourteen scars, Benedict XVI of one hundred and forty-four. She carried them for the rest of her life.

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

A CONSUL IN KHARTOUM

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

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

Bakhita asked whether she could come with him. In her own words, as Vatican News quotes them, she dared to ask him to take her with him to Italy. He said yes. They traveled to the port of Suakin on the

Red Sea and from there by ship to Genoa. According to the archivist in Schio this was in 1885. Vatican News gives 1884.

NANNY IN ZIANIGO

In Genoa, Legnani handed her over to a family he was friends with, the Michielis. The Vatican writes that this happened under pressure from Mrs. Michieli. They went to live in Zianigo, a village near Mirano, not far from Venice. There Bakhita became the nanny of their little daughter Alice, whom everyone called Mimmina.

She was still not free. She was property that had changed owners. But for the first time she was in a setting where she heard something about the God she had not yet known in Darfur.

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

WITH THE SISTERS OF CANOSSA

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

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

masters. This Master was different. He loved her. According to the pope, she knew she was “definitively loved”.

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

“BODY AND SOUL”

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

Bakhita said no. She wanted to stay. Later she explained that otherwise she would have lost body and soul, Sister Frison relates.

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

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

A NEW NAME ON JANUARY 9, 1890

On January 9, 1890, she was baptized. On the same day she received confirmation and her first communion, the three sacraments by which an adult is received into the Catholic Church. The Patri-

arch of Venice himself administered them. According to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography this was Cardinal Domenico Agostini.

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

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

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

"YES, FATHER"

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

On December 8, 1896, she took her vows as a Canossian sister. Benedict XVI writes that this took place in Verona. The Vatican has preserved a prayer she wrote for that day. In it she asked whether she might one day go to her own people to tell them about God's goodness. She mentioned her father and mother, her brothers and her sister, who she believed were still living in slavery.

In 1902 she was transferred to Schio, a small town in the province of Vicenza. According to Sister Frison, when she was asked whether

she was willing to go, she answered with two words: “Yes, Father.” She would stay in Schio for the rest of her life.

MADRE MORETTA AT THE DOOR

Her work was simple. She cooked, sewed, embroidered and looked after the sacristy, the room where the things used for Mass are kept. She became best known as the doorkeeper. Anyone who rang at the convent door saw her.

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

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

A STORY THAT SPREAD

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

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

What did she tell people? A student from Bologna once asked her what she would do if she met her kidnappers. According to a text that the Pontifical Urbaniana University prepared for the Vatican, she said that she would kneel and kiss their hands. Without them she would never have become a Christian. Asked whether she could forgive the people who had tortured her, she answered: "Why not? poor things! They did not know the Lord."

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

"AS THE MASTER DESIRES"

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

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

On February 8, 1947, she died in the convent in Schio, with the sisters around her. Vatican News gives pneumonia as the cause. According to the Vatican her last words were a cry to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Afterwards people came from the town to see her one last time.

BACK TO SUDAN

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

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

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

In 2007 Benedict XVI wrote about her in *Spe Salvi*, his encyclical on hope. Since 2015 her feast day, February 8, has also been the International Day of Prayer against human trafficking. This was decided by two organizations in Rome, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the international union of superiors of women’s orders.

THE WINDOW IN SCHIO

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

I think of the window to which she led the men who wanted to arrest her. She had nothing to hide. She only pointed to the place

where her Master had called her. A girl without a name, sold at the market of El Obeid, stood at a window in Schio and knew who she was.

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the twin sister and the childhood in Olgossa; the escape attempt; that she already sensed God as a child; her words about forgiveness, about her baptism and about losing body and soul; her prayer of December 8, 1896; the story of the spying suspicion and the window; the help given to wounded soldiers in the First World War; her words about the chains and her last words.

Unconfirmed: that Mrs. Michieli was Russian Orthodox (one source); the exact years of her travels for the missions and the stay in Vimercate (Wikipedia only); the following figures, on which the sources disagree: her age at the abduction (seven or nine), the number of scars (114 or 144), the number of sales, and the year of

arrival in Italy (1884 or 1885). Whether the proceedings of 1889 were a real court case is not clear.

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

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Gil Sun-ju: the man who prayed before daybreak

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

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

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

He began his search for God in the mountains, on a very different path.

THREE YEARS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Gil Sun-ju was born in 1869 in Anju, in South Pyongan Province. That town now lies in North Korea. His father was called Gil Bong-sun. According to the Korean Wikipedia, he married young, at around the age of eleven, as was customary in his region. I have not found that detail in other sources.

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

The young Gil was a strong man. According to the Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, from the age of nineteen he trained his body with strength exercises. When he was twenty-five, a friend told him about seondo, a Taoist path to a long, strong and even immortal life. Gil went into the mountains and practiced there for three years. He did not find what he was looking for.

The sources do not fully agree about his religious path before his conversion. Christian History calls him a Taoist and Confucianist. Britannica speaks of Zen Buddhism. Korean sources speak of seondo, the Taoist path.

Do you know what that is like, investing years in something and then discovering it does not bring you what you hoped for?

A FRIEND AND A BOOK

The friend who had once pointed him to the mountains, Kim Jong-seop, had meanwhile become a Christian. Through him Gil came into contact with Christian books in Chinese, the language in which educated Koreans read at the time. One book in particular made an impression: *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, the story of a pilgrim who sets out with a burden on his back toward the heavenly city. According to the *Christian History Almanac*, the American missionary Samuel Moffett had recommended the book to him.

How he finally came to faith, we know from what he later told about it himself. In Soo Kim, professor of church history, puts it this way. While Gil was praying, he heard the sound of a flute and a voice calling his name. Then he prayed: "My beloved God, forgive my great sins and save me."

It is his own testimony. No one else was there. What followed is certain, though. In 1897, at the age of twenty-nine, Gil was baptized. According to the Korean Wikipedia, this was done by the American missionary Graham Lee.

AN ELDER IN JANGDAEHYEON

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

That fitted what Moffett had in mind. According to the *Christian History Almanac*, he wanted Koreans themselves to lead the Korean church, not outsiders. Men like Gil made that possible. Because of

this, the church looked less like a Western, colonial movement to many Koreans.

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

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

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

A COUNTRY UNDER PRESSURE

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

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

In the accounts of the revival you read that in January 1907 the American missionary William Blair preached about the hatred of

Koreans toward the Japanese, and called on the men to let it go. For a people that had just lost its freedom, that was not an easy message.

BEFORE DAYBREAK

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

When exactly it began is not certain. Some sources mention the autumn of 1906, others 1909. The article in *Acta Koreana* draws a connection with his years in the mountains: the zeal of seondo found a new direction in his prayer. The practice remained. The goal had changed.

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

According to a biography written by his son Gil Jin-gyeong in 1980, something else happened in September 1906. Gil had heard about revivals in Wales and India. That month the American minister Howard Agnew Johnston asked who wanted to receive the Holy Spirit fully in order to lead the Korean church. Gil, then a student and elder, raised his hand and came forward. In December of that year he was one of the main speakers at a Bible conference in Hwanghae, and he agreed with the missionaries to prepare the great winter conference of January together. This story comes from the family and was taken over by Bonjour Bay in an article. I have not found independent confirmation.

JANUARY 1907

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

According to the article by Bonjour Bay, Gil preached on January 9 about opening your heart to the Holy Spirit. After that the congregation began to pray aloud. Gil also led the conference's early morning prayer meetings.

On Monday evening, January 14, writes Young-Hoon Lee, the missionary Graham Lee led the meeting. The historian Thomas Kidd describes, based on eyewitnesses, how in those days men began to pray aloud all at once. They confessed their sins in public, wept and fell to the ground. One missionary wrote that the prayer sounded like the sound of many waters.

Gil Sun-ju played a key role in those days. He confessed his own sins in public, and many followed his example. The sources differ on the date: the Korean Wikipedia mentions an early morning prayer meeting on January 6. Stories also circulate about what exactly he confessed. I have not found those details in any source I could read, and so I leave them out.

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

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

was exhausted. Whether that was the real reason, no one knows for sure.

ONE OF THE FIRST SEVEN

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

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

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

THE SHADOW OF 1911

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

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

death was directly connected to that, I cannot establish from the sources.

I pause here for a moment. A father burying his son, under a regime that silences his people. We do not know what Gil said about it. No letter or sermon about it has been preserved that I have been able to find. Two years later he put his name to the declaration.

THIRTY-THREE NAMES

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

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

So on March 1 itself he was not in Seoul. The Korean Wikipedia mentions that by then he already had serious problems with his eyes. He was arrested, like almost all the signatories. The sources differ on the length of his imprisonment: the Encyclopedia of Korean Culture speaks of two years, the Korean Wikipedia of a year and seven months. According to that Wikipedia, after nearly two years of pretrial detention he was the only one of the arrested signatories to be acquitted. I have not been able to check that acquittal myself in a court source.

The movement was crushed. Yet something did change. According to In Soo Kim, from that time on many Koreans no longer saw Chris-

tianity as a faith imposed on them by a foreign power. Christians had stood at the front.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

After his release Gil traveled the country again. He led revival services and Bible conferences, also in North Gando, the area in Manchuria where many Koreans lived. His preaching gained a new focus. Britannica writes that after prison he preached mainly about the end times, with emphasis on the book of Revelation. A frequently told story is that he read Revelation hundreds of times in prison. There is no source for it.

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

Theologians view this period differently. According to the article in *Acta Koreana*, his emphasis on repentance and the authority of the Bible, together with his later expectation of the millennial kingdom, grew into a conservative, fundamentalist theology that is still strong in Korea. The Korean researcher Bae Deok-man sees him as the one who spread this way of thinking about the end times among Korean Presbyterians. English-language overviews report that he stepped down as senior pastor of Jangdaehyeon in 1926. For this too I have found no verifiable source.

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

Large numbers circulate about his ministry: seventeen or twenty thousand sermons, hundreds of thousands of listeners, tens of thou-

sands of converts. They come from later overviews and contradict each other. No one has been able to count them.

IN THE PULPIT IN GANGSEO

In his last years Gil could see almost nothing. He kept preaching. In November 1935 he led a Bible conference in a church in Gangseo, in South Pyongan. There he suffered a stroke. According to the Christian History Almanac, he collapsed in the pulpit while preaching to thousands of people, and was pronounced dead within a few hours. He was sixty-six. Most sources give the date as November 26; the Almanac holds to November 25.

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

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

at Taehwagwan; later preaching about the end times; death in November 1935; honor in 2009.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the flute and the voice at his conversion and his prayer for forgiveness; raising his hand at Howard Agnew Johnston's question in 1906 (from the biography by his son); the Spirit baptism in 1907 (letter from one missionary, disputed by others); the marriage at around age eleven; the baptism by Graham Lee; the stories about the number of sermons, listeners and converts.

Unconfirmed: what exactly he confessed in January 1907 and on which day; the starting year of early morning prayer (1906 or 1909); the acquittal in 1920 and the exact length of his imprisonment; the connection between the death of his eldest son and the case of 1911; that he read Revelation hundreds of times in prison; his stepping down in 1926; the exact date of death (November 25 or 26).

Interpretation: church historians differ on whether his influence on Korean theology, especially his expectation of the end times, was healthy.

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Sundar Singh: the sadhu in the yellow robe

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

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

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

That is why this chapter is a little different from the others. Many miracle stories circulate about Sundar Singh. Most of them come

from his own telling. Even in his own day there was fierce dispute over whether they were true. I tell them, and each time I say where they come from.

It begins in a village in the Punjab.

A SON OF THE SARDAR

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

His father, Sher Singh, was a wealthy man and, according to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, the head of the village, with the rank of sardar. Sundar was the youngest of three sons. The family was Sikh, but also lived with Hindu customs. A British archive speaks of a family of Sikh and Hindu background.

The strongest influence in his childhood was his mother. She was deeply devout and took him to see sadhus, the men who left everything behind to seek God. She hoped her youngest son would one day become like them. At home he learned the Bhagavad Gita, a beloved Hindu sacred book. According to his later biographers he knew it by heart at the age of seven. This detail comes from the veneration that grew up around him, not from any document.

His mother also sent him to a school run by the American Presbyterians in Ludhiana, the Ewing Christian High School, to learn English. There he came into contact with the New Testament. He wanted nothing to do with it.

A BIBLE IN THE FIRE

When he was about fourteen, his mother died. The boy fell into a deep crisis. He was angry, at God and at the Christians. In public he burned a Bible, page by page, while friends looked on. That is how the early accounts of his life tell it. A British archive briefly calls it a symbolic burning of the Bible.

What happened next, he told himself. He could find no peace in his own religion, nor in the other books he read. One night in December 1904 he decided that he would throw himself in front of the train if God did not show Himself to him. He prayed. Early in the morning, so he later said, he saw Jesus. Christian History speaks of a vision of the crucified love of Christ. He was certain, and the restlessness was gone.

The date varies from source to source. A recent article by Shivraj Mahendra gives December 18, 1904, at about half past four in the morning. Another source puts it in December 1903. The historian of religion Eric Sharpe pointed out that this story rests mainly on Sundar's own retellings and on the first books about him. There were no other witnesses.

I believe God can seek people out like that. But I cannot prove it, and neither could Sundar. What is certain is what happened afterward.

SENT AWAY FROM HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

Sundar cut off his hair. For a Sikh that was a public sign: he no longer belonged. His father threw him out of the house. According to the magazine Christian History he also feared the disgrace. In the Punjab many converts to Christianity came from the lowest castes, and a son of the sardar becoming a Christian was a humiliation for the family.

According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, his father still gave him a farewell meal. According to later accounts of his life, someone in the family tried to poison him, and he survived. That story, too, comes from him.

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

A CHRISTIAN IN THE ROBE OF A SADHU

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

Everyone in India knew that figure. A sadhu owns nothing, travels from village to village and lives on what people give him. Sundar carried only a New Testament. He did not marry and he walked barefoot. According to his biographer in the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, he wanted to make Christianity Indian. The Swiss historian Philippe Bornet places him among the attempts of that time to free Christianity from its colonial packaging.

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

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

In those same years Samuel Stokes, who had come to India in 1904, was working in the leprosy colony at Subathu. Encouraged by the Archbishop of Canterbury, he started a small brotherhood modeled on Francis of Assisi. The SOAS archive in London states that Sundar was briefly involved in a brotherhood of that kind. The sources I read do not say exactly how long or how closely.

TO THE FORBIDDEN LAND

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

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

His best-known stories date from the years that followed. In one of them a lama had him thrown into a dry well. After three days an unknown helper is said to have pulled him out. In another story he was taken prisoner in 1914 in Ilam, in Nepal, stripped and covered with leeches. His friend A.J. Appasamy, later a bishop in South India, included stories like these in his biography.

Here I have to be honest. All these stories come from Sundar himself. There are no other witnesses. The British bishop Stephen Neill, an expert on Indian Christianity, thought, according to Sharpe, that Sundar had never been in Tibet, although Sundar himself believed he had. The German theologian Michael Biehl wrote in 2003 that historical research had concluded that the journeys to Tibet did not

take place as they were told. Where Sundar actually was during those summers, we do not know exactly. The SOAS archive speaks of journeys and preaching in the mountain regions. The sources give no conclusive answer.

EIGHT MONTHS IN LAHORE

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

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

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

THE HERMIT OF KAILASH

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

His most disputed story dates from 1912. High in the Himalayas he is said to have found, in a cave, a Christian hermit who was called the Maharishi of Kailash. This man was supposedly about three

hundred years old. Sundar said he spent weeks with him. There were no witnesses and there is no account from anyone else. Later Sundar also spoke of a secret movement of Christian sanniyasis, ascetics who believed in Jesus in hiding. Biehl found no trace of it at all.

In his book *At the Master's Feet*, translated from Urdu in 1922, Sundar describes how he was praying alone in a forest and met a strange man. At first he did not recognize him. Then he writes: "At once I knew that my dear Saviour stood before me." His books are short, devotional writings about prayer and life with Jesus.

FROM RANGOON TO OXFORD

From 1918 on, Sundar was invited to speak outside North India. That year he traveled through South India and through Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka. In 1918 and 1919 came Burma (now Myanmar), Malaya (now Malaysia) and Singapore, China and Japan.

In 1920 he came to Great Britain. He spoke in churches and halls there, and in Oxford he met the theologian B.H. Streeter. Then he traveled on to the United States and Australia. In 1921 Streeter, together with the Indian theologian A.J. Appasamy, wrote the book *The Sadhu*, in which he was presented as a living mystic. On a journey through Europe in 1920, according to *Christian History*, he was hailed as a living apostle and saint.

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

In 1922 he returned to Europe. He visited Palestine. His tour of Switzerland produced many publications, and according to Bornet the organizers were overwhelmed by his appearances. From April 21 to 23, 1922, he was in Uppsala with Archbishop Söderblom, who later wrote a book about him.

APOSTLE OR IMPOSTOR?

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

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

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

In between were voices that were less harsh. His friend C.F. Andrews thought the visions came largely from his imagination, and noticed that Sundar later no longer spoke about them. The Swede Tor Andrae thought he was certainly no fraud, but that he experienced reality differently than Westerners did.

Sharpe, who as a historian of religion wrote a great deal about Sundar, came to a cautious judgment. Sundar's mystical experiences cannot be verified. In his last book, *The Riddle of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, published after his death in 2004, he showed how Western Christians had each made their own Sundar. For one group he was a fiery evangelist who died in Tibet. For another, an ideal mystic.

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

A TIRED BODY

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

His thinking changed too. According to Sharpe he became fascinated by the writings of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, and wrote to Söderblom about it in 1928. According to the *Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia*, he said in 1929 that punishment after this life would not be eternal. Many of his evangelical admirers struggled with that.

All those years he wrote letters to Rebecca Parker, the missionary who wrote the first book about him. He saw her as a mother. His letters from 1918 to 1929 are still kept in the archive of the London Missionary Society, now at SOAS in London. He wrote them in English and in Hindustani in Latin script.

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

THE ROAD PAST KALKA

Then, in April 1929, he wrote those last letters. He was going to Tibet one more time. Friends advised him against it.

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

Sharpe wrote that Sundar “disappeared into still greater obscurity.” The image fits. A life that was already full of stories ended without a grave and without a witness.

A CHILD LOOKING FOR ITS MOTHER

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

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

He loved to tell parables. In one of them a child is looking for its mother, who has hidden herself. It is offered mangoes, but it does not want them. It says: “No! No! I want my mother.”

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the vision of Jesus in December 1904 (or 1903) and the plan to throw himself in front of the train; the details of the Bible burning; the poisoning by his family; the Gita at age seven; his first journeys to Afghanistan and Baluchistan; the reason for his departure from Lahore (according to his biographers); the handing back of his preacher’s license in 1911; making Christianity Indian as his conscious goal (so his biographers say).

Unconfirmed: his journeys in Tibet (disputed as early as the 1920s, called into question by Neill and Biehl); the rescue from the dry well; the imprisonment in Ilam (1914); the Maharishi of Kailash

(1912); the secret movement of Christian sannyasis; the precise connection with Samuel Stokes's brotherhood; the exact date of his disappearance (most sources say April, one source June 1929); the cause and place of his death.

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

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

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

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

Anyone who saw him in White Plains then would never have believed what became of him. In the twelve years that followed he traveled through China and Southeast Asia, as far as Batavia, Surabaya and Ambon. Historian Daryl Ireland of Boston University writes that in those years he traveled farther, spoke more often and brought more Chinese people to faith than anyone else. But his story is also one of the most reworked stories in the history of the

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

It began in a parsonage in Fujian.

A BOY FROM HINGHWA

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

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

In 1909, in his father's church, the boy witnessed a revival that became known as the Hinghwa Pentecost. According to the English Wikipedia it began on Good Friday, with a sermon by the preacher Lim Hongban. He was seven at the time. It moved him, writes the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity, but he was not yet born again. According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, he wanted to become a pastor from an early age, just like his father.

FIVE AND A HALF YEARS IN AMERICA

In 1920 he left for the United States. He studied chemistry at Ohio Wesleyan University, a Methodist university, and earned his bachelor's degree in three years. There he became friends with Rollin H.

Walker, a Bible teacher. Then he went on to Ohio State University. In 1924 he earned his master's degree, and in 1926 his doctorate in chemistry.

They were impressive years, and he later liked to talk about them. The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity notes that recent research found errors in his own account, including about his academic results. The doctorate itself is certain. Yale Divinity School, which holds his papers, mentions the Ohio State doctorate from 1926.

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

A VOICE ON FEBRUARY 10

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

The first is Sung's own. He said that on February 10, 1927, he heard a voice telling him his sins were forgiven. Later he called that day his spiritual birthday. In his own words, freely translated, Jesus found him in room 405 of an atheist seminary. He also said that he had attended evangelistic meetings during those weeks.

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

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

ONE HUNDRED NINETY-THREE DAYS

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

Sung himself later saw those months as a great misunderstanding. He said he was locked up because his faith was too fervent. A 2008 article in *Christian History* says that in the institution he read through the Bible forty times. As far as I can tell, that number comes from his own testimony. Nobody else counted.

Accounts of how he was released differ. According to the *Biographical Dictionary* it happened through the efforts of a friend, Dr. William Walker. According to Ireland he was discharged because Union could no longer pay for his care, not because he had recovered. He was released into the care of a family named Fowler. Henry Sloane Coffin, Union's president, refused to let him return. Sung went home, and according to Ireland he still carried his delusions with him.

I find this the hardest part of his story, and also one of the most honest. How would you look at a preacher you knew had spent half a year in a psychiatric institution? Many Christians have preferred to leave that part of his life out, or to bend it into a story about persecution. The sources show something else: a broken man who went home and had to find his way there.

OVER THE RAIL

In the autumn of 1927 he sailed back to China. On that voyage came the story he is best known for. This is how he told it himself later: before the ship reached the Chinese coast, he threw his awards and diplomas overboard. He kept only his doctoral diploma, to give to his parents. According to one account it was for his father, according to another for his mother. He gave his savings to his father, his books and clothes to his brother.

No witnesses wrote it down. The story comes from his own mouth, and the serious biographers say so too. Still, the image has stayed with people: a man who let the titles he had worked years for sink into the Pacific Ocean. From then on he wanted to be nothing but a preacher.

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

A LETTER FROM W.B. COLE

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

Union responded with its own version: Sung had already been ill when he arrived. So the life of a Chinese student became a stake in an American battle between modernists and fundamentalists. Sung himself told his story in 1933 in the booklet *My Testimony*, which he dictated to Wang Minxue. Ireland shows that in it he even moved a vision by a week, to the day he was admitted. That made the story stronger.

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

ELEVEN HUNDRED NINETY-NINE SERVICES

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

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

In December 1931 he also began to pray for the sick. Ireland sees his faith healing as something that offered Chinese people a third way, alongside traditional Chinese medicine and Western

hospitals. Strikingly, he himself was never healed of the ailment he had brought back from America.

In 1933 it came to a break. After conflicts with his teammates, Gih among them, and with the two women who led the mission, he had to leave. From 1934 he worked independently, and from then on in Mandarin. His preaching drew many women. They took up his call and formed their own evangelistic teams.

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

“COME HOME”

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

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

Historian Barbara Watson Andaya of the University of Hawai'i has researched Sung's trips to the Indies, using Dutch newspapers as a source. He first came to Java at the invitation of the Pentecostal community in Soerabaja (now Surabaya). In Batavia, today's Jakarta, a special Chinese committee was formed to invite him. His visa for Batavia took six months to come through. When he finally arrived,

the Chinese church on the Prinsenlaan turned out to be too small. The services moved to the much larger Portuguese Outer Church, where worship was normally held in Malay. That church, built in 1695, still stands and is now called Gereja Sion.

The Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad wrote about him in November 1938 and February 1939, and Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië in August 1939. According to Andaya, the Dutch-language newspapers were unanimously positive. They spoke of a great success and an astonishing number of visitors. The colonial government saw no danger in him. Some Dutch missionaries compared his campaigns to the great revival in Wales.

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

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

"YOUR HEARTS ARE SO HARD!"

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

magazine. So it is a source written by friends of the movement, and you have to read it that way.

According to that account, a Reformed minister threatened to forbid his members to attend the meetings if he did not like the sermons. Sung received threatening letters. The Pentecostal missionaries advised him against using the island's largest Protestant church as a venue. Another minister then paid for a large tabernacle made of atap, dried palm leaves. He borrowed a piano, a blackboard and chairs to go with it.

Three days after arriving, Sung sat down in the middle of a service. He said to those present: "Your hearts are so hard!" He threatened to leave for Makassar. He stayed. At his last meeting, according to the Pentecostal magazine, there were about four thousand people. I know of no other counts.

Sung himself said that of all the places in the Indies, Ambon was the hardest. I find that an honest detail. Even a man with a great name could get frustrated and say so.

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

A CAMP BED IN DECEMBER

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

Meanwhile, in 1937, war with Japan broke out, and the work in China became more and more difficult. That was one of the reasons he went south so often.

In December 1939 he preached for the last time, in Indonesia. He was lying on a camp bed. Ireland mentions it briefly, without naming a place. It was his last sermon. After that he went back to China.

SIX THOUSAND PAGES

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

On August 18, 1944, he died in a small house outside Peking. He was forty-two. The sources differ on the cause of death: Yale names tuberculosis, while Ireland and the Biographical Dictionary point to the fistulas he had brought back from America. The Chinese preacher Wang Mingdao led his funeral. He left behind his wife and children. The reference works do not agree on exactly how many children there were.

What he also left behind were his diaries. Every evening he wrote down how many people had come and how many had come to faith. They also contain sermons, prayers and lists of people he prayed for. The 2008 article in Christian History calls him someone who constantly examined himself and repented anew every day. A daughter published edited versions of the diaries. His daughter Levi kept the papers, and after her death they went to the library of Yale Di-

vinity School. In 1916 Ireland was the first researcher to use the unedited diaries.

Nobody knows how many people came to faith through him. Estimates range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, and they are not counts. The numbers in his diary come from himself. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia calls them reliable on the whole, and also notes that Sung admitted he sometimes exaggerated in his sermons.

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Outer Church in Batavia; ordination as elder in 1938; illness and bedridden final years; death on August 18, 1944, near Peking; diaries now at Yale Divinity Library.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: the voice on February 10, 1927, and the statement about room 405; that his admission was a misunderstanding about his conversion; reading through the Bible forty times in the institution; throwing his diplomas overboard; the figure of two thousand participants in 1936 (his own diary); the description of the services in Surabaya (eyewitness account by Cornelia Baarbé, published in 1949); the course of events on Ambon and the figure of four thousand (the Pentecostal magazine *The Australian Evangel*, 1940).

Unconfirmed: whether the doctoral diploma was for his father or his mother; exactly how he was released from Bloomingdale (the sources name different people and reasons); the cause of death (tuberculosis or the effects of fistulas); the exact number of children; the number of people who came to faith through him; which cities in the Indies he visited in which year.

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

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Janani Luwum: the shepherd who stood firm

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

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

The other bishops were allowed to leave. Luwum was called back. Kivengere waited outside until guards sent him away at gunpoint. None of them saw the archbishop alive again.

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

In Uganda, Janani Luwum became the first martyr of his church’s second century. His country now remembers him every year with a

national holiday. In London his statue stands above the West Door of Westminster Abbey. He was a herd boy from the north, a teacher who only truly came to faith at twenty-six, and an archbishop who stood firm when standing firm became dangerous.

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

A BOY WITH THE HERD IN MUCWINI

Janani Luwum was born in Mucwini, a village in East Acholi, in the north of Uganda. It lies in the present-day district of Kitgum. The sources do not agree on the year of his birth. Most give 1922, a few 1924.

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

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

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

A CHURCHGOER WHO DID NOT YET BELIEVE

Luwum grew up in the church. He knew the hymns and the prayers. But his later secretary Margaret Ford, who wrote the first biography of him in 1978, was honest about it: "He was not at this time a converted Christian." His faith was a habit.

Do you recognize that? You can sit in a pew for years without it ever reaching your heart.

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

That day Luwum confessed his sins and gave his life to Jesus. The date appears in Ugandan, British and church sources. He was twenty-six, or twenty-four, depending on which birth year is correct.

A TEACHER WHO DISTURBED THE PEACE

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

The Daily Monitor goes further. According to that newspaper, he was arrested with eight others and held in Kitgum. For two days

they were given no food. Luwum is said to have told his guards that he loved them. I have found this last part only in this one newspaper, without any source given. It fits who he later became, but I cannot check it.

There is another story, told by the Christian History Institute: that as a young believer he preached from a tree to fellow students. That too appears in only one source.

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

A BICYCLE AND TWENTY-FOUR CONGREGATIONS

In 1950 he came back as a catechist and was attached to St. Philip's Church in Gulu. In 1953 he went to Buwalasi again, this time to train for the ministry. On December 21, 1955, he was ordained deacon. A year later he was ordained priest. An Anglican priest is what many other churches would call a minister or pastor. A few sources give earlier years for the ordinations, but most give 1955 and 1956.

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

Another path was open to him as well. According to the same source, he could have been given a leading role in his tribe. He chose the church.

Luwum was twice given the chance to study in England. First a year at St Augustine's College in Canterbury. According to the Daily Monitor, he returned in 1959, to the parish of Palwo near Lira. In

1962 he became vice principal of the school in Buwalasi where he had studied himself. After that he studied at the London College of Divinity. In 1965 he became principal of Buwalasi.

These were the years in which Uganda became independent. In 1962 the British left. In September 1966 he became provincial secretary of the Church of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga-Zaire. Boga lies in the east of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was a church that stretched across four countries.

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

BISHOP IN A STADIUM

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

As bishop, Luwum worked for leprosy patients in Gulu. He brought a German group to his diocese to train farmers in agriculture, so that the church would also have its own income. He was a practical man. He preached, but he also kept an eye on the harvest.

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

A COUNTRY UNDER THE SHADOW OF AMIN

Under Idi Amin, Uganda lived in fear. Thousands of people were picked up, beaten, held without trial or killed. The violence fell especially on the Acholi and the Langi, the peoples from the north

where Luwum himself came from. In 1972 Amin expelled the Asian population from the country.

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

In May 1974 he was elected archbishop. On June 9, 1974, he was enthroned, succeeding Erica Sabiti. He was the third archbishop of the province and the second African in that position. According to the Christian History Institute, Amin did not come to the enthronement.

"I AM PREPARED TO DIE IN THE ARMY OF JESUS"

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

He was not a man of grand gestures. The Ugandan historians Tom Tuma and Phares Mutibwa described him as a gentle, peaceful and humble man. According to the Anglican news service, he often went himself to the State Research Bureau, Amin's notorious secret police, to get prisoners released. About his own safety he said: "I face daily being picked up by the soldiers." He would keep on preaching.

Not everyone agreed with his approach. According to the Christian History Institute, some grumbled that he cooperated too much with Amin. Luwum answered that he was not taking the government's side. On the contrary, he was telling the president what the

church disapproved of. That is how narrow the road is for a church leader under a dictator. Whoever talks is called an accomplice. So is whoever keeps silent.

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

A CHRISTMAS SERMON TAKEN OFF THE AIR

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

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

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

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

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1977

On February 5, 1977, soldiers raided the archbishop's house. They said they were looking for weapons. According to the Christian History Institute, they held a gun to his ribs. They found nothing.

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

According to one source, Amin received him and his wife at the palace on February 14. Luwum denied any involvement in a plot. He was advised to stick to his church work from then on.

"I SEE GOD'S HAND IN THIS"

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

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

Two cabinet ministers were also arrested that day: Erinayo Wilson Oryema and Charles Oboth Ofumbi. They too were Christians.

The next morning Radio Uganda reported that the three men had died. They had supposedly tried to overpower the driver of the car

they were in, after which the car crashed. No one was allowed to see the bodies.

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

There is no certainty about the exact date of his death. Uganda keeps February 16, the day of his arrest. The Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the United States remember him on February 17, the day his death was announced.

A SERVICE WITHOUT A COFFIN

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

His body was taken north, to Mucwini, the village where he was born. According to This is Africa, it arrived there on February 19. He was buried at St. Paul's Church in Mucwini. The Anglican news service writes that Amin's soldiers buried him there. An American source says the family only received the body weeks later. Here too the accounts differ.

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

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

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

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

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

A STATUE ABOVE THE WEST DOOR

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

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: that he was not yet converted before 1948 (his biographer Margaret Ford); the names of the preachers Yusto and Josephine Otunno and the name of his father (only the Daily Monitor); the arrest with eight others in Kitgum and his words to the guards (only the Daily Monitor); the preaching from a tree and the bicycle journeys (only the Christian History Institute); the gun to his ribs; the meeting with Amin on February 14 (one source).

Unconfirmed: his year of birth (1922 or 1924); the exact date of his death (February 16 or 17, 1977); the precise last words to the bishops; when his body was given to the family; the number of children (most sources say nine, one says five); who gave the order for the killing.

Interpretation: the accusation of arms smuggling was never proven and is rejected by his family and his church. The criticism that he stood too close to Amin comes from one source and shows how narrow the road was for church leaders under his rule.

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Afterword

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

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

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

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

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