

HEROES OF FAITH FROM AROUND THE
WORLD
VOLUME 2

From Every Nation

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

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

Revelation 7:9

WIM KAMPHORST

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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: the multitude grows

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

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

THE SAME APPROACH

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

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

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

OF ALL NATIONS

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

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

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

He wrote down in his journal what happened. She took hold of his hand and trembled. “She trembled as she held me by the hand,” he noted. They said little. They sat quietly side by side and looked at each other.

The man’s name was Samuel Ajayi Crowther. As a child he had been captured and sold, and then set free by a British warship. He became the first African bishop of the Anglican Church in modern times. He translated large parts of the Bible into Yoruba, his mother tongue, and year after year he traveled up the Niger River to plant new congregations. At the end of his life his work was taken out of his hands by young European missionaries. The British historian Andrew Walls called him probably the best-known African Christian of the nineteenth century.

The woman in Abeokuta was called Afala. A few years later she would be baptized, taking the name Hannah. To understand why that reunion meant so much, we have to go back to a village called Osogun.

THE DAY OSOGUN BURNED

Ajayi was born around 1807 in Osogun, a small town in Yorubaland. The place lies near present-day Ado-Awaye, in the Nigerian state of Oyo. Nobody knows the exact year. Andrew Walls settles on about 1807, other sources give 1809 or 1810.

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

Around 1821 Osogun was raided. According to Walls, the attackers were Fulani and Muslims from Oyo. Ajayi was captured, together with his mother and his sisters. He later wrote about that day twice. One of his phrases has been preserved. Loosely translated, he called it the saddest scene you could imagine.

What happened next, we know in broad outline. The boy was separated from his family and changed owners six times. A Nigerian biography tells that somewhere along the way he was traded for a horse. In the end he landed at the slave market of Lagos and was sold to Portuguese traders.

A SHIP THAT NEVER ARRIVED

In April 1822 the Portuguese ship lay off the coast, ready to sail. According to Christian History, it was called the Esperanza Felix. It never arrived.

Great Britain was fighting the slave trade with warships off the African coast. One of those ships was the Myrmidon, under Captain Henry Leeke. He intercepted the Portuguese ship. According to a book from 1854, he took Ajayi and other boys on board and, after a voyage of two months, put them ashore as free people. That was in June 1822, in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, a British colony, the navy landed the people it had freed. The Church Missionary Society, the CMS, had schools there. The CMS was a mission society of the Church of England, the Anglican Church. Ajayi ended up at one of those schools.

He was thirteen or fourteen. He did not know whether his mother was still alive.

A NEW NAME

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

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

In 1827 the CMS opened a training institution in Freetown, later known as Fourah Bay College. Crowther was one of its first students. According to Rochester Cathedral, he started there on Christmas Day 1827. Two years later, on September 21, 1829, he married Asano. She too had been freed from a slave ship. At her baptism she

was given the name Susan Thompson. They would stay married for about fifty years and had six children.

Crowther became a schoolteacher, and later a tutor at the school where he himself had studied.

MALARIA ON THE RIVER

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

The journey became a disaster. Most of the Europeans caught malaria, and about forty of them died. Crowther survived. The leaders of the CMS saw the difference. Anyone who wanted to bring the gospel into the interior of West Africa would need Africans.

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

HOME IN ABEOKUTA

In 1846 Crowther went to Abeokuta with the English missionary Henry Townsend. Abeokuta was the city of the Egba, the Yoruba group to which Crowther himself belonged. They arrived on August 3. Three weeks later his mother stood in front of him.

What moves me about that journal entry is how bare it is. No big words, no prayer, no explanation. A mother who trembles and a son who lets her hold his hand. I think Crowther knew there were no words for what had happened in those twenty-five years.

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

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

THE LORD'S PRAYER AT WINDSOR

In 1851 Crowther traveled to London to speak up for Abeokuta. He talked with government ministers, among them Lord Palmerston. He was received by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. A Nigerian biography tells that he prayed the Lord's Prayer for them in Yoruba. Henry Venn, the secretary of the CMS, was convinced that Crowther's visit had moved the British government to act.

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

Meanwhile Crowther kept working on his translation. In 1852 a Yoruba grammar appeared, along with translations of Luke, Acts, James and 1 Peter. He worked together with an African colleague, Thomas King. Walls points to a choice that was ahead of its time. Yoruba is a tonal language: the same word means something different when you say it higher or lower. Crowther wanted the trans-

lation to mark those tones. His approach became a model for later Bible translations in Africa.

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

AN ARABIC BIBLE IN GBEBE

In 1854 Crowther went up the Niger again, with an expedition paid for by the British shipowner McGregor Laird. This time the crew used quinine against malaria, and according to Christian History no one died.

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

In Onitsha, in the land of the Igbo, the group was given a piece of land by the king. The African minister J.C. Taylor stayed behind there to begin the mission. Farther upstream, in Gbebe, Crowther gave an Arabic Bible to one of the leaders of the town. Shortly afterward the Dayspring struck a rock near Rabba and sank. The group continued overland.

Many Muslims lived along the middle Niger. Crowther did not debate with them in order to win. He looked for what the Bible and the Qur'an had in common, such as the figures who appear in both books. Walls describes how careful he was in handing out Arabic Bibles, because he knew they were sometimes used as amulets. He wrote that "the Bible, the sword of the Spirit, must fight its own battle." The image comes from Paul: *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17).

“WILL YOU REFUSE ME MY LAST WISH?”

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

A saying of Venn’s circulates about the conversation between the two men. Loosely translated, he is supposed to have asked his son Samuel Ajayi whether he would refuse him his last wish before he died. The line appears in later biographies. I have not found it in any account from 1864.

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

On June 29, 1864, Samuel Ajayi Crowther was consecrated bishop in Canterbury Cathedral by Archbishop Charles Longley. One source from Rochester gives June 24, most others June 29. His title was bishop of the countries of West Africa beyond the territory of the British queen. He was sent to peoples where Britain had no authority yet. That same year the University of Oxford gave him an honorary doctorate in divinity.

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

BONNY AND THE RIVER

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

An important place became Bonny, a trading town in the Niger Delta. According to a Nigerian biography, the leaders of Bonny renounced their idols on Easter Day 1867. The same source tells that a young Christian, Joshua Hart, was killed in Bonny because he refused to take part in the old rituals. Walls mentions Bonny as one of the most important places of his work, without those details.

That same year, according to that biography, Crowther and his son Dandeson were held for several days by a local chief who demanded a ransom. I have found that story in only one source.

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

On October 19, 1880, Susan died, after about fifty years of marriage.

A COMMISSION HE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO READ

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

Complaints came in about the conduct of some African workers in the Niger Mission. Some of those complaints were justified. Crowther himself had warned for years that many of his helpers lacked good training and that he had no means to guide them. In 1881 he met with CMS delegates on Madeira. Control over the mission's money went to a committee. An investigation into his workers followed. According to Christian History and an African biographical dictionary, Crowther did not get to see the report

before it went to London. In 1883 the first African workers were dismissed.

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

ONITSHA, 1890

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

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

Crowther was over eighty. He resigned in protest in 1890, wrote Brockman and Rochester Cathedral. Exactly which positions he laid down differs from source to source. What exactly was said in Onitsha, I have not found in the sources I read. What is certain is that the work of a lifetime was taken out of his hands in a short time.

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

that group, H.H. Dobinson, later regretted his hasty judgments, writes Walls.

What would you do if your life's work were taken over by people who could have been your grandchildren?

THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR

According to the Nigerian biographer Owodayo, on May 8, 1891, Crowther wrote a plan for an independent church in the Niger Delta. In September 1891 he suffered a stroke. After that he could hardly move or speak.

He died on December 31, 1891, in Lagos. Walls describes him in those last months as a desolate, broken man. He was buried on January 1, 1892. The funeral was well attended.

He was given an English successor, Joseph Sidney Hill, who arrived in Nigeria at the end of 1893.

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

PRAYERS IN CANTERBURY

In July 2014 a service was held in Canterbury Cathedral, a hundred and fifty years after his consecration. Thanks were given for his life, and prayers were said asking for forgiveness. In his sermon the Archbishop of Canterbury called him the apostle of Nigeria, a man

who had been “betrayed and let down and undermined” by his own church.

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Osogun in Yorubaland, around 1807 to 1810; capture around 1821 and six changes of owner; liberation by the British navy in April 1822 (Myrmidon, Captain Henry Leeke) and arrival in Sierra Leone; baptism on December 11, 1825, by John Raban; one of the first students at Fourah Bay; marriage to Asano (Susan Thompson); the Niger expedition of 1841; ordination as deacon and priest in 1843; arrival in Abeokuta in 1846 and reunion with his mother; visit to Queen Victoria in 1851; translation work in Yoruba with tones; the expeditions of 1854 and 1857; consecration as bishop in Canterbury in 1864; Henry Townsend’s opposition; the takeover of the Niger Mission by European missionaries and the confrontation in Onitsha in 1890; his resignation in 1890; stroke and death on December 31, 1891, in Lagos; English successor; the Niger Delta Pastorate from 1892; the service in Canterbury in 2014.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his own account of the raid; the words from his journal about the reunion with his mother; the trade for a horse; the Lord’s Prayer in Yoruba for the queen; Venn’s saying about his “last wish”; the conversion of the

leaders of Bonny on Easter Day 1867 and the death of Joshua Hart; the hostage-taking of 1867; the plan of May 8, 1891.

Unconfirmed: the exact year of birth; the name of the slave ship (Esperanza Felix, one source); the date of the consecration (June 29 according to most sources, June 24 according to Rochester); when the complete Yoruba Bible appeared; what exactly was said in Onitsha in 1890.

Interpretation: historians differ on the weight of the complaints against Crowther's workers. Some were justified, and Crowther himself admitted that his helpers had too little training. That the young missionaries sidelined him, and that racial ideas played a part in it, is widely acknowledged, including by the Anglican Church itself.

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

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

His lodging was a small shed. He shared it with people who had nowhere else to go, and he fed them from the small allowance he received as a student. According to a later biographer, some 7,500 people lived in the district. It became his home for years.

That student's name was Toyohiko Kagawa. He became the best-known Japanese Christian of his century. He wrote bestsellers, founded labor unions and cooperatives, went to prison and spoke to packed halls in America. American churches named him in the same breath as Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer. After his death he was given a statue in the cathedral in Washington.

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

A SON OF THE CONCUBINE

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

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

The boy grew up with relatives, under an uncle who was in charge. His biographers describe the years after his parents' death as lonely.

A BIBLE CLASS TO LEARN ENGLISH

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

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

On February 14, 1904, Myers baptized him in the church at Tokushima, on the island of Shikoku. He was fifteen. When he

made it known that he wanted to become a minister, his uncle cast him out of the family. From then on, the missionaries supported him.

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

AMONG THE HOMELESS OF SHINKAWA

Toyohiko studied at Meiji Gakuin in Tokyo, a Presbyterian college, and then at the theological seminary in Kobe. In 1909 he fell ill. After his recovery came the move to Shinkawa, that Christmas Eve.

Kagawa did not live in Shinkawa as a visitor. He took people into his home and preached in the streets. There he caught trachoma, a contagious eye disease that troubled him for the rest of his life. Around 1910 he started a small group, which he called Kyūrei Dan, the Salvation Band.

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

WHAT HE WROTE ABOUT HIS NEIGHBORS

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

Around those years his study *Hinmin shinri no kenkyū* appeared, an investigation into the psychology of the poor. The book described life in the slums, a world unknown to the Japanese middle class.

It also contained something else. Next to Shinkawa lay a Buraku neighborhood. The Buraku are Japanese who had been excluded for centuries, because their ancestors did work that was considered unclean, such as slaughtering animals and tanning leather. In that book Kagawa described them as a separate and degenerate race, attributed to them a tendency toward crime and spoke of racial improvement. So writes the Japanese historian Fujino Yutaka. A 2023 study by Hiroshi Sekiguchi shows how Kagawa at that time adopted the accepted science that linked poverty, crime and disease to heredity.

It was the language of his time, in Europe and America too. That does not make it any less painful for the people he wrote about. In the 1980s an open debate arose in Japan over these passages, which became known as the Kagawa problem. It has never entirely died down.

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

ACROSS THE DEATH LINE

Back in Kobe, Kagawa wrote a novel about his years in the slums. It was called *Shisen o koete*, across the death line. In Dutch the title has been rendered as *Voorbij de grens van de dood*, and in English as *Before the Dawn*. The book appeared in 1920 and became a bestseller. The sources differ on exactly how it came about: Britannica writes that he wrote his first novels in prison in 1921 and 1922. An article in Japan Harvest speaks of a million copies sold; I have not found that figure confirmed anywhere else.

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

THIRTY THOUSAND MEN AT THE SHIPYARDS

In 1921 about thirty thousand workers walked off the job at the Kawasaki and Mitsubishi shipyards in Kobe. It became the largest labor dispute in Japan between the two world wars. In those years Kagawa was one of the leaders of the young labor movement. In 1921 he was briefly imprisoned for his union work, and again in 1922.

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

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

THE FRIENDS OF JESUS

On October 5, 1921, Kagawa, Haru and thirteen ministers founded the Friends of Jesus. It was a brotherhood made up mostly of young people, who committed themselves to prayer and discipline, to caring for the poor and to bearing witness to Christ. Biographers com-

pare the group to the followers of Francis of Assisi. According to Loucky there were more than five hundred members within a year, a figure that comes from the movement's own circle.

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

A MILLION SOULS

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

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

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

AN APOLOGY TO CHINA

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

the National Anti-War League in 1928. In 1934 he publicly apologized to the Chinese people for what Japan was doing in China.

In America he became a hero in those years. His tour from December 1935 to June 1936 was organized by American church leaders. On arrival in San Francisco he was first held on Angel Island because of his eye disease. President Franklin Roosevelt took a personal interest, and Kagawa was allowed to continue, on condition that a doctor or nurse traveled with him. In May 1936 he spoke to a large crowd in St. Louis.

The American interest had a history. In 1931 he had already given lectures at the Yale divinity school. In 1932 a biography by the missionary William Axling appeared in America. During the 1936 tour he gave lectures in Rochester and spoke in Cleveland and Los Angeles. That same year his book *Brotherhood Economics* appeared, about an economy of brotherhood. In the years of the Depression, many Americans were looking for a way between capitalism and communism, and his cooperatives seemed to offer one. The historian David King shows that American church leaders also saw themselves in Kagawa. He became a hero seen through Western eyes, King writes. The Japanese knew a more complicated man.

In the 1920s he had signed an appeal, together with Gandhi and Einstein among others, to abolish military conscription. According to an article by The Nonviolence Project of the University of Wisconsin, he had a meeting with Gandhi in India in 1939 that went awkwardly, because the conversation turned to the Japanese war in China.

In August 1940 he was briefly imprisoned in Japan because of that apology from six years earlier. The New York Times reported it as news. In 1941 he traveled with a Japanese Christian peace delega-

tion to the United States, to try to avert the looming war. Three months after his return, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

THE VOICE ON RADIO TOKYO

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

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

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

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

BEFORE THE EMPEROR

Japan surrendered in August 1945. In February 1946 Kagawa was summoned to Emperor Hirohito. According to Plough, he quoted there the words of Jesus that whoever wants to be great must become the servant of all. He became an adviser in the reconstruction and was a member of the House of Peers from 1946 to 1947.

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

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

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

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

A FACE OF STONE

Fukada, who wrote his biography for a reference work on missions, put it this way: inside and outside Japan, Kagawa was known

mainly as a social reformer, but all his life he was first and foremost an evangelist. He preached, he wrote and he built. His cooperatives still exist. His words about the Buraku and his voice on Radio Tokyo have been preserved as well.

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

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Kobe on July 10, 1888, as the son of a concubine; loss of both parents around the age of four; Bible class with the missionaries Myers and Logan; baptism in Tokushima in 1904 (date February 14 according to Fukada); break with his family; studies at Meiji Gakuin, the seminary in Kobe and Princeton; move to Shinkawa on Christmas Eve 1909; marriage to Haru Shiba (1913); the novel *Shisen o koete* as a bestseller (1920); imprisonment in 1921 and 1922; founding of cooperatives and the Friends of Jesus (1921); relief work after

the 1923 earthquake; the campaign for a million converts and the Kingdom of God Movement (1925 to 1934); apology to China (1934) and arrest for it (1940); peace journey to the US (1941); broadcasts on Radio Tokyo during the war; House of Peers 1946 to 1947; Nobel Prize nominations; death in Tokyo on April 23, 1960; the statements about the Buraku in his early work and the later Kagawa problem.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: what he felt in the missionaries' home and how he read about Christ; his words to Emperor Hirohito in 1946 (found only in Plough); his last words.

Unconfirmed: a million copies of the novel sold (one source); the exact year and place in which the novel was written (sources differ); his personal role in the great shipyard strike of 1921, beyond his arrest that year; the figure of five hundred members of the Friends of Jesus within a year (one source, from the movement itself); the figure of 7,500 residents of Shinkawa (one source).

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

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Ju Ki-cheol: the pastor who would not bow

Early in 1939 Ju Ki-cheol stood once more in the pulpit of the San-jeonghyeon Church in Pyongyang. He had just come out of a cell. He had been there for months. The Japanese police were watching him closely.

That day he did not preach an ordinary sermon. He read out a list of five things he was praying for. One of them has been preserved in the Korean sources. He asked God to let him overcome the power of death. In free translation, the request was this: grant that I may overcome the power of death.

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

But it began in a village on the south coast.

A COUNTRY THAT WAS NO LONGER ITS OWN

Ju Ki-cheol was born on November 25, 1897, in Ungcheon, in Changwon county, in southeastern Korea. Ungcheon is now part of the city of Changwon. His childhood name was Ju Gi-bok. His father was called Ju Hyeon-seong, his mother Jo Jae-seon. She was his father's second wife, and his father already had children from his first marriage. The sources disagree on which son Ki-cheol was in the line of sons. The family was not poor. According to the Korean encyclopedia they were middle-class farmers who employed hired hands.

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

Christianity was young in the country and had been brought mainly by missionaries from the West. The church grew strongest in the north, around Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea.

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

CHRISTMAS 1910

At Christmas 1910 Ki-cheol went to the church in Ungcheon for the first time. He followed his eldest brother, Ju Gi-won, who already

attended. He was thirteen. That same year Japan had annexed the country.

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

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

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

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

MARCH 1919

On March 1, 1919, a nationwide movement for independence began in Korea. Everywhere people rose in resistance against Japanese rule. According to Michael Breen in the Korea Times, 9,458 people were imprisoned afterward, more than a fifth of them Christians.

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

THE REVIVAL PREACHER IN MASAN

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

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

A story goes around that his eyes were healed during Kim Ik-du's prayer. The English Wikipedia reports it cautiously, with the word "allegedly." The detailed Korean encyclopedia says nothing about it. I cannot confirm it.

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

FROM PYONGYANG TO BUSAN

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

On December 22, 1925, he graduated. On December 30 he was ordained as a minister. On January 10, 1926, he began at the Choryang

Church in Busan, then called Pusan. It was the first church ever founded in that city.

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

According to an article by the historian Kim Kang-sik in the *Busan Ilbo*, in 1929 Ju submitted a proposal to the presbytery against Shinto worship. That would be early. Other sources speak of protests in his province in 1931. I leave open exactly how it went. What is certain is that he had been raising the subject for years before his arrest.

MASAN AND AN EMPTY HOUSE

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

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

In 1935 he married again, to Oh Jeong-mo, a deaconess from the church in Masan. In the years that followed she would prove at least as determined as he was.

A BOW AT THE EMPEROR'S ALTAR

What did Japan actually want from the Korean Christians?

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

At first the obligation applied mainly to schools. Christian schools that refused could be closed. In 1936 Presbyterian missionaries in Pyongyang decided to close their schools rather than give in. In 1938 Japan extended the obligation to all Christians. The Methodists and the Roman Catholic Church accepted the government's explanation. They agreed that it was a civil ceremony. Among the Presbyterians the resistance was strongest, but there too the regional assemblies gave in one by one.

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

READY TO DIE

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

That same year he preached the sermon for which he became best known. In Korean it is called *Ilssa gakoh*, which means something like: being ready to die. According to the Korea Times, he said openly in it that the national church should not have given in to

Japanese pressure. Britannica points out that his motive was faith, not patriotism.

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

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

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

FIVE PRAYERS

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

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

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

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

A WIFE WHO STAYED

While her husband was in prison, Oh Jeong-mo did not keep quiet. The Korean encyclopedia devotes a separate article to her. She was arrested more than ten times. When the church was closed, she gathered the members together. She encouraged her husband to hold out to the end.

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

Ju himself was held in Pyongyang prison without ever being convicted. Anyone who reads the sources knows that he suffered severely there. I will not go into detail. It is enough to know that he stayed there four years, and that his body could not endure it.

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

NINE O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

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

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

Oh Jeong-mo died of breast cancer on January 28, 1947.

AN EMPTY GRAVE

After liberation Korea was divided in two. Pyongyang ended up in the communist north, where South Koreans cannot go.

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

I find it striking that he is honored by his government as a patriot and by his church as a martyr. In his life the two belong together,

but they are not the same. Britannica points out that his resistance came from faith. He would not honor another god.

In Seoul there is a memorial with no grave beneath it. His grave lies in a city on the other side of a closed border. What remains of him to read is that sermon from 1939, by a man who had just come out of a cell, climbed into the pulpit and asked God that he might overcome the power of death.

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his last words (one source); that he came to know the gospel through the Australian mission (only a church commemorative calendar); that he was a support to his former student Son Yang-won.

Unconfirmed: the healing of his eyes under Kim Ik-du; a proposal against Shinto worship as early as 1929; the exact month of the last arrest (July or September 1940); the year he came to Pyongyang (1936 or 1937); when the Sanjeonghyeon Church was closed; the

year of the state decoration (1963 or 1990); the circumstances of the 1939 sermon (release or short leave).

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

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Watchman Nee: the night watchman of Shanghai

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

On the paper were a few sentences in his handwriting. Christ is the Son of God, he wrote, who died for the sins of mankind and rose again after three days. He called this the greatest fact in the world. The last sentence read: "I shall die believing in Christ."

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

The man who wrote it was, in the West, one of the best known Chinese Christians of the twentieth century. His books, such as *The*

Normal Christian Life, are still read today. In China he founded hundreds of churches that wanted nothing to do with Western denominations. He was also a businessman, a man against whom serious accusations were made, and a prisoner. All of these things belong to his story.

It began with a promise his mother made.

A GONG IN THE NIGHT

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

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

His mother had given birth to two daughters before he came. According to his own testimony, which he told in 1936, she had prayed that if she had a son, she would give him to God. We know that story only from him.

He was given the name Shuzu, which means roughly: proclaim the merits of your ancestors. Later he chose another name for himself: Tuosheng, after the sound of the night watchman who strikes a bamboo gong at night in a Chinese city to mark the hours. From that name comes his English name: Watchman. According to Wikipedia he took the name in 1925.

A ROOM IN FUZHOU, APRIL 1920

Watchman attended schools of the Church Missionary Society, an Anglican mission organization from England. From 1916 he went to the secondary school of Trinity College in Fuzhou. In his final exams he came second in his class.

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

His conversion took place at the end of April 1920. The sources give April 28 or 29. He later told how it happened. He sat alone in his room and wrestled. For him, believing and being called belonged together. If he said yes to Jesus, he was also saying yes to a life in His service, and no to the career he saw ahead of him. He confessed his sins, he said, and found peace.

Do you know that feeling, when saying yes to God costs you something straight away? For this seventeen-year-old it was no side issue. He knew he was giving something up.

THE MISSIONARY WHO BAPTIZED HIM AGAIN

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

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

baptism they had received as babies enough, and wanted to be baptized as believers.

The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity calls Barber the most important personal influence on his thinking. His emphasis on the inner life with Christ fits with Western writers such as Andrew Murray, according to the Christian Research Journal. A co-worker of Barber gave him a simple task: pray every day by name for your classmates. According to his own account, within a few months all but one of his roughly seventy classmates came to faith. Only he ever gave that number.

BREAKING BREAD WITHOUT A DENOMINATION

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

That was a bold choice. At the time most Chinese Christians belonged to churches founded by missionaries: Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists. Watchman saw that division as a problem. In his view there should be only one church in each place, just as the New Testament speaks of the church in Ephesus.

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

Then he fell ill. Doctors diagnosed tuberculosis, a disease that killed many young people in those days. The sources disagree about the year: 1924 according to his own testimony, 1926 according to the Biographical Dictionary. During that period he wrote *The Spiritual Man*, a work in three volumes published in 1928. He later said that after fasting and prayer he received a word from the Bible about faith, got up and walked down the stairs. He believed God had

healed him. When he visited Dora Yu, she was shocked, because she had heard he was dying. This too we know from his own story.

THE LITTLE FLOCK IN SHANGHAI

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

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

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

In 1934 he married Zhang Pinhui, known in English as Charity Chang. Her aunt opposed the marriage. According to the Biographical Dictionary, she spread accusations about his conduct, after which he withdrew from leadership for a time. The following year he took it up again. Charity and Watchman had no children.

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

“IN A FLASH I SAW IT”

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

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

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

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

A PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY

In 1939 Watchman became involved in the pharmaceutical company of his brother, a chemist. According to Asia Harvest it was called China Biological and Chemical Laboratories, and Watchman became chairman of the board. The aim, according to that source, was to earn money for the work of the churches, which were short of funds.

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

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

SIX SILENT YEARS

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

Why this happened is disputed to this day. I will set the sources side by side.

According to Wikipedia and Asia Harvest, the elders had difficulty with his involvement in the company. The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity gives two reasons: irregularities in his business and sexual immorality. A Hong Kong church historian who devoted a long study to it in 2002 concluded that it was not about the company but about his personal morals. Writers from within the local churches themselves speak of great unrest and of rumors which, in their view, were untrue.

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

In April 1948 revival came to the church in Shanghai. Witness Lee and a co-worker, Peace Wang, had rebuilt the church in the preceding years. With Witness Lee's help, Watchman returned to the ministry. On that return the sources agree.

THE MAN WHO DID NOT WANT A WESTERN CHURCH

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

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

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

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

APRIL 10, 1952

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

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

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

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

WHAT WAS TRUE?

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

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

I have let those three voices stand side by side. A court in the China of 1956 was not a place where a defendant received a fair trial. That does not automatically make the charges untrue. It does make them

unreliable as evidence. What happened in his personal life, I cannot establish from here.

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

TWENTY YEARS

Watchman was first held in Tilanqiao Prison in Shanghai. There are stories from a fellow prisoner about what he said and did there. Joseph Lee warns that they should be read with great caution, because their tone is strongly hagiographic.

According to Christian History, he was someone who said, "I want nothing for myself, I want everything for the Lord." In prison that was put to the test. His sentence was due to end in 1967. He was not released. An English biography relates that he was offered release if he would stop preaching, and that he refused. I have not been able to check that story in an independent source.

After that he was transferred to a labor camp in Anhui. According to Joseph Lee this was in 1969, according to Asia Harvest not until 1972. The camp was called Baimaoling.

Charity was arrested in 1966, during the Cultural Revolution, and according to Asia Harvest severely mistreated. In 1971 she fell, broke several ribs and died a few days later. Watchman was not allowed to attend her funeral. They had been married for thirty-seven years, nineteen of which he had spent behind bars.

A TRACTOR ON THE WAY TO THE HOSPITAL

In May 1972 his heart was in serious trouble. According to the Biographical Dictionary and Asia Harvest, he was eventually taken by tractor to a prison hospital about nineteen kilometers (twelve miles) away. He died on May 30, 1972, in his sixty-ninth year. There was

no official announcement and no funeral. On June 1 his body was cremated, before his family arrived.

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

THE WATCHMAN ON THE WALL

What Watchman Nee left behind has gone in two directions.

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

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

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

In the Chinese cities of his youth, a watchman walked the streets at night with a bamboo gong. He struck the hours. Watchman Nee took that sound as his name. The last thing he sounded lay under a pillow in a camp in Anhui.

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his mother's promise before his birth; the exact date and the inner struggle of his conversion; the seventy classmates; his healing from tuberculosis; the moment he "saw" Romans 6; the note under his pillow (through his family, passed on by several sources); the stories of a fellow prisoner from Tilanqiao; the offer of release if he would stop preaching.

Unconfirmed: these remain unconfirmed or disputed: the reason for his removal in 1942 (business, moral, or rumors); the truth of the charges of 1952 and 1956, including the accusations of sexual misconduct; the city of his arrest; the year of his transfer to the labor camp (1969 or 1972); the year of his illness (1924 or 1926) and of his move to Shanghai.

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

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

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Bakht Singh: the Sikh who tore up the Bible

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

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

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

This man would grow into one of the best-known evangelists and Bible teachers in India. He founded churches that depended on no one in the West and were led by Indians. When he died, Christianity Today wrote that he had helped start more than six thousand churches and groups in India. When he was buried in Hyderabad in 2000, about a quarter of a million people followed the bier, according to his own movement.

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

A TURBAN AND A MISSION SCHOOL

Bakht Singh Chabra was born on June 6, 1903, in the Punjab, in the northwest of what was then British India. According to most sources he came from the village of Joiya in the Sargodha district. Since 1947 that area has been part of Pakistan. His parents, Jawahar Mal Chabra and Lakshmi Bai, were well-to-do Sikhs.

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

Bakht went to a Christian mission school. He heard little about Jesus there, he said later. According to Christian History Institute, the teachers did not dare to preach Christ strongly, because there was criticism of British rule. The Christians he saw around him were British administrators or people from the lowest castes. Neither attracted him. Christianity seemed to him more a cultural identity than a living faith, as the American organization Renovaré sums up his view as a young man.

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

ENGLAND, 1926

He graduated from the University of the Punjab in Lahore. In 1926 he left for England to continue his studies in London, at King's College. The sources disagree about the subject: mechanical engineering or agricultural engineering. Before he left, he promised his mother that he would remain a Sikh.

By then he was already married to a woman his parents had chosen for him. They had a son. How old he was when he married is not certain. One source gives the year 1915, when he was twelve, but I have not seen that confirmed anywhere else.

In England he let go of his faith. He called himself an atheist. Looking back, he said he lived like a playboy, spent his money on drink and wrote to his father claiming higher costs than he actually had. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia relates, based on his own testimony, that he used up seven months' allowance in one month.

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

A KNEE ON THE FLOOR

Then comes the moment he himself saw as the beginning. The sources differ about the place. Christian History Institute says it happened on board a ship bound for Canada. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia places it in 1928, during a summer vacation in Canada. The heart of the story is the same in both versions, and that heart comes from his own testimony.

He went to a church service out of curiosity. During the sermon he fell asleep. He woke up when everyone around him knelt for prayer. He was hemmed in and could not get out. Out of politeness he knelt

with them. And as he knelt there, words of praise for the Lord Jesus rose up in his mind. He felt, he said, a strong nearness of God.

A young man who had torn up a Bible was on his knees because he did not want to disturb the people next to him. I find that a beautiful beginning. God used something small, almost accidental.

He was not yet a Christian. But something had happened.

WINNIPEG, DECEMBER 1929

In 1929 he moved to Canada to study agricultural engineering at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. There friends gave him a New Testament. Christianity Today speaks of two friends. According to Wikipedia and the American Our Daily Bread, they were John and Edith Hayward, a Christian couple who let him live with them and who read from the Bible before dinner. The Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia mentions a bank manager, Owel Hansen, whom he met at the YMCA. Perhaps all three played a part. The sources do not settle it.

According to his own testimony he received the New Testament on December 14, 1929. He read for three days. On December 16, at half past eleven in the morning, he surrendered to Christ. His craving for tobacco, drink, the cinema and the dance hall disappeared almost at once, he said. The website of his movement also says that in 1929 in Canada he heard God's voice, confessed his sins and accepted Jesus.

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

A STAMMERER WITH A CALLING

There was a policeman in Winnipeg, Flynn, a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He asked Bakht why he did not go

back to India to preach. Bakht wanted nothing to do with it. He had been trained as an engineer. And he stammered. According to his own account he resisted for about two years. He offered God his money, but heard that God wanted him.

On February 4, 1932, he was baptized in Vancouver, on the west coast of Canada. That date appears in several sources. He was almost thirty.

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

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

THE STREET WAS HIS HOME

This brings us back to Bombay, April 1933, and the turban at his feet. His family disowned him. According to Christian History Institute, his wife left him and took their son with her. After that, the sources say almost nothing more about his wife and son.

He slept in a public night shelter. Then he traveled to Karachi, now in Pakistan, where one of his sisters lived. According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, his first listeners were street sweepers. They met at four in the morning for prayer and Bible study, before their work began. In India's caste system, street sweepers belonged to the lowest groups. The son of a rich Sikh read the Bible with them.

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

According to the English Wikipedia, he began as an evangelist within the Anglican Church and later continued independently. Other sources say little about this.

MARTINPUR, JUNE 1937

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

In June 1937 he came to Martinpur, a village in the Punjab with a Presbyterian congregation. According to the Dictionary, the village was known for its loose morals. Presbyterians are Protestants whose churches are governed by elected elders. According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, he preached there for thirteen days without anything seeming to happen. On the fourteenth evening a revival broke out that lasted until three in the morning. After that, all-night prayer meetings and shared meals became normal there.

That there was a revival in Martinpur in which Bakht Singh played a major part is stated in several sources. The historian Jonathan Bonk later called it one of the most remarkable movements in the church

history of the Indian subcontinent. The exact days and hours come from Bakht's own circle.

That same year he spoke at the large Christian convention in Sialkot. The British revival historian J. Edwin Orr later called him an Indian counterpart of the great Western evangelists. According to the Dictionary, seventy young men from Martinpur walked with him to Sialkot, a journey of some hundred and fifty miles, telling people about Jesus along the way.

A BIBLE HELD HIGH

From 1938 he traveled south: to Madras, today's Chennai, and to Kerala. Large crowds came. Healings were reported. According to the Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, he deliberately kept those healings in the background. He is even said to have prayed that they would stop, so that people would come for Christ and not for a miracle. That story comes from the movement itself.

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

He wanted every believer to have a Bible of their own. In his meetings he held his own Bible high. During his campaigns the Bible shops are said to have sold out.

In 1940, according to the Dictionary, some twelve thousand people came to hear him in Madras. Shortly afterwards a number of ministers in that city barred him from their churches, because he criticized the established church. Here a tension begins that would remain throughout his life.

A NIGHT ON THE HILL

Many people who came to faith through his preaching did not feel at home in the existing churches. They asked him to start a church. Bakht had never wanted to found a church of his own. According to the Dictionary, he fasted for twenty-one days before he agreed. Then he and his co-workers spent a night in prayer on a hill near the city, according to Wikipedia at Pallavaram, on the edge of present-day Chennai.

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

No Western mission organization was involved. Indians led the church, and the believers regularly shared a common meal, which they called a love feast. In December 1941 the young church held its first Holy Convocation, a gathering of nineteen days. Bakht based it on Leviticus 23, where Israel gathers every year for God’s feasts. Later, thousands of people slept in tents at such convocations.

It was 1941. India was still a British colony. Six years later the country became independent and was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Bakht’s work shows that the gospel in India had already passed into Indian hands before then.

HEBRON

From 1946 he also traveled abroad. According to his movement’s website, in 1946 he spoke in Toronto at a large missions conference for students. In the years that followed came England, the United States and Australia, among other places.

On September 25, 1950, he moved with his co-workers to Hyderabad, in the south of India. In the mid-1950s they acquired a new site there, which he called Hebron. Hebron became the center of the movement, with a Bible school, a church and the grounds for the large convocations. According to Wikipedia, these drew up to twenty-five thousand people in Hyderabad, but I have not found that figure in an independent source.

The churches grew. In 2000 Christianity Today wrote that he had founded more than six thousand churches and groups in India, and that his influence reached some ten thousand churches in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States. In the same report, Robert Finley was quoted, the president of Christian Aid Mission, an American organization that supports Indian evangelists. I have not found an independent count of those churches anywhere.

THE SHADOW OF A STRONG MAN

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

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

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

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

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

How would you deal with a leader who was so clearly used by God, and yet wanted to keep deciding everything himself?

HYDERABAD, SEPTEMBER 2000

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

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

He died in Hyderabad at the age of ninety-seven. His movement and most reference works give Sunday, September 17, 2000. Christianity Today wrote September 16. His co-workers even recorded the time: five past six in the morning.

On Friday, September 22, he was buried. The procession went from Hebron to the Christian cemetery in Narayanaguda, a distance of about three kilometers (two miles) that, according to his co-workers, took some three hours. They estimated that a quarter of a million people walked along. Christianity Today reported that about six hundred thousand people attended the memorial services in Hyderabad. That figure also comes from the circle around Hebron. According to the Dictionary, many of the people in the procession held their Bibles high.

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

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

Only from own testimony or later tradition: tearing up the Bible; his dissolute life in England; kneeling during the church service; the exact date and hour of his conversion; the role of the policeman Flynn; the three conditions of his calling; the turban at his feet and his answer to his parents; the street sweepers in Karachi; the details of Martinpur (thirteen days, the fourteenth evening) and the walk to Sialkot; his prayer that the healings would stop; his father's conversion; the numbers at his funeral and the number of churches (from his movement and from Christian Aid Mission).

Unconfirmed: whether the decisive experience took place on board a ship or in Canada; the names of the friends in Winnipeg (the Haywards or Owel Hansen); his marriage at the age of twelve in 1915;

the warning about the Quetta earthquake; his start as an Anglican evangelist; the exact date of death (September 16 or 17); the attendance figures for the convocations in Hyderabad.

Interpretation: whether his churches were a return to the first Christians or a breakaway from the existing church is a question on which Christians in India judge differently. Nuthalapati sees him as a translator of the gospel into Indian devotion, without the core being changed.

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Festo Kivengere: the bishop who loved Idi Amin

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

That is how he told it later in his book. The men said that they had received Jesus in prison. They asked him to let their families know that they were forgiven. About three thousand people watched as the shots were fired.

The bishop would not forget it. Four years later he himself had to flee from the same president, and that same year his book appeared with a title he was asked about again and again: *I Love Idi Amin*. He became one of the best-known preachers in Africa and was nicknamed the Billy Graham of Africa. He himself spoke above all about the cross.

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

A COWHERD IN KIGEZI

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

His family was a ruling family among semi-nomadic cattle herders, and it was not Christian. As a child Festo herded cows. In those years Uganda was a British protectorate. The British governed the country through local kings and chiefs, and missionaries of the Anglican Church Missionary Society had founded schools and churches there since 1877. The Anglican church is the church that grew out of the Church of England, with bishops and a set liturgy.

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

According to the Ugandan newspaper Daily Monitor, he then went to Kinyasano, Kigezi High School and Mbarara High School, and between 1938 and 1940 to Bishop Tucker Theological College in Mukono, near Kampala. In 1938 his mother died. In secondary school he had left the faith behind. He drank and smoked heavily, according to the short biography by Frank Retief.

PEOPLE WHO CONFESSED THEIR SINS OUT LOUD

While Festo was letting go of the faith, something unusual was happening in the churches around him. From the 1920s and 1930s a movement swept through East Africa that later came to be called the East African Revival. A revival is a period in which many peo-

ple come to a living faith at the same time and churches come back to life.

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

In 1935 the revival reached Kigezi, during a week of Bible study on Rugarama hill near Kabale. According to Retief, the churches in North Kigezi became so full that people gathered under trees and in houses.

Not everyone was pleased. Festo's uncle Karegyesa paid men to beat Christians. He stopped when the men said they could no longer sleep at night. Some of them later came to faith themselves. In those years Festo shared his uncle's dislike.

A NINE-YEAR-OLD BROTHER IN THE CHAPEL

After his training Festo became a teacher at a mission school. Retief tells of an incident from that time. Once Festo had to lead a chapel service and had nothing to say. His nine-year-old brother stood up and spoke, and according to this story about twenty boys gave their lives to the Lord.

He knew, he said later, that he had nothing to give, and the boys knew it too. Living with him at the school were his stepsister Eva, his stepbrother Jonathan and his niece Kyabyarwa. The girls belonged to the revival and prayed for him.

A BICYCLE ON THE ROAD

What followed is the best-known story from his youth, and it comes from his own mouth, through his biographers. In early October 1941 Festo was thinking about suicide. One Sunday his fourteen-year-old niece said in church that God had promised her and Eva that their prayer for Festo would be answered that weekend. Festo walked off angry and spent the rest of the day drinking with his uncle.

That afternoon a friend came towards him on a bicycle. His name was also Festo, Festo Rwamunahe. He said that three hours earlier Jesus had become a reality to him. Then he asked Kivengere's forgiveness for three specific things he had done to him.

At home Festo went down on his knees. He saw, he said later, Jesus on the cross. Not a helpless criminal. In his own words: "I saw my God slaughtered for my sin." He knew he was forgiven.

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

Have you ever had to ask someone's forgiveness for something small and specific? Then you know how hard that is. For Festo, his faith began with a conversation like that on a road. It would also become the heart of his preaching.

TWELVE YEARS IN DODOMA

In 1946 Festo went with the Church Missionary Society to Tanganyika, present-day Tanzania. According to the Daily Monitor, he was a teacher for twelve years in Dodoma, in the middle of that

country. Around the same time he married Merab. They were married for forty-two years and had four daughters: Peace, Joy, Hope and Charity.

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

In 1959 Festo became assistant inspector of the Church of Uganda's schools in Kigezi, and from 1961 inspector. He earned a teaching diploma from the University of London.

"DON'T BOTHER TO TRANSLATE LITERALLY"

At some point in these years Festo translated the sermons of the American evangelist Billy Graham into Swahili. According to Frederick Quinn, in his book *African Saints*, Graham told him he did not need to translate word for word: "Don't bother to translate literally." The two became lifelong friends.

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

His road to ordination was not a straight one. According to the historian Louise Pirouet, he was at first turned down for ordination in Uganda. He was ordained deacon in the United States and earned a theology degree at Pittsburgh Seminary. In Uganda he became a priest; Pirouet gives 1967, the *Daily Monitor* 1965. In the 1970s Christianity Today wrote that he had been traveling the world as an evangelist since 1962.

In 1969 the South African evangelist Michael Cassidy invited him to build a team in East Africa for his organization African Enterprise. Around 1971 this became African Evangelistic Enterprise,

with Festo as its leader in East Africa. The aim was to spread the revival across the whole continent.

A BISHOP IN THE DAYS OF AMIN

In 1971 General Idi Amin seized power in Uganda in a military coup. He was a Muslim and allowed the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches to operate only under his supervision. No one knows exactly how many people were killed under his rule. African Enterprise mentions an estimate of 400,000.

In November 1972 Festo was consecrated Bishop of Kigezi, with his seat in Kabale. He remained an evangelist as well and kept up his work for African Enterprise.

Then came February 1973, and the three men before the firing squad. Quinn writes that Festo confronted Amin about this execution.

Meanwhile he kept speaking about the revival. On July 21, 1974, he stood up at the great International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. The transcript has been preserved. He told how people divided by tribe, race and doctrine returned to the cross: "The theme of the East African revival was the cross, and we needed it!" Then he asked the East Africans in the hall to come forward and sing.

WAITING OUTSIDE THE BUILDING

In 1977 the Church of Uganda celebrated the centenary of the gospel's arrival in the country. It was also the year in which the tension between church and government snapped. According to Christian History, in January 1977 Festo preached a sermon on the value of life in which he denounced the violence.

In February the Anglican bishops wrote a letter of protest to Amin about killings and arbitrary rule. Archbishop Janani Luwum stood

behind it, and Festo signed it too. According to the Daily Monitor he even drafted it, but the paper presents that as something people say. Luwum himself is the subject of another chapter of this book.

On February 16, 1977, Luwum and the other bishops were summoned to a gathering in Kampala. Luwum was arrested, together with two government ministers. According to Tim Stafford in *Christian History*, Festo was one of the last to see him alive. He waited outside the building where Luwum was being interrogated, until guards sent him away at gunpoint. The next day the government announced that Luwum and the ministers had died in a car accident. Later it emerged that he had been shot dead.

OVER THE HILLS BY NIGHT

Festo was told that he would be next. Christians around him urged him to leave. According to a Canadian account from 2025, he refused at first because he did not want to abandon his flock, until they kept insisting.

He and Merab drove as far as they could. Then they walked by night along forest paths through the mountains to Rwanda, where they were taken in. The sources do not fully agree on the route: a few name Kenya or Tanzania as the country they fled to. Rwanda was probably the first step, and Nairobi in Kenya the place where they ended up. He could no longer take part in the memorial service for Luwum, which reportedly drew some 45,000 people.

In Nairobi he found the African Enterprise office full of Ugandan refugees. With colleagues he started RETURN, a relief program for Ugandan refugees. According to African Enterprise itself, it paid for more than three hundred scholarships at universities abroad. In that period he had no contact with people in Uganda. A letter or a phone call could put them in danger.

GOOD FRIDAY IN LONDON

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

What happened inside him we know from his own book. He noticed that he had become hard and bitter. The Holy Spirit showed him, he wrote, that he had to ask for grace to love Amin more. According to Christian Today, he prayed there: “Lord, I am here and now forgiving Idi Amin.” In a later book he wrote that he got up that day with a liberated heart.

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

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

The book was no plea to look away. It described the persecution, the imprisoned church leaders who sang, and the Catholic and Protestant clergy who found each other. He wrote: “A living church cannot be destroyed by fire or by guns.” At a conference in Germany he put it even more briefly: “A bullet can kill, but a bullet cannot heal.”

Anyone who finds that too naive should know that in those same years he worked with Ugandan exiles who wanted Amin gone. The Ugandan jurist George Kanyeihamba, then a lecturer in England, said that in 1977 Festo sent word, through his daughter Hope among others, asking him to help get rid of Amin. For Festo, forgiving went together with resisting injustice. What he refused to do was hate.

BACK TO RUGARAMA

In 1979 Amin was driven out. Festo returned to Kigezi and his diocese. He was now internationally known and traveled to America, Australia and Britain. He became a spokesman for the church of Uganda.

But he did not keep quiet towards the new rulers either. Under Milton Obote's second government, human rights were violated again. Festo said so out loud. When thousands of Rwandan refugees in Uganda were driven from their homes in 1982, he organized help. Pirouet calls that unpopular and dangerous. He also warned that Obote was favoring the Anglican church and so setting Catholics and Protestants against each other.

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

You may see that differently from him. I mention it because it fits who he was: here too he did not wait for London's approval.

A COFFIN IN A CHARTERED PLANE

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

Cassidy and other leaders of African Enterprise flew the coffin to Uganda in a chartered plane. There was a service in Namirembe Cathedral in Kampala. The government wanted to bury him in the national heroes' cemetery in Kampala. The family chose Kabale, in Kigezi.

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

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Kigezi, southwest Uganda, into a non-Christian ruling family; conversion within the East African Revival; work as a teacher and then in Tanzania; marriage to Merab and four daughters; degree from Pittsburgh Seminary; Michael Cassidy's invitation (1969) and leadership of African Enterprise in East Africa; Bishop of Kigezi from 1972; the execution

of three men from his diocese in February 1973; his address in Lausanne on July 21, 1974; the bishops' letter of protest and the death of Janani Luwum in February 1977; his flight to Rwanda in 1977; the Good Friday service at All Souls, London, and the book *I Love Idi Amin* (1977); return after 1979; criticism of the Obote regime; help for Rwandan refugees in 1982; the ordination of three women in 1983; death from leukemia in 1988.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his disappointment after baptism; his little brother speaking in the chapel; the conversion after the conversation with Festo Rwamunahe and the vision of Jesus on the cross; Billy Graham's words about translating; the conversations with the three condemned men; his inner struggle and the prayer on Good Friday; the answers at press conferences; the figure of more than three hundred scholarships (from African Enterprise itself).

Unconfirmed: the year of birth (1918, 1919 or 1921); the year of his conversion (1939 or 1941); the year of his ordination as priest (1965 or 1967); the exact route after Rwanda (Kenya or Tanzania are also mentioned); that he drafted the letter of protest; the exact date of death, May 18, 1988 (one source).

Interpretation: some sources, Christian ones included, contain errors: once he is called an archbishop, and the letter of protest is placed in 1980. I have not relied on those in this chapter.

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Óscar Romero: the bishop who spoke the names on Sunday

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

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

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

No one who knew him in his younger years would have predicted that.

AN APPRENTICE IN THE WORKSHOP

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

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

As a boy, Óscar learned the trade of a carpenter. According to the Romero Trust he was apprenticed to a carpenter in the village. Other sources say his father taught him the trade. He was good at it. But in 1931, when he was thirteen, he left the workshop behind. He went to the minor seminary in the city of San Miguel, a school for boys who wanted to become priests, run by the Claretians, a Catholic order.

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

On April 4, 1942, Romero was ordained a priest in Rome. His family was not there. There was war in Europe, and crossing the ocean was impossible for them. He began a doctorate, but in 1943 he was called back to El Salvador. On the way home he was detained in Cuba, for three months according to the Romero Trust. In December he arrived home.

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

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

TO THINK AND FEEL WITH THE CHURCH

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

That motto fits the man he was then. He wanted to be faithful to Rome and to the teaching of the church. He was cautious, and he was afraid of unrest. In 1973 he came into open conflict with the Jesuits. He accused their secondary school of spreading Marxism through what they called "liberating education."

According to the Romero Trust, in 1971 he sought help for scrupulosity, an anxious tendency to keep doubting whether you have done well enough. I mention it because it makes him human. The man who later seemed to step aside for no one struggled with fear and doubt.

FIVE FARMERS AT TRES CALLES

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

In 1975 the National Guard, a military police force, killed five farmers at Tres Calles. Romero wrote a letter to the president in protest. It shows that something was already changing, before the events that would make his name known.

To follow those events, you need to know something about the country in the 1970s. Political violence was increasing. Armed left-wing groups arose, and there were death squads: groups that kidnapped and killed people without any trial. According to the later United Nations Truth Commission, those squads were often led by military men and supported by businessmen, large landowners and some politicians.

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

On February 3, 1977, the pope appointed Romero Archbishop of San Salvador. On February 22 he was installed. The government welcomed the appointment. Many priests were disappointed. They knew him as the conservative bishop who had attacked the Jesuits.

THE ROAD TO EL PAISNAL

On March 12, 1977, less than three weeks later, Rutilio Grande drove from Aguilares to the village of El Paisnal. With him in the car were Manuel Solórzano, an elderly catechist, and Nelson Rutilio Lemus, a teenager. According to the Romero Trust, Grande was on his way

to say Mass. Vatican News writes that he was on his way to a novena, a series of prayer services. A death squad stopped them and killed all three.

Grande worked in the area around Aguilares. There, among the poor, he had set up groups that learned to take care of themselves.

Romero led the funeral Mass for the three men. Then he made an unusual decision: on Sunday, March 20, all the churches of the archdiocese would be closed, and there would be one Mass, in front of the cathedral. Shortly afterward he traveled to Rome and told Pope Paul VI what was happening in his country. On July 1, 1977, he stayed away from the inauguration of the new president. In this way he protested against the lack of any investigation into Grande's murder.

The sources see Grande's death as the turning point in his life. America Magazine writes that through this murder Romero understood where his own road would lead. How sudden that change was is a question on which biographers differ. The letter about Tres Calles shows that he had already begun to see what was happening in the country.

Can you remember a moment when you could no longer look away from something you had known for a long time?

"EVERY CATHOLIC MUST BE A MARTYR"

In May 1977 another priest was killed: Alfonso Navarro, on May 11, together with a boy from his parish, Luis Torres. The army then occupied Aguilares, Grande's village.

In 2018 Pope Francis recalled a line from one of Romero's sermons of 1977: "every Catholic must be a martyr." Romero meant the word

in its old sense: a martyr is a witness. Whoever is a witness of Christ must be willing to lose something for it.

In his sermons the archbishop began to tell what had happened that week. Who had disappeared. Who had been found dead. Who had been tortured. He did it again every week.

A VOICE ON THE RADIO

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

For many people it was the only place where they heard what was really happening. The newspapers and the other stations kept silent or told it differently. CathNews writes that Romero refused to be censored.

The station was jammed. Its office was bombed. His sermons went on the air every week, except when YSAX had been silenced by a bomb.

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

In November 1978, 118 British members of Parliament and members of the House of Lords nominated him for the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. In February 1978 he had already received an honorary doctorate from Georgetown University in the United States, and in February 1980 the University of Louvain in Belgium followed. In May 1979 he

gave Pope John Paul II seven dossiers on the injustice in his country, Westminster Abbey records.

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

A LETTER TO THE WHITE HOUSE

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

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

In March 1980 a case of dynamite was found behind the altar of the basilica where he was to preach. It had not exploded. A papal envoy had warned him that he was in danger. Romero brushed aside the worries of others.

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 1980

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

At the end he turned to the soldiers, the National Guard and the police. He said they were brothers of the same people they were killing. He said that no soldier was obliged to obey an order that goes against the law of God. Then came the sentence that would become famous. He begged them, asked them and ordered them in the name of God: "Stop the repression" (freely translated from the Spanish).

According to America Magazine, the applause in the church was so loud that the radio technicians at first thought something had gone wrong with the sound.

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

THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

Romero lived by the Hospital of Divine Providence, Divina Providencia, a hospital for people with cancer in San Salvador. On Monday, March 24, 1980, at about six in the evening, he celebrated Mass in the chapel of that hospital. It was a Mass in memory of Sara Meardi de Pinto, who had died a year earlier. Her son Jorge Pinto published the weekly El Independiente, one of the few papers that wrote about human rights.

One of the readings came from the Gospel of John, the words of Jesus about the grain of wheat: *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the*

ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. (John 12:24). Romero preached on it. A sound recording of that sermon exists. The Jesuit James Brockman, his biographer, later listened to the recording again and translated it. The last words were an invitation to pray together: "Let us, then, join together intimately in faith and hope."

Immediately after the sermon a shot was fired. It came from a car standing in front of the chapel. Romero was hit and died in the chapel. According to the Romero Trust it was 6:26 p.m.

He had not chosen the words about the grain of wheat himself. It was the reading for that evening.

PALM SUNDAY 1980

Six days later, on Palm Sunday, March 30, 1980, the funeral Mass was held on the square in front of the cathedral. According to Wikipedia more than two hundred and fifty thousand people came. During the service bombs went off and shots were fired. In the panic and from the shooting, dozens of people lost their lives. The Romero Trust speaks of about forty dead, while official sources at the time gave thirty-one. Who did the shooting has never been established.

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

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

WHAT THE TRUTH COMMISSION FOUND

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

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

Five days after the report, parliament passed an amnesty law. In 2016 the Supreme Court of El Salvador declared that law unconstitutional. In 2004 a court in the United States held that former captain liable for the murder in a civil case. He went into hiding. No one has ever been criminally convicted for the murder of Romero.

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

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

ST. PETER'S SQUARE, OCTOBER 14, 2018

In 1990 his successor, Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas, opened the process to beatify Romero. It went slowly. Around 2000 it came to a halt, and in Rome it was examined whether his teaching was sound.

Some in the church felt he had been killed for political reasons, and not for his faith.

In 2013 Pope Francis set the process free again. On February 3, 2015, he recognized Romero as a martyr, killed in odium fidei, out of hatred for the faith. On May 23, 2015, he was beatified in San Salvador, on the Salvador del Mundo square. On March 6, 2018, the pope recognized a healing as a miracle. It concerned the healing of Cecilia Maribel Flores, a pregnant woman. In the Catholic Church a miracle is a condition for canonization. Whether it was a miracle is a question of faith. The church investigated it and recognized it.

On October 14, 2018, Óscar Romero was canonized in St. Peter's Square in Rome. A day later the pope spoke with pilgrims from El Salvador. He called Romero a shepherd who gave his life for his sheep.

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth on August 15, 1917, in Ciudad Barrios; ordination to the priesthood in Rome on April

4, 1942; long period as a priest in San Miguel; auxiliary bishop in 1970 and bishop of Santiago de María in 1974; appointment as archbishop in February 1977; the murder of Rutilio Grande, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus on March 12, 1977; the single Mass in front of the cathedral; the Sunday sermons on YSAX and the attacks on the station; the letter to President Carter in February 1980; the last Sunday sermon on March 23, 1980; the murder during Mass on March 24, 1980; the deaths at the funeral; the conclusion of the UN Truth Commission (1993); the civil judgment against Saravia (2004); beatification (2015) and canonization (October 14, 2018).

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his notes from the last retreat about a violent death (his own notes, quoted by America Magazine); his treatment for scrupulosity in 1971 (Romero Trust, based on biographers); the details of his training as a carpenter, where the sources differ.

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

Interpretation: whether Romero was killed mainly for his faith or mainly for political reasons was a debate in the church for years; in 2015 the pope chose the first. The course and causes of the civil war are still a sensitive subject in El Salvador. How abrupt his change after Grande's death was is seen differently by different biographers.

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Luis Palau: the bank clerk who preached to Latin America

At a summer camp in Argentina, a twelve-year-old boy wrote down one short sentence. According to a life sketch published at his death, that night he wrote: “Feb. 12, 1947. I received Jesus Christ.” In Argentina, February is the height of summer. A camp counselor, whose name the sources have not kept, had talked with him. There was no more drama than that. He later wrote that you do not need a spectacular conversion story. It just has to be your own.

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

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

A BIBLE FROM A BRITISH OIL EXECUTIVE

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

In those years Argentina was a Roman Catholic country. The Palau family also came from that world, according to a motion in the Argentine parliament from 2021. Protestants were a small minority. Several sources tell the same story of how the family became evangelical. A British oil executive, Edward Rogers, gave Luis' mother a Bible. She and her husband came to faith. Rogers remained a spiritual friend of the family.

They went to a meeting of the Brethren: small congregations without a pastor, where the brothers lead the service together. In an interview from the early 1980s, Palau said that such a meeting sometimes consisted of twelve people. Seven of them were from his own family.

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

"WITH JESUS, WHICH IS BETTER BY FAR"

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

Palau told himself how his father died, in his memoir and in interviews. On his deathbed his father sang and clapped, and pointed upward. His last words, according to his son, were: “I am going to be with Jesus, which is better by far.” It is almost exactly what the apostle Paul wrote: *For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better* (Philippians 1:23). Palau later said that this deathbed shaped his faith in eternal life. We know the scene only from his own memory.

What came next is found in many sources. The family lost its wealth. According to English-language Wikipedia, which relies on a profile in *The Oregonian* from 2003, relatives mishandled what was left. Palau told the Associated Press a detail he never forgot: his mother cut one steak into eight pieces, so that everyone at the table had something.

What she did left a mark on his life. His memoir opens with her story. She taught him to sing, to recite Bible verses and to pray. She believed, he wrote, that God would provide, and somehow He did.

THE CAMP IN SUMMER

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

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

In those years he dreamed of studying law. According to the Argentine parliament, he wanted to become a lawyer so he could help

widows like his mother. It turned out differently. Around the age of eighteen he had to start working, because the family needed the money.

A JOB AT THE BANK OF LONDON

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

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

The start was hard. He preached his first sermon in a small church in the hills, to about thirty-five people. He imitated Graham, with a loud voice and waving arms. It was, as he himself later said, a flop.

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

A SPANISH BIBLE FROM 1953

In the Museum of the Bible in Washington lies a small Spanish Bible, printed in 1950. Palau bought it in 1953 in Buenos Aires. It contains notes and sermon outlines from his early years.

These were the years when he led two lives. On weekdays he worked at the bank. On weekends he preached, also in the street.

At nineteen he had his own Christian radio program. When he was twenty-two, he organized tent meetings with friends and an evangelistic radio program in Buenos Aires.

He was a bank clerk with a microphone.

AN AMERICAN AT A BIBLE STUDY

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

After that he took a one-year program at the Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon. It became a difficult year. Palau later said that he struggled with pride there. In a class taught by the British speaker Major Ian Thomas, something fell into place. He understood, as he put it himself, that Christ truly lived in him.

At Multnomah he met Patricia Scofield. They married in 1961. In 1962 he became an American citizen, and that same year he did an internship at a Billy Graham campaign in Fresno, California, where he also interpreted. The man he had heard on the radio ten years earlier was now standing beside him.

OVERSEAS CRUSADES: COLOMBIA AND MEXICO

In 1961 Palau joined Overseas Crusades, known in Latin America as SEPAL and today as OC International. It was an American mission organization. With Pat he lived briefly in Detroit and then in Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico.

There is a tension in his story here that I do not want to polish away. Palau was an Argentine who preached in Latin America, but his base was in the United States and he worked for an American organization. According to AL DÍA, he interpreted for Graham at

Spanish-language campaigns for some twenty years. In 1970 Graham helped him with start-up money. The New York Times wrote at his death that he worked mainly outside the United States for his first twenty years, partly out of respect for the place Graham held there.

In 1964, at a campaign in Colombia, he started the radio program *Luis Palau Responde*, “Luis Palau answers.” Listeners came with questions from their daily lives. He listened and answered from the Bible, while others listened in. The Wheaton College archives still keep recordings.

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

A TWELVE-MINUTE MEETING

In the 1970s his work grew quickly. He bought television airtime, in prime time, and invited viewers to come with their doubts. In 1974 he had a twelve-minute appointment in Guatemala with President Carlos Arana Osorio. According to Christianity Today, the conversation lasted an hour, and the president accepted a Bible.

Relations among Christians also cost him effort. In 1976 he called off a campaign in Chicago for Spanish-speaking Christians, because Pentecostal churches and other evangelical churches could not agree with one another. Pentecostals put strong emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and prayer for the sick. A campaign required the churches of a city to work together, and that did not always happen.

In 1977 he spoke to more than sixty thousand people in Wales in one month. In October 1978, with Graham’s support, he started

his own organization, the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association, with headquarters in the Portland area.

GUATEMALA, 1982

One campaign from those years honestly belongs in this chapter. In 1982 Palau held a large celebration in Guatemala, *Gratitude '82*. General Efraín Ríos Montt, who had come to power in a coup shortly before, was there. Palau estimated the attendance at half a million.

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

I am not judging the heart of a man I did not know. I do note that an evangelist who gets a full grandstand thanks to a ruler also gets that ruler's shadow. By his own account, Palau wanted to stay out of politics. In Guatemala he did not fully succeed.

The same interview also touched on the other side of politics. In those years liberation theology was strong in Latin America, especially in the Roman Catholic Church. It read the Bible from the struggle of the poor against injustice and oppression. Palau opposed it. He saw in it a different understanding of sin, redemption and new birth from what he read in the Bible. He also spoke about Uruguay, where the security services distrusted Protestants and had recently expelled Protestants from the country because they were suspected of hiding weapons. An evangelist who traveled from country to country on that continent had to explain again and again who he was and who he was not.

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

He was not welcome everywhere. In 2005 the city of Cardiff in Wales canceled a reception for him, because of what the city called his extreme evangelical views. In the United States, by contrast, The New York Times named him in 1999 as the leading candidate to succeed Billy Graham.

FROM CRUSADE TO FESTIVAL

Campaigns like these were called *crusades*. In the 1990s his sons pressed him to drop that word. According to Evangelical Focus, the idea came from his son Andrés. Palau resisted at first. Then he came around.

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

The festivals also went back to the continent where he had begun. In Lima, Peru, an estimated seven hundred thousand people listened in 2004. In March 2008 he stood in Buenos Aires by the Obelisco, the well-known monument in the city center. The Argentine parliament speaks of more than a million people, Evangelical Focus of press reports giving that estimate on the second evening. In 2015 he

held a week-long festival in New York, closing with a gathering in Central Park where, according to CBN News, some sixty thousand people came.

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

FIFTEEN YEARS AWAY FROM HOME

There is a price that comes with a life like this. Palau calculated himself that in fifty-seven years of marriage he had been separated from his wife and sons for about fifteen years, because of all the travel. After dangerous experiences abroad, Pat and he had decided that she would stay in Oregon with the four boys.

He did not regret it, he told Christianity Today. But he spoke about it openly. How much are you willing to miss for what you believe God is asking of you? Palau gave an answer, and his family carried it with him.

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

JANUARY 2018

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

He lived for more than three more years. In November 2018 he told a local newspaper that the disease was stable for the time being. In February 2021 he was admitted to the hospital, and after that he stopped treatment.

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS CERTAIN AND WHAT IS TOLD

Certain (several independent sources): birth on November 27, 1934, in Ingeniero Maschwitz; only son among seven children; the Bible from Edward Rogers and the conversion of his parents; British schools; the death of his father when Luis was ten and the poverty that followed; conversion at a summer camp around the age of twelve; work at a bank and the Billy Graham radio broadcast around 1952; his own radio program around 1953; the invitation

from Ray Stedman and Multnomah (1960-1961); marriage to Patricia Scofield (1961); Overseas Crusades from 1961; *Luis Palau Responde* (1964); his own organization in 1978; Guatemala 1982 with Ríos Montt and the criticism of it; the switch to festivals around 1999; friendship with Jorge Bergoglio; lung cancer (2018); death on March 11, 2021, in Portland.

Only from own testimony or later tradition: his father's last words; the steak in eight pieces; the diary note of February 12, 1947; the failed first sermon; his mother's answer about the calling; the class by Major Ian Thomas; the Brethren meetings of twelve people; the hour with President Arana Osorio; the fifteen years away from home.

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

Interpretation: the numbers (thirty million listeners, the stadium figures, registered responses) come from his own organization, from the campaigns themselves or from press reports. They were not counted independently.

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16. Wikipedia, "Luis Palau" (starting point)

Afterword

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

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

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

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