

## Amy Carmichael (1867-1951).<sup>1</sup>

**“It is a safe thing to trust Him to fulfill the desire that He creates.”**

Amy Beatrice Carmichael was born in the small village in Ireland in 1867. Her parents were devout Presbyterians and she was the oldest of seven siblings.<sup>[1]</sup> Amy attended Harrogate Ladies College for four years in her youth. It was there she became a Christian at the age of fifteen.

Amy's father moved the family to Belfast when she was 16, but he died two years later. In Belfast, the Carmichaels founded the Welcome Evangelical Church.<sup>[2]</sup> In the mid-1880s, Carmichael started a Sunday-morning class for the ‘Shawlies’ (mill girls who wore shawls instead of hats) in the church hall of Rosemary Street Presbyterian. This mission grew and grew until they needed a hall to seat 500 people. At this time Amy saw an advertisement in *The Christian*, for an iron hall that could be erected for £500 and would seat 500 people. Two donations, £500 from Miss Kate Mitchell and one plot of land from a mill owner, led to the erection of the first "Welcome Hall" on the corner of Cambrai Street and Heather Street in 1887.

Amy continued at the Welcome until she received a call to work among the mill girls of Manchester in 1889, from which she moved on to missionary work, although in many ways she seemed an unlikely candidate for missionary work, suffering as she did from neuralgia, a disease of the nerves that made her whole body weak and achy and often put her in bed for weeks on end. But at the Keswick Convention of 1887, she heard Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission speak about missionary life; soon afterwards, she became convinced of her calling to missionary work. She applied to the China Inland Mission and lived in London at the training house for women, where she met author and missionary to China, Mary Geraldine Guinness, who encouraged her to pursue missionary work. She was ready to sail for Asia at one point, when it was determined that her health made her unfit for the work. She postponed her missionary career with the CIM and decided later to join the Church Missionary Society.

Initially Carmichael traveled to Japan for fifteen months, but fell ill and returned home.<sup>[3]</sup> After a brief period of service in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), she went to Bangalore, India for her health and found her lifelong vocation. She was commissioned by the Church of England Zenana Mission. Carmichael's most notable work was with girls and young women, some of whom were saved from customs that amounted to forced prostitution. Hindu temple children were primarily young girls dedicated to the gods, then usually forced into prostitution to earn money for the priests (i.e., Devadasi)<sup>[4]</sup> Families often sold their children to the temples if they did not want them, or if they needed extra money and fewer children to feed.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Wikipedia Books: If: What do I know of Calvary Love?; Gold By Moonlight; Rose From Brier

Carmichael founded the Dohnavur Fellowship<sup>[5]</sup> in 1901 to continue her work,<sup>[6]</sup> as she later wrote in *The Gold Cord* (1932). A popular early work was *Things as They Are: Mission Work in Southern India* (1903). Dohnavur is situated in Tamil Nadu, thirty miles from India's southern tip. Carmichael's fellowship transformed Dohnavur into a sanctuary for over one thousand children who would otherwise have faced a bleak future.<sup>[7]</sup> Carmichael often said that her Ministry of rescuing temple children started with a girl named Preena. Having become a temple servant against her wishes, Preena managed to escape. Amy Carmichael provided her shelter and withstood the threats of those who insisted that the girl be returned either to the temple directly to continue her sexual assignments, or to her family for more indirect return to the temple. The number of such incidents soon grew, thus beginning Amy Carmichael's new Ministry.<sup>[8]</sup> When the children were asked what drew them to Amy, they most often replied "It was love. Amma (They're referring to Amy as their mother; Amma means mother) loved us."<sup>[9]</sup> Respecting Indian culture, members of the organization wore Indian dress and gave the rescued children Indian names. Carmichael herself dressed in Indian clothes, dyed her skin with dark coffee, and often travelled long distances on India's hot, dusty roads to save just one child from suffering.

While serving in India, Amy received a letter from a young lady who was considering life as a missionary. She asked Amy, "What is missionary life like?" Amy wrote back saying simply, "Missionary life is simply a chance to die." Nonetheless, in 1912 Queen Mary recognized the missionary's work, and helped fund a hospital at Dohnavur.<sup>[10]</sup> By 1913, the Dohnavur Fellowship was serving 130 girls. In 1918, Dohnavur added a home for young boys, many born to the former temple prostitutes. Meanwhile, in 1916 Carmichael formed a Protestant religious order called Sisters of the Common Life.

In 1931, a fall severely injured Carmichael, and she remained bedridden, in constant pain, for much of her final two decades. However, it did not stop her from continuing her inspirational writing, for she published 16 additional books (including *His Thoughts Said . . . His Father Said* (1951), *If* (1953), *Edges of His Ways* (1955) and *God's Missionary* (1957)), as well as revised others she had previously written.

Carmichael died in India in 1951 at the age of 83. She asked that no stone be put over her grave at Dohnavur.<sup>[11]</sup> Instead, the children she had cared for put a bird bath over it with the single inscription "Amma", which means mother in the Tamil language.

Her example as a missionary inspired others (including Jim Elliot and his wife Elisabeth Elliot) to pursue a similar vocation.

*"We are here to live holy, loving, lowly lives. We cannot do this unless we walk very, very close to our Lord Jesus. Anything that would hinder us from the closest walk possible to us till we see Him face to face is not for us."*

IF...

*"If I do not give a friend 'the benefit of the doubt,' but put the worst construction instead of the best on what is said or done...*

*If I take offence easily; if I am content to continue in a cool unfriendliness, though friendship be possible...*

*If a sudden jar can cause me to speak in impatient unloving word-for a cup brimfull of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted...*

*If I say, 'Yes, I forgive, but I cannot forget,' as though the God, who twice a day washes all the sands on all the shores of all the world could not wash such memories from my mind...*

*If I ask to be delivered from trial rather than for deliverance out of it, to the praise of His glory; if I forget that the way of the cross leads to the cross and not to a bank of flowers; if I regulate my life on these lines or even consciously my thinking so that I am surprised when the way is rough and think it strange though the word is, 'Think it not strange,'*

*'Count it all joy...'*

*then I know nothing of Calgary love."*

*"Perhaps prayer often needs to be followed by a little pause, that we may have time to open our hearts to that for which we have prayed. We often rush from prayer to prayer without waiting for the word within, which says, "I have heard you, My child. "*

*"There is no need to plead that the love of God shall fill our hearts as though He were unwilling to fill us: He is willing as light is willing to flood a room that is opened to its brightness; willing as water is willing to flow into an emptied channel. Love is pressing around us on all sides like air. Cease to resist, and instantly love takes possession."*

*"The way of love is never an easy way. If our hearts be set on walking in that way we must be prepared to suffer. 'It is the way the master went; should not the servant tread it still?'"*

*"However things may appear to be, of all possible circumstances-those circumstances in whose midst I am set-these are the best that He could choose for me. We do not know how this is true-where would faith be if we did?-but we do know that all things that happen are full of shining seed.*

*Light is sown for us-not darkness.*