

Not to be Forgotten: Amy Carmichael

1867-1951 Missionary to India

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"If souls can suffer alongside, and I hardly know it—then I know nothing of Calvary love." The author of these words, Amy Carmichael, spent 55 years in the mission fields of India, rescuing over 1,000 children from temple prostitution and other forms of abuse, and providing them with a home, an education, and spiritual salvation. Her organization, the Dohnavur Fellowship, still thrives 50 years after her death.

Born in northern Ireland to an evangelical Christian family, Carmichael was 24 when she attended an 1891 Keswick Bible Conference and there committed herself to a life of Christian service. The Keswick Movement, which swept England during the last quarter of the 19th century, urged Christians to live out their faith by serving God, and young Amy Carmichael responded to its message of "deeper life theology" by boarding a ship one year later for the mission fields of the Far East. Her first assignment was in Japan, but difficulty with both language and climate made her realize that she was not in the place where God wanted her. She moved on to the friendlier climate of Ceylon, but found her work there cut short by an urgent summons home to care for a dying friend. By 1895, however, she was back in the Far East—this time in India, where she would spend the rest of her life.

Immediately after her arrival, young Carmichael dedicated herself to mastering Tamil, the language of southern India, and then gathered together a group of Indian women who had converted to Christianity. Calling themselves the "Starry Cluster," the women traveled from village to village sharing the gospel message of hope. In 1900 the evangelistic group settled in the town of Dohnavur, where Carmichael soon learned of the Hindu custom whereby little girls were "married to the gods" and then offered as prostitutes to men who visited the temples. In 1901 she rescued her first temple child, a young girl named Preena, or "Pearl Eyes," and from that point on felt called by God to save as many children as she possibly could from this life of forced prostitution.

Carmichael soon became known to her Indian neighbors as "child-catching Missy Ammai." Her interference in Hindu custom brought angry opposition from both villagers and authorities, and she faced kidnapping charges on several occasions. News of Carmichael's courageous exploits reached Christian circles back in England, and in 1912 Queen Mary gave her official recognition for her efforts.

By 1913 Carmichael's "Dohnavur Fellowship" had 130 female children under its protection. Her staff of both European and Indian women voluntarily forsook marriage

in order to focus on the rescue, care, feeding, and education of the children, and in 1916 she formed a new Protestant religious order called the Sisters of the Common Life. The women took no vows and were free to leave if they decided to marry, but most stayed on, devoting much of their energy to developing Christian character in the young girls they nurtured. In 1918 Dohnavur Fellowship expanded to include a home for young boys, many of them infants who had been born to the temple prostitutes.

Throughout her ministry, Carmichael used her gift for written expression to share her faith with others, and this became an even greater spiritual outlet for her after a serious fall left her crippled at the age of 64. Confined to her room, she wrote 13 books during the 20 years remaining to her and also updated books she had written earlier. Thirty-six books by Amy Carmichael have been published, and many are still available from Christian booksellers. Among the most enduring are *His Thoughts Said ... His Father Said*, which gives God's answers to Christian doubts and struggles; *If*, a slim book of poetry that demonstrates the shallowness of human love compared to the love of Calvary; *Mimosa*, the true story of an Indian child who discovered the love of Christ; and *Gold Cord*, the story of the Dohnavur Fellowship and the women and children who lived there.

Amy Carmichael died peacefully in Dohnavur at the age of 83, having spent 55 years in India without a single furlough from mission work. In addition to an enormous body of inspirational writing, this beloved Christian left behind an energetic organization that continues the work she began in 1901. Today Dohnavur Fellowship is a 400-acre community with 500 residents, a hospital, 16 child nurseries, and other public services.

Among the many people inspired by Carmichael's life is Elisabeth Elliot, herself a well-known missionary and author, who tells the story of the dedicated young woman from northern Ireland in *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael*.

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