

Revivals And Church History :: The spiritual journey of Amy Carmichael by Mike Atnip

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Introduction

Reading the story of the judges and kings of Judah and Israel, one finds a history of hills and dales. Some of the leaders of Israel took God's people on a downhill journey, low, so low that one wonders how they could grovel in the dirt and still retain any sense of integrity about themselves.

Others soared to the clouds; faithful shepherds who dared to do such things as depose their own mother as queen or cut down the family idols and burn them, for the glory of God. Those were revival days! Were we to graph out the whole history, the result would look something like a distant mountain ridge, with its silhouette against the bright sky making a line that moves randomly up and down. So went the kings and prophets, some higher, some lower.

And so go we.

The story of Amy Carmichael is one of climbing toward the clouds. Her life and work is one to be admired, and emulated. But ...

As with the judges and kings who marched God's people in an upward way, there are sometimes little phrases of sadness pasted into the story, usually beginning with "nevertheless," "but," or "howbeit." Just one example among many is found in 2 Kings 14:3: "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father." The next verse contains another of those sad conjunctions, "howbeit": "Howbeit the high places were not taken away." We thus see Amaziah as one who overall had a positive rating, guiding God's people forward. Yet ... the bottom line is that he could have done better. How God will judge all those things, I dare not say. I am happy to leave those things in His hands.

Such is the life of Amy Carmichael. We shall see a general upward move, and in certain aspects, standing head and shoulders above the general run of Christianity; even standing among giants, if you will. We look up to her.

Howbeit—we at The Heartbeat of the Remnant are obligated to use that sad word—we wish that a few things could have been better yet. One example would be her unveiled head in public, in her younger years at least. Or perhaps the fact that while she seemed to live out nonresistance in her personal life, she fellowshiped with those who did not.

Like with Amaziah—who generally did well, but who did not take away the high places—we will let God judge Amy according to the light she had and the light she rejected. We are responsible to walk in the light we have, in our life and our environs, teaching and holding others accountable to that light.

We say all this as a sort of "disclaimer" concerning Amy Carmichael. While her life in general is to be admired, and in some aspects reaches beyond ours, we are obligated to say that—according to the light we have at the present—there are a few of those sad "buts" and "howbeits" in her walk. That said, we are going to focus for the moment on what she did, the "yes and amen" parts of her life.

And we do that with one goal in mind: so that her life may show us a couple of the "buts" and "howbeits" in our own life. May we all be ready to "go beyond" our present walk, into the very fullness of the character of Christ. May her story let a little bit more of His light into our life. It is too late for us to shine more truth into Amy's life, but it is not too late for her life to shine into ours, taking us—hopefully—beyond our own "howbeits"!

Irish girl by the sea

The little "spade and bucket" town of Millisle in Northern Ireland cradled the future missionary in its sandy beaches and country lanes. Born into a family of solid Presbyterians, Amy Carmichael was blessed by a firm upbringing. Yes meant yes, and no was no. If Amy or any of her six younger siblings tried to define "yes" as "no," or "no" as "yes," the discipline was meted out, and while the sting was yet there, the offender was required to politely thank the

trainer.

But they were happy days, as disciplined childhood days usually are; riding horses on the beach, watching the sea birds in flight, or swallowing a dozen plum seeds. After all, the nursemaid—trying to deter the child from eating the stones—had told Amy that a tree would grow out of her head for each stone she swallowed. Amy reasoned that it would be nice to have plenty of fruit within easy reach, and so quickly swallowed twelve! Such are childhood days in a secure, happy family!

At twelve years of age, she was sent to England to attend a Methodist boarding school. For a child coming from a loving, secure home, the homesickness was just short of devastating. The years at the school were some of Amy's worst, as far as obedience was concerned. In her autobiography she lamented to her "children": "If I told you much about those years, it would not help you, for I was not at all what I want you to be."

About three years later, she came to understand that although she had known about Jesus' love from childhood, she had not "opened the door" and surrendered to let Him into His throne room—her heart. On that day, she did so.

The family soon ran into financial difficulties which necessitated her recall to Ireland. Three years later, her father contracted double pneumonia and quickly passed from this world. Amy was 18, a young lady, now living with her family in Belfast, a small city, but the largest one in north Ireland.

Beyond girlhood

Paul spoke of childhood in the following manner, being a man: "When I became a man, I put away childish things." This process usually does not happen in one night, but as boys and girls mature in their minds, they begin to lose interest in tractors and dolls. Unfortunately, very few adolescents bypass the folly of the teen years, and more unfortunate is the fact that modern society encourages adolescents to stay adolescents as long as they possibly can. But Paul probably included what we call adolescence when he spoke of "childish things." For young ladies, adolescence is a time of awakening femininity, a time when pretty clothes, socializing within cliques, and an embarrassing consciousness of outward appearance stand supreme in their thoughts. A few in every generation are not blown over by the storm, but most girls are, in some degree or another.

After her father's death, Amy seems to have been one of those who weathered the storm better than normal. It probably had to do a lot with purposeful decisions she made, choosing to fill her life with good works, rather than wasting precious time chitchatting with friends on the latest "look." But one experience in particular was a life-changer for her.

Coming home from church service one rainy morning, she and her brothers saw an old, haggard-looking "bag lady" tottering down the street. For whatever whim of impulse it was that hit them, she and her two brothers grabbed the old lady's heavy load, and taking her by the arms helped her down the street, the wind blowing her raggy clothes like a bunch of tacked-on feathers.

It wouldn't have been so bad... except they were now headed back up the street they had just come down, and "everyone"—so to speak—in the "uppity" church saw them helping the poor lady along. It was an embarrassment to the courageous young people, facing all those "respectable people" with the old "bag lady." But a strange thing happened while they were passing a beautiful fountain in the middle of the street. Amy heard a voice quote 1 Corinthians 3:12-14:

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

Amy looked around to see who had spoken. Nobody was there. She wrote:

I said nothing to anyone, but I knew that something had happened that had changed life's values. Nothing could ever matter again but the things that were eternal.

Amy returned home and closed herself in her room, to meet with God. God was calling her further on; beyond the folly that coincides so often with feminine adolescence.

Beyond nominalism

Amy began to pour herself into blessing others less blessed than she was. Determination in a dress might describe her. She tutored school boys. She went into the poorer sections of town and gathered children, then brought them home for a children's meeting. She began a work among the so-called "shawlies," lower-class girls and ladies who could not afford to buy the snazzy hats that the "higher" class ladies wore, so they went about with a shawl wrapped around them. She helped her siblings with their school lessons.

Then came her introduction to Keswick. The so-called Keswick meetings were the British counterpart of the American Holiness movement, but with a slightly different twist. While the Holiness movement in America emphasized a second work of grace that supposedly eradicated sin in a person, the Keswick meetings put more emphasis on total consecration. That said, without going into the intricacies of the doctrine, the Keswick movement (also sometimes called "Deeper Life") represented a gathering of the more serious end of Protestant believers in the British domains.

When Amy was just shy of turning 19, she was invited to Scotland, where she attended a convention being held "on Keswick lines." She confesses that for "months, perhaps years," she had been "longing" to know more about living a holy life. At the close of these meetings, a phrase pierced her heart and would not let her go: "O Lord, we know Thou art able to keep us from falling."

She was taken for dinner shortly after, and someone complained about the mutton chops not being cooked fully. Amy wrote later, "Whatever does it matter about mutton chops? O Lord, we know Thou art able to keep us from falling."

But it was more than sentimentalism. God was calling her beyond nominalism, beyond just being a nice, moral, churchgoing young lady. She tells of the following incidence:

Soon after that shining day I went home to Belfast. The long time of being "in mourning" for our father was over. So my mother took me to a shop to buy coloured things, and among them was to be an evening dress. That meant something exceedingly pretty. It meant that once more I would be going to parties and spending time in all sorts of pleasant ways. Suddenly I felt I couldn't do that. To my startled mother I said so. The shopman came and unrolled his loveliest materials, his loveliest colors too, and my mother, looking rather pained, apologized for troubling him and we left the shop.

A photo of Amy as a child reveals a family very much "in mode," with lots of lace and adornment. For Amy to take a step into plainness of dress was to take a step out of her culture and out of the nominal Presbyterian norms. But God was calling her, and to not follow would mean a severance in the relationship with her Lord!

And remember, she was but 18 years old.

One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving. —Amy Carmichael
Home missions

For the next couple of years, Amy's life was wrapped up in what may be called "home missions." I doubt she made any conscious decision to dedicate her life to "home missions," it is just that Amy was initiating what would become a lifelong "habit": wherever she was, she reached out to those around her, be it Belfast, London, or India. One strange phenomenon seen too often in youth is a zest for foreign missions, but without much evidence in being pained for the needy souls in their neighborhood.

Amy began a work with girls in Belfast that eventually grew to needing enough room for 500 people. It was here that, as a very young lady, she took up the course that she would follow for financial needs for the rest of her days: never ask anyone for material things, except God.

A few years later, she and her mother and one sister were invited to England to help at Manchester City Mission. A short quote from Amy will suffice for this time of her life:

The training in that slum work was splendid in every way. had no patience with people who weren't ready at a moment's notice to do whatever was required. If you worked for him you had to be ready. You had to learn to use odd minutes to prepare. You had to learn to do without a quiet room for preparation.

Yes, Lord.

The only two words written on the wall of Amy's room in Japan.
The D.O.M. and foreign missions

"The Dear Old Man" (D.O.M.) they called him. He was Robert Wilson, one of the leaders of the Keswick meetings. Robert was born a Quaker (he was later baptized, contrary to Quaker teaching), but was a seeker of deeper things than a mere denominational creed. As his wife and daughter and one son had died, and Amy was about the same age as his now deceased daughter, he unofficially "adopted" Amy. Amy spent a lot of time on his farm, taking the place of his daughter, with her mother's consent. It was this channel that opened the door for Amy to enter foreign missions, since Robert—as Chairman of the Keswick Mission Committee—was respected enough that his recommendation carried a lot of weight. He gave his recommendation for Amy as one of the first missionaries of the Keswick missions. It was from Robert Wilson that Amy began to sign her name, Amy Wilson Carmichael.

Amy was all set to join the China Inland Mission of Hudson Taylor (whom she had met personally), but "at the last minute" a doctor said her health was not good enough and the whole thing fell through. The D.O.M. then lined her up to join a mission in Japan, and Amy sailed "in faith," expecting to be accepted there. A letter awaited her in China granting that permission, and she sailed on for Japan.

At this point in her life, a small incident occurred that again challenged Amy to "go beyond." She was with what was perhaps the most zealous group of Protestants in England in the late 1800s, the Keswick movement. In fact, one could almost describe Amy as the cream of the crop among them. Yet as she and another missionary walked along the seashore in Japan, Amy received a startling piece of information. Amy wrote:

As we walked along the seashore she mentioned casually something which led to an astonished question from me. And then she said—and the words chill my very heart—"You don't mean to say you think that all missionaries love one another?" Of course I had thought they did. I had never dreamed they didn't.

Amy was "blown away," as we might say in our colloquial English. But like the little scene that occurred by the fountain in the street with the bag lady some years previous, this little scene was to be a provocation to move further on in her Christian walk. Although it would take some years to bring it into reality, that day something was forged in her spirit. She continued, saying:

Was such a life of love lived nowhere? And I did earnestly ask for the love about which our Lord spoke on the evening before He suffered.

Yes, it is good to be dedicated to a cause, a good cause, like missions. Yes, one can sell all and dedicate themselves to the most remote unreached people group in the world. But if they don't live out John 17:21, "that they all may be one," what does it avail? Some Hindus are very devoted folks; they have been known to pour gasoline over themselves and light themselves into a fireball, becoming a crisp ... in total consecration and devotion. Muslims have stepped into the cockpits of airliners and rammed them into buildings, dying in devotion to their cause.

Is there something beyond the total consecration that, for example, a Keswick convention offers? Was God glorified when missionaries leave all and sail for Japan, only to not love their fellow missionary once there?

It was sometime during this phase of her life that Amy wrote the following words. While they have a strong tinge of total consecration to them, was Amy perhaps pondering the lack of brokenness, in the last sentence?

We profess to be strangers and pilgrims, seeking after a country of our own, yet we settle down in the most un-stranger-like fashion, exactly as if we were quite at home and meant to stay as long as we could. I don't wonder apostolic miracles have died. Apostolic living certainly has.

Across the will of nature
Leads on the path of God;
Not where the flesh delighteth
The feet of Jesus trod.
O bliss to leave behind us
The fetters of the slave,
To leave ourselves behind us,

The grave-clothes and the grave!

We follow in His footsteps;
What if our feet be torn?
Where He has marked the pathway
All hail the brier and thorn!
Scarce seen, scarce heard, unreckoned,
Despised, defamed, unknown,
Or heard but by our singing,
On, children, ever on!
Gerhard Tersteegen
(Quoted by Amy Carmichael)

In her autobiography, Amy tells of another incident that happened in Japan, a sort of wake-up call. She and others had entered a room with an idol and several devout Buddhists. In the course of the ensuing conversation, Romans 5:10 was read: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Upon hearing these words, the sincere Buddhist responded:

True, true, it must be true. Buddha died; we know it. How can he help us, who live today? He may say, "Be good"; the power to obey he cannot give.

The man then pondered the last phrase, "saved by his life," and continued, looking Amy straight in the eyes:

If this be so, you are as an angel from heaven to us; but if it be so, we want to see it lived; can you show it to us?

"Can you show it to us?" Could Amy and her fellow missionaries show indeed that Jesus had the power over self and sin in this life? Not just a sister over here and a brother over there, but a body of believers "showing the life of Christ"?

The next part shows the gold in Amy. Instead of patting herself on the back and telling herself that she was sent to Japan for the very purpose of showing it to the old man, she asks herself a startling question:

Was I sent to Japan partly that I might hear?

She continues, saying:

Some of you know how, when this Fellowship was being shaped, an old man in the village of S— asked me the same question and in almost the same words. "We have heard much of your preaching," he said, "can you show us the life of your Lord Jesus?"

God was calling Amy once again... to go beyond.

Decisions, decisions, and more decisions

In some churches, being "spiritual" is to go to church meetings, or have private devotions, and experience something "uplifting" or "inspiring" that will propel the believer on. While such experiences do occur, real spirituality is attained by simply choosing the spirit over the flesh in everyday situations. From the time of her experience at the water fountain—which began when she chose to help a poor old lady—Amy was continually confronted with little decisions, and big ones, that defined her path later in life.

Late in her life, Amy shared that on two different occasions she had received letters from would-be suitors while a young lady. Laying it out before the Lord, she felt God saying to her, "No, no, no. I have something different for you." And so Amy settled for singlehood. She would devote herself to His cause. These proposals are mentioned here since they seem to have occurred in the time from her first starting to Japan to her entrance into India a couple years later. Young, totally dedicated, very physically attractive, extremely intelligent, talented... one can wonder that not more than two spiritual young men would have been interested. But Amy's heart seems to have simply rested secure in what God had called her to. If she struggled with the matter of marriage, she kept it hidden. In fact, the details about the letters from the suitors were put into her autobiography late in her life, but then she had them pulled out before publication. It was only from

the girl transcribing for her—she later told others—that these details are even known today.

Did she battle with it and hide it well? Or did she simply “get over it”? We will probably never know. But one thing is absolutely clear: she never flirted or carried herself about in a way that drew attention to herself. If she had, there would have certainly been more than two suitors in her line.

She refused to wear jewelry and makeup (and she wouldn't let her girls wear any, which caused her trouble with some of the other missionaries in India), and dressed very modestly; it is doubtful that any man saw much of her legs higher than her ankles, unless by accident. And although she adopted the native dress style in both Japan and India, she was not afraid to adapt it to meet her standards of modesty: she added a blouse to her sari, for example, when the style of sari in her area did not cover her well enough.

In the same tone, she was not fond at all of photographs of herself, and only on very rare occasions did she permit someone to photograph her. In her early days, she would scratch her face out of group photos. And not one picture of her was ever put into the many books she authored. No, she did not promote herself in dress or action, and so she did not have to deal with hordes of young men proposing to her, beautiful as she was. A meek and quiet spirit and dress saved her a lot of trouble.

Then came decisions about telling the truth. When a fellow missionary wrote home the story of a Muslim girl, in which the girl did not end up getting converted in the story, the author was asked to send home positive stories, so as to not discourage supporters of the mission. Again Amy was forced to make one of the “little” decisions in life; should she tell the truth, or embellish stories to make the mission look good? She resolved to always speak things as they really were. And a few years later, when she released her book, *Things As They Are*, it was a shocker for the supporters. In fact, the original publisher asked her to revise it; it was too negative. Amy simply stuck the manuscript in a drawer. About two years later, others found out about it and published it. The hidden immorality of the temple girls that she exposed was almost too hard for people to believe. Yet that book, and subsequent letters and books sent out, was one of the impetuses to exposing and ultimately making illegal the traffic of children.

It all started with a decision. Amy wrote:

And that night I resolved that if I ever had to write a story I would not change one word to please anybody. God helping me, I would be very careful about truth.

A chance to die.

Amy's response to someone who asked her what missionary work was like.

In another small incident, she received a truth about life that would guide her for her remaining days. The “I” in her arose one day when an associate acted “unfair and curiously dominating.” She described what happened next:

“... the word came, ‘See in it a chance to die.’ To this day that word is life and release to me ... a chance to die to self in every form.”

She chose to die that day, and on hundreds of occasions in the next five decades. Yes, the church services were doubtless inspiring to Amy, but her spirituality came from choosing the Spirit over the flesh in the everyday incidents of life.

Beyond “revival”

Poor health had forced Amy out of Japan. But within a couple of years, she was in India, working with the “fiery” Thomas Walker. At 30 years of age, she formed a little evangelistic band of women and went from village to village trying to reach into the hidden lives of the Indian ladies. But before that happened, another “life-changing” incident occurred.

In a monthly “social evening” (Amy secretly abhorred these social times) among the missionaries, someone asked what she thought was a shocking question. Did any of the missionaries there know of one single “national” worker among them that would continue his work if he did not get paid to do it? Amy wrote later:

There was dead silence. The lady near me was busy matching her silks. All the others went on with what they were doing. Not one, so far as I could see, was astonished or shocked by such a question. At last one of the men said, ‘I must confess I don't.’

But I felt as if a thunderbolt had fallen in the midst . . .

Did anyone work out of pure love for the Lord? Not that Amy felt financial recompense was wrong . . . but what kind of results come from people who are in the "service of the Lord" for money? Amy does not raise the question, but one has to wonder if she wondered how many of the missionaries themselves would continue on out of pure love for the Lord.

I don't know if by this time Amy could have articulated it, but a vision was beginning to rise within her. A vision of . . . brotherhood. A vision of a body of believers joined together in one accord, bound by the cords of a fiery, holy love. She was in her late 20s. She was a missionary, sent out by a "revival" movement. But something was missing. What was that "something"?

Walker of Tinnevely was a fiery evangelist who served as a "big brother" to Amy in India, giving her encouragements and faithful rebukes.

In order to learn the Tamil language better, she went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Walker. At this point, she began to experience a little of that "something." Her initial dislike for "Walker of Tinnevely" was soon overcome as he taught her. Amy found a "big brother" in him, one with whom she could experience "iron sharpening iron." He was forthright at times, telling her that she was too "headstrong, following her own desires rather than the Holy Spirit." But such reproof could be received, as it came from one whom she knew was watching for her own good.

After joining the Walkers in a new outreach effort, Amy and her little band of women began to evangelize, while Mr. Walker did the same with a group of men. They would travel to a new area, set up a camp of tents, and spread out to do personal witnessing in the surrounding villages. The ladies would work with women and children, while the men would focus on the men in the villages. In the evenings, they would sometimes have a joint service or street meeting.

At this point, Amy began to see the realization of her dream. In the beginning, she gave her helpers the usual pay, and a *batta*, the extra stipend for every night spent away from home. But then the blessed day came; her helpers brought their *batta* to the dining room table and poured it out. Amy was delighted. She wrote:

They told me that they had not needed it and did not want it. At that time this was a new thing. A new love had been kindled in those hearts—they glowed. Thereafter it was never, "How much can I get?" but always "How much can I give? How much can I do without, that I may have more to give?" . . . Can you imagine with what a joy we worshipped the Lord together?

Not too long after, the Indian sisters began to lay aside their jewelry. This was a deeper matter in their culture, since their jewels were a status symbol, more so than in our American society. A woman's jewels were her dowry. And although the Hindus respected and admired that decision, some other missionaries "threw a fit." But Amy was beginning to experience what she had longed for since that day by the seashore in Japan—true sisterhood, a fellowship that went beyond nominalism and even revivalism. A fellowship, not of individuals seeking God on their own, but of being knit into one and seeking God together.

Crossing the sea does not make any woman a missionary in spirit, nor does it turn soft iron into steel. Spend much time at Calvary before you come. Look at that love, look and look till you can say to Him, "Yes, Lord, anything."
-Amy Carmichael, to a potential coworker at Dohnavur

The mystic Amy

Amy was a voracious reader. Her own letters and books are filled with quotes from a wide array of authors. One person said of her that she would often sit at the table for a meal with a book, and excitedly say, "You just have to hear this . . ." And she would then read out loud an inspiring quote or section.

It is likely that Amy drew, in her early days, most of her deeper inspiration from books. Her own depth of spirituality was beyond many of her counterparts, and so those with whom she labored could not provide the fellowship she needed. It is interesting to note that many of the quotes in Amy's books are from "mystics." A "mystic" is someone who strives for a personal relationship with God, a "mystical union" of spirit-to-Spirit unity with God. In medieval times, many of the mystics were Catholics who found refuge in the cloistered shelter of the monasteries. When one monastic order would degenerate, it seemed another would arise to challenge the worldliness of the day. To Protestants and Anabaptists, se

eking for spiritual stimulation from a Catholic seems to be a bit “over the top,” but the fact is that in medieval times the monasteries were places where sincere seekers of Christ ended up—there just weren’t a lot of options in those days!

Names like Richard Rolle, St. Francis of Assisi, Raymund Lull, Madame Guyon and others show up as quotes in her books. It seems clear that Amy was trying to cultivate a spirit-to-Spirit, intimate, personal relationship with Jehovah.

It is unlikely that Amy knew much of Anna Nitschmann, the Moravian, but both Amy and Anna seem to have appreciated the emphasis on mystical union with Christ, and experienced it. And yet both seem to have doubted whether—while union with Christ is essential and wonderful to experience—the “life of Christ” was supposed to be kept cloistered up in a monastery somewhere. Is union with Christ only an individual thing? And is there not more to “church life” than a bunch of individuals who meet occasionally to exhort one another to a closer union with Christ? What about the union one to another? What about a corporal expression of union with Christ?

Two helpers and a few of the rescued girls

By the time Amy had died, more than 1000 girls had been rescued from a life of forced immorality in the temples or other bad circumstances. Note the enlarged earlobe of the helper on the right. Many heavy jewels would have once dangled there. A good number of the rescued girls later stayed on as helpers in the mission. Below, a group of girls rescued from a life of vice enjoy a happy game.

Beyond mysticism

The year was 1916. World War I was raging in Europe, and another war in America was starting to flare up, the social war; atheist Emma Goldman was arrested for promoting birth control.

In the south of India, there was war as well. But this was not fought with guns. At stake was the testimony of God and the souls of men. The soldiers needed grouping. Many young girls had been rescued from the temple service, and some of them had chosen to follow Jesus. Amy wrote:

We had at that time seven Indian girls who were seeking to live a life of unreserved devotion, a life without fences. ... Something was required to unite and fortify them. Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David in the wood and strengthened his hands in God. We needed to meet one another in Jonathan’s wood. We did meet there; we shaped ourselves into a group, and called ourselves “Sisters of the Common Life.”

... The name “Sisters of the Common Life” came from the Brotherhood of Common Life, founded by Gerhard Groot of Holland. The Brothers worked with their hands and gave themselves to the training of “such as sought, apart from the evil about them, a pure and godly life.” Communion with God and laborious work filled their days. They lived a common life, but they lived it with God for men.

“They lived it with God for men.” Finally! The pieces fell into place. A sisterhood of those who were dead to this world, but alive to God, showing the life of Christ to the world about them by a united service to the poor and needy. Yes, mystical union with God ... but more! That “mystic union” was also one with another! Service—united, heartfelt, joyful, and downright practical “doing good,” just like the Master who “went about doing good.” Amy expressed it this way:

We were still learning how to take our towel; and when we found the translation, “Put on the apron of humility to serve one another,” (1 Pe. 5:5) we wondered if the apostle, as he wrote, thought of that day when the Lord of lords took a towel and fastened it on himself like an apron.

Amy felt like most of the teaching about Mary and Martha is wrong. Jesus did not reprove Martha’s service, but her fussing. Serving others is spiritual.

The little group of sisters met regularly to read the Bible and the spiritual writings of others. Amy summed up the goal: “to be spiritually ready to go all lengths with their Lord.” This meant practical “going.” So much so that the sisters had the reputation, when a task needed done, of “Ask her, she is a Sister of the Common Life. She will do it.” And promotion? That word “means more work, harder work.”

A sort of “Confession of Faith” was drawn up, which between 20 and 30 of the Dohnavur girls ended up subscribing to as time went on:

My Vow.

Whatsoever Thou sayest unto me, by Thy grace I will do it.

My Constraint.

Thy love, O Christ, my Lord.

My Confidence.

Thou art able to keep that which I have committed unto Thee.

My Joy.

To do Thy will, O God.

My Discipline.

That which I would not choose, but which Thy love appoints.

My Prayer.

Conform my will to Thine.

My Motto.

Love to live; Live to love.

My Portion.

The Lord is the portion of my inheritance.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee more faithfully; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not seek for rest; to labor and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do Thy will, O Lord our God.

These three graphs represent Amy’s stages in life as she advanced in her walk.

The first one is nominalism. In a nominal church, there are sometimes—but not always—a few people who have a vital relationship with God. The rest of the congregation goes through the motions of “church,” usually seeing “church” as an obligation or a great way to have social interaction with friends and/or family.

Next is revivalism. The goal of revivalism is to bring each individual into a vital relationship with God. Each man or woman is expected to have a personal relationship with Christ. These congregations definitely have a zeal level that exceeds nominalism, and are usually very evangelistic and missions-minded. The Keswick movement that Amy associated with would be a good example of revivalism.

And the third? The last graph represents what we will call koinonia. Koinonia is the Greek word that is translated as “fellowship” or “communion.” The German word “Gemeinschaft” would fit it well. But how does this graph differ from the second one?

In a koinonia church, each individual has his/her own relationship with God. But as you notice, this fellowship also extends through the body horizontally. And the relationship with God of each individual is also intimately tied to the relationship of the rest with God. The individual then experiences fellowship with God in conjunction with, and through, the body. Individualism is abolished.

Koinonia is experienced in both spiritual and material ways. Spiritual gifts and edification flow freely among the believers, as well as material sharing one with another. If one member fails, he/she is intimately tied to the rest and is supported, and cannot so easily “drop out of the scene” as in the middle graph.

George Whitefield saw hundreds and thousands of conversions in his evangelistic campaigns. But he lamented that his

converts were "like a rope made out of sand." They were simply individuals who did not adhere one to another. Thus his preaching in the American colonies had little results as far as establishing enduring congregations.

Amy Carmichael and the Sisters of the Common Life achieved the close community represented by the last graph. Although Amy probably never read many Anabaptist writings—they were not available in English in her locality—she achieved the koinonia that early Anabaptism preached and strove for. In the words of one Anabaptist, "One cannot go to heaven unless he goes with his brother." The life of Christ cannot be manifested in the body, if there is no body!

May the koinonia of the saints be with you all! ~

Dohnavur Fellowship

As time went on, various situations with mission organizations pressured Amy into breaking all official ties with the European organizations that had originally sent her and her helpers to India. From that point on, Dohnavur was like a family. Whatever came in to support the work was used as needed, where needed. Clinging to her early resolve to never ask or hint for funds, the work among the temple girls—which numbered over a total of a thousand rescued by the time Amy died—was financed solely on unsolicited donations and hard work by Amy and her helpers. Amy acknowledged that the stark "unromantic" realities of her mission kept many young missionaries from joining Dohnavur Fellowship. After all, washing the dirty diapers of a dozen babies, every day, does not appeal to many prospective missionaries.

Amy never recruited help from the USA. Her reasons were twofold: 1. She did not know of anyone in the USA whom she could trust with the vetting process for candidates to her mission. 2. She said Americans were not ready for such deep commitments as were required for the Dohnavur Fellowship. Obviously, this generalization does not fit every individual in North America. But she seems to have understood that the American infatuation with personal rights was a real hindrance to Holy Ghost fellowship. "My rights," entertainment, and the whole spirit behind capitalism clash with the foundation on which Dohnavur was constructed.

Amy recounted the time that one helper suddenly showed up with a Bible in her hand, and "with her church-going smile" announced to Amy that she was taking the opportunity to spend an hour or two "doing the Lord's work." She left to attend chapel services in the village... and never came back.

At another time, Amy received a letter stating that the writer "had no interest in anything but evangelistic work." Amy's response? "Well," wrote Amy:

One can't save and then pitchfork souls into Heaven (there are times I heartily wish we could). And, as for buildings: souls (in India at least) are more or less securely fastened to bodies. Bodies can't be left to lie about in the open... What then is to be done?

Amy did what needed to be done. She shared the truths that would save the soul, and she took in the girls that needed a shelter over their bodies and built them a house. Sometimes that meant her own tired hands stacking the bricks.

Living it out

About a decade before the Sisters of the Common Life materialized, Amy had written:

Sometimes I wonder if God will ever give me a comrade, who will be such a comrade: utterly other-worldly, utterly single-hearted, utterly consumed. Don't think I mean that I am myself! I fall far short of my own standards. But this is what I want to be, and that is what we must be if we are to stand the strain and conquer.

From nominalism, to revivalism, to mysticism, to Sisters of the Common Life; thus Amy Carmichael grew in her walk with God. While Dohnavur Fellowship was not perfect, Amy did find the answers to those nagging questions in her earlier life. The one in Japan: Can missionaries love one another and manifest the life of Christ to the society around them?

Yes! Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-35 became a reality in Dohnavur. Even before the Sisters of the Common Life came into being, Amy's mother visited India and wrote the following astounding words:

An atmosphere of love and obedience pervades the compound, and in this large family of over thirty, varying in ages from 34 years to a babe of nine months, I have not seen an angry look, or heard an impatient word. A set of more loving, u

selfish women and girls and children could not easily be found. The secret, I think, is that everything great and small of all kinds is done for God, and to please Him, and in the consciousness that Jesus is present, and that He may come today to take them to Himself.

Enough said!

Summary

At 61 years of age, Amy stepped into an outhouse in which the hole had been misplaced towards the front of the building, instead of toward the rear. The resulting fall sent her to convalescence for a few weeks.

Or so everyone thought.

She would never fully recover. In fact, for the next 20 years she was for the most part bedridden. But she continued her good works, doing a lot of writing—books, letters, and little notes to her girls and helpers. On January 18, 1951, Amy slipped off into her final rest. The work at Dohnavur continues to this day, albeit with natural changes.

This little article can in no way cover all the aspects of Amy's life and spiritual journey. But my hope in sharing it is to catch the general course of her life—always stretching herself beyond her present experience and that of those around her.

The end result was a fellowship of sisters that embodied the call of the kingdom of God: a group of people that devoted themselves to very purposeful good, a testimony that Christ can change an individual and a group. Fellowship with God, and fellowship one with another. And perhaps the latter—genuine fellowship one with another—is what will astound the world more than an individual relationship with God.

Can missionaries love one another? Can the life of Christ be made manifest in a whole body of believers, and not just an individual here and there? Can a Japanese Buddhist or an Indian Hindu—or a North American drug dealer—look at the church and see a manifestation of the character of Jesus?

Amy Carmichael and the Sisters of the Common Life proved it so!

~Mike Atnip

NOTE: The drawing with the title is based on a photograph of Amy when she was 57 years old, in 1925.

European custom was to wear black for a certain length of time after a death in the family, as a sign of mourning.

Her brothers had all immigrated to America and South Africa.

Dohnavur Fellowship, which she was basically responsible for shaping.

And even then, her autobiography was not intended for general publication, but for the Dohnavur Fellowship only.

In the 1800s in the USA, it was known that a woman could be arrested for public indecency if she showed her ankles in public (at least in one town). I am not saying that it needs to be that way, but it goes to show how far our society has slipped.

She had what was called "Japanese Head," which I am not able to find information on. In another place, she called it "acute neuralgia." Neuralgia is a condition in which the nerves send pain signals to the brain when in fact there is nothing causing pain. In short, the person feels pain for no known reason. In any case, strong sunshine on her head worsened her condition, and she was known to faint, and suffered physical weakness for many months.

The mission she was with when the preceding incident occurred was not a "Keswick" mission, but the Keswick movement had sent her.

The story of Anna coming up soon in The Heartbeat of the Remnant, Lord willing!

Referring to washing feet, but not as a mere “ordinance,” but rather a way of life.

Although the majority were Indian sisters, a few Europeans joined the “Sisters of the Common Life.”