

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Amy Carmichael's Work Goes On

Some of you have read *A Chance to Die*, my biography of Amy Carmichael, Irish missionary to India, whose forty books have so deeply influenced my own spiritual life ever since I was fourteen. It was my hope that by introducing her to a new generation who did not know her books, they would be read and reread. (Thirteen of them, every one a spiritual classic, are available from the Christian Literature Crusade, Ft. Washington PA 19034).

People sometimes ask me to suggest a mission to which they may send funds. When I suggest the Dohnavur Fellowship which Miss Carmichael founded, they are surprised to know it still goes on. It does indeed. In a village in south India a family of nearly five hundred steadily carries on its life and work of rescue and outreach, begun ninety years ago. Baby girls who would otherwise be abandoned or killed, are taken in, loved, cared for and educated. The staff is entirely Indian now, the last foreigner having recently retired. For some the work involves day and night care of small babies; for others, mothering a group of girls and being responsible for other work during school hours, such as teaching, sewing, office work, etc. There are sixteen cottages where the girls live in mixed age groups, mothered by "Accals" (older sisters). Amy loved her children dearly and taught them to welcome difficulties and to "count it all joy" to put selfish aims aside and give themselves to helping others.

In preparation for writing the biography Lars and I spent nine unforgettable days in Dohnavur, visiting the bungalows and nurseries, the school rooms and kitchens (where curries are prepared and enormous vats of rice are cooked daily over wood fires), the sewing rooms where all the children's clothes are made, the home for the handicapped where they make mats, boxes, and brushes, the Place of Lovingkindness where the severely mentally handicapped are cared for, the retirement compound, and the hospital, staffed mainly

by those who grew up in Dohnavur, where loving care, shown to all regardless of caste or creed, opens the way for a spoken witness to the faith which motivates the Fellowship—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. We saw the farms, gardens, dairy, paddy fields, and workshops where carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons are employed. We watched one of Amy's "babies," now in her eighties, lettering wooden plaques with Scripture verses. She made one for me which is now above our big window that overlooks the ocean: "The sea is His and He made it."

We felt that we had moved back a thousand years in time. Two old ladies were sitting on the floor sifting rice by hand (about a ton per week, I think it was). Others were weaving cloth on hand looms. We were given a ride in a bullock cart, the commonest method of transportation there. We stayed in a lovely little bungalow with a bathroom, which means you dip water from a great brass pot, stand in a declivity in the floor and pour it over you. The toilet was a sort of box with a bucket inside. The children sit on tile floors in school and sleep on straw mats on tile floors which are kept beautifully polished. Little girls wear brightly colored dresses and often have flowers in their hair. As they grow up they graduate to skirts and blouses, then to the loveliest of womanly garments, the sari. All but some of the older women go barefoot. It was obvious that money was treated very wisely, very carefully, very thankfully.

All family members work without salary. They have a small allowance for clothing and personal needs. The Fellowship counts on the Heavenly Father to send the money needed for all expenses. His love in the hearts of His children in many parts of the world has prompted them to send their gifts. Through ninety years that love has never failed to supply. All needs have been met without a single appeal for funds ever having been made. Neither I nor anyone else is ever authorized to make an appeal. This sounds perilously close to that, but I *know* some of you would be writing to me to say, "But I WANT to send something! Whom do I send it to?" Answer: U.S. funds may be sent to Dohnavur Fellowship c/o Mrs. Charles Schwartz, 3260 SW 20th St., Miami FL 33145. In the U.K. the address is Dohnavur Fellowship, 15 Elm Drive, North Harrow, Middlesex HA2 7BS.

Two Views

One morning I received an article from a Christian magazine, written by a consulting physician at a well-known Christian clinic, entitled "Learning to Love Yourself," and, ironically, in the same mail came *Newsweek's* cover story, "The Curse of Self-Esteem."

I said, "Well." (That's a byword from my sister-in-law's family. When they think it best not to say what they're really thinking, but need to say *something*, they've found this useful: *I said, "Well."*)

So I said, "Well."

The doctor's suggestions for improving your self-esteem included these: Praise yourself. Speak up for yourself. Believe in yourself. Be proud of yourself. Express total, unconditional acceptance for where you are at this moment.

Newsweek says, "If you're like most Americans, chances are you were at risk for low self-esteem. Sure, you felt bad at your kids' school's Career Day when you were the only parent who didn't own his own company. But unless your family psychometrician had administered a Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory or the Kaplan Self-Derogation Scale you probably never imagined that a negative self-image might be holding you back in life. You just thought you were no good.

"But now you know that there are no bad people, only people who think badly of themselves."

"Aha," said I.

Then *Newsweek* gives us a few pithy quotes. Mark Twain: "Deep down in his heart no man much respects himself." Leo Tolstoy: "I am always with myself and it is I who am my tormentor." Goethe: "I do not know myself and God forbid that I should." And H.L. Mencken: "Self-respect—the secure feeling that no one, as yet, is suspicious."

To all of which I said, "Hear, hear."

Then I said, "*Selah.*"

As I paused and pondered I bethought me of the boy king Uzziah who, taking the throne at sixteen made such a good start at obeying God and was "greatly helped until he became powerful.... His pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God," (2 Chr 26:15-16) and died a leper, excluded from the temple of the Lord. It was at the time of that ignominious death that the prophet Isaiah received his commission from God, for which he was prepared first by a vision of the Lord Himself, high and exalted. The very

doorposts shook at the sound of the voices of the seraphim, "*Holy, holy, holy,*" and the prophet, in that awful revelation of the holiness of God, was given an instant and terrible self-revelation which wrenched from him the cry, "Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips... and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Is 6:5).

That self of which the conscious image (of an *honest* man) is not merely "low" or "poor" but twisted, maimed, tortured, ruined—can it find wholeness and healing by sweet affirmation? It took fire from God's altar to cleanse Isaiah's lips. It took the total immolation of the Lamb to take away the sin of the world. Was that sacrifice really necessary? Is the cross obsolete?

"Beware of false prophets," Jesus warned (Mt 7:15). "If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24 JBP). Can we manage to juggle the building of a stronger self-image while we fulfill those three conditions of discipleship?

"Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for My sake, he will find his true self" (Mt 16:25 NEB). Who can forget about his own safety and allow himself to be lost while at one and the same time striving to build a stronger self-image? Sounds like a serious conflict of interest, doesn't it?

I know of nothing more agitating to the soul, nothing that so unsettles and disquiets, as the contemplation of the self. If I succeed in improving my self-image by minimizing my faults, I may find the peace that the world can give, but I will end up in spiritual turmoil. The peace of the penitent spirit is "very low in its own eyes, and therefore not unsettled" (Janet Erskine Stuart).

Those who follow the Lamb leave self behind, and "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24).

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A Girls' Study Group

My friend Mary Hampson of Charleston SC had an idea which other young (or old!) women might wish to consider—a “little workshop/Bible study with a handful of girls, to walk them through your book, *Passion and Purity*, using Joyce Holmes' guide*—it's wonderful! Sound good to you? I'm a bit nervous. These are my concerns and prayer requests:

1. that this is actually *God's* work, not my fleshly enthusiasm alone.
2. that I will actually be able to attract these girls in a real way (note: many of their mothers are thrilled with the idea, but the girls are reluctant).
3. that, assuming the girls even show up, they will be *truly committed* and do the very minimal work it will require. This thing's not for wimps, you know! I just want your message to spring out at them and grab them by the throat, like it did for me.

Mary told me the girls showed up, all right. Word got around, and some who claimed to be atheists asked to come so they could *refute* Mary's teaching. Perhaps they were afraid it might be dangerous. It would be—for *them*. C.S. Lewis said: “An atheist can't be too careful what he reads” because it might be true.

* Available for \$8 from Mrs. Joyce Holmes, 216 NE Azalea Dr., Corvallis OR 97330.

Recommended Reading

Margaret Clarkson: *Susie's Babies*, the best little book I've ever seen on “the facts of life” for children. Margaret tells me she wrote it for her own seventh and eighth graders (a good many years ago). Nowadays it probably should be given to younger children, in view of the sorts of things they're informed about by their friends. “Susie” was a hamster (maybe a gerbil—my copy is gone and Margaret can't recall which it was), a classroom pet, who produced babies, and thus taught the children many wonderful things, which lead into a clear and beautiful explanation of human sexuality. (Newly reprinted by Eerdmans, should be available from your bookstore. \$8.95)

Toys and Theology

My granddaughters were playing with toy penguins. Valerie, fixing breakfast, overheard Evangeline, three, say to Colleen, five: “God says in the Bible you have to share penguins.”

Jim, seven, resident theologian: “No, Evangeline, God says you have to share, but He *doesn't* say you have to share *penguins*.”



A Sickly Appetite for Sympathy

An interviewer said to me, “It's very important to share our sufferings, don't you think? We need to be willing to be vulnerable.” The truth is that we *are* vulnerable, all of us, willing or not. Does a true Christian's willingness to be vulnerable mean that he ought to talk about his wounds? Sometimes this may be helpful to *others*, as it was when the apostle Paul told of that “messenger of Satan,” the thorn (one translation has “a sharp physical pain”), for he learned a priceless lesson to pass on to the rest of us: grace is always supplied in the exact measure needed.

God in His tender mercy often sends a comforter in human form, and for that we can be grateful. It does seem to me, however, that there is far too much gratuitous “sharing” of miseries in today's self-preoccupied world. Misery does love company, but *company* loves cheerfulness a whole lot more. Would it not usually be better to keep the miseries to ourselves and God, instead of dragging others into the fog of our depression? Why cloud their day? The sun might shine through much sooner if we spoke only with God about it. He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”—perfectly touched, perfectly understanding, and perfectly able to lift us up. No one else is so qualified.

We've all had the experience of finding ourselves weary and heavy-laden after hearing somebody's tale of woe. Frederick W. Faber writes of “the littleness and the meanness of that sickly appetite for sympathy, which will not let us keep our sorrows to ourselves!”

“Jesus Christ our Lord... died for us, so that whether we are ‘awake’ or ‘asleep’ we share his life. So go on cheering and strengthening each other with thoughts like these” (1 Thes 5:11 JBP).

Quietness before God

Do you try to find a little quiet space in the day when you come before the Lord in complete emptiness, so that His holy presence can fill your heart and calm your spirit? What peace it is to let fall before Him everything earthly, those things which worry and press so insistently for our attention, and then, quite simply, to offer up our hearts in loving adoration, trying to focus steadily on *Him*, His beauty and majesty, His merciful tenderness and changeless care for His own. To do this is to find things wonderfully simplified. The "look" of them is surprisingly altered. What weighed heavily on our minds diminishes to featherweight in His presence. Since all great concerns, both ours and those of the people we love, belong to Him who made us, we may turn them explicitly over to Him, not as a careless ridding ourselves of them, but committing them to the hands in which we can be sure they are safe. This relinquishment assigns things to their proper places, and we are helped to see them then in God's view—a very different perspective from our own.

Keep in Touch

Are you moving? Getting married? Leaving school? *Don't forget to send us your change of address.* The post office DOES NOT FORWARD third class mail like the Newsletter. *Please remove your address label below and send it with your new address to:* The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, Post Office Box 7711, Ann Arbor, MI 48107.

Prayer

Let's pray for each other what Epaphras prayed constantly and earnestly for the Colossian Christians: that we may become mature Christians, and may fulfill God's will for us (Col 4:12 JBP).

Travel Schedule July–October 1992

July 16 Downey, CA; Calvary Chapel; Karyn Johnson, (213) 803-5631.

July 17 Laguna Niguel, CA; Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church; Cathryn Ritchie, (714) 380-1084.

July 17-18 Sun Valley, CA; Grace Community Church; (818) 782-5920 or Carolyn Maguire, (818) 886-0219. (This had been scheduled for May 1-2, but the L.A. riots forced cancellation.)

August 21-22 Fayetteville, AR; women's retreat; Pam Carlson, (501) 756-0535.

August 25-27 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

September 11 Raymond, NH; Fellowship in Christ; (603) 895-9447.

September 25-27 Atlanta, GA; PCA Women in the Church; Marriott Hotel, Susan Hunt, 1852 Century Pl. Suite 101 (sold out).

October 2-4 Philadelphia Tenth Presbyterian Church (City Light Mtg., Women's Day, Couples' Class, Tenth College Union); (215) 735-7688.

October 15-17 Portland OR and Seattle, WA; area radio rallies; Linda Meyers, 1-800-759-6655.

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