



A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael

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A Chance to Die is a vibrant portrayal of Amy Carmichael, an Irish missionary and writer who spent fifty-three years in south India without furlough. There she became known as "Amma," or "mother," as she founded the Dohnavur Fellowship, a refuge for underprivileged children. Amy's life of obedience and courage stands as a model for all who claim the name of Christ. She was a woman with desires and dreams, faults and fears, who gave her life unconditionally to serve her Master. Bringing Amma to life through inspiring photos and compelling biographical narrative, Elisabeth Elliot urges readers to examine the depths of their own commitment to Christ.

A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael Details

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From Reader Review A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael for online ebook

Natalie Vellacott says

This is the first book I have read about the life and work of Amy Carmichael and I have to say that I was surprised by the content. I feel conflicted as to how to review and rate this book as there were so many positive and negative aspects.

Amy believed she was called to China but subsequently ended up in India where she ministered for 55 years--with over a decade spent as a "shut-in" after an accident. Evangelism had been her focus and I found myself admiring her singlemindedness and lack of interest in material things or worldly distractions. She knew from a young age that she would remain single for the Kingdom. However, shortly into her work in India she became horrified by the plight of a number of children who were used for unmentionable acts at the various local temples--she set about rescuing them. She effectively created an organisation to house these children but referred to it as a "family." She employed staff to help her--the organisation grew and expanded to form "Dohnavur," which still exists as a Christian charity today.

I appreciated Amy's love for those around her and her determination in her work and ministry. Also her faithfulness in prayer and reliance on the Lord in all matters. She lived by faith financially--refusing to even mention needs until they had been provided for after prayer. There are many examples in this book of incredible provision just at the right time and down to the last penny. God obviously had His hand on her ministry and bore with her failings as He does with all of us.

However, I struggled with a number of aspects in her work. She chose to be single for the Kingdom as she believed that God was leading her to do that but then effectively created a single-parent family due to the needs she saw in India. It comes across in the book as if she remained single partly due to her belief that men were somehow inferior spiritually--she believed that some of the passages in the NT about women in the church don't apply to us today. She didn't appear to value the marriage bond especially highly discouraging her staff from marrying and in some cases allowing/causing separation between husband/wife/children for long periods for the sake of the work. One of her long term male workers became conflicted when his wife was asking him to return to England with her and the children and Amy was telling him he should stay for the sake of the life-long call he had received to the work.

Amy took the role of spiritual leader of this large organisation and local Indian men and foreign workers were therefore in submission to her. She ruled over small details almost as an autocrat at times. She did appoint men to preach and teach for seasons but the lines of authority were blurred. She regularly speaks of "words from the Lord" and is always 100% convinced that the leading she thinks she has received is correct. But she has no accountability and doesn't seem to seek advice from anybody. It's Amy's way or the highway.

The way Dohnavur operated has a "cult-like" feel to it, although clearly it was not as they were following the Bible. But they were cut off from the outside world and insulated/sheltered from any and everything worldly. The Bible makes it clear that we should be in the world but not of it. I think changes were made to this aspect of the ministry in Amy's latter years and she endorsed the changes which can only be a positive thing.

I think Amy would've benefitted from friends who were her spiritual/intellectual equals to keep her independent spirit in check at times. She chose not to allow a husband to lead her in that way and it seems that others wouldn't dare to stand up to her--those that did were listened to but largely ignored. Amy was in

my view too reliant on her own spiritual discernment.

Having said these things, I think we can all learn from her life, work and mistakes. It is interesting that I didn't have the same reservations about Gladys Aylward whose life and work had a similar independence--maybe because she stuck to her original calling with evangelism as her main focus rather than rescuing and parenting needy children. That said, Amy's purpose in doing so was to bring the Gospel to them. God did bless Amy's ministry and provided for her--she was sincerely doing what she felt He was calling her to do. The area of India was impacted for the Gospel in a big way and the work continues long after her death.

I would recommend this book.

Kelly says

“She felt keenly her own helplessness, awkwardness, and ignorance, and begged her friends at home to pray. ... She deplored the tendency she found in herself to do more talking and writing about praying than actual praying. She lacked practice, she wrote, so it was a small wonder she was an infant in prayer speech. Would her friends at home help? Would they, when they wakened in the night or were busy at work and her name flashed into mind, would they recognize it as God’s telegram to remind them to pray? Would they telegraph back? ‘Don’t let a moment slip. More may hang upon your instant yielding than you know or shall know till the great Then comes.’” (Pg. 85)

Amy Carmichael’s Confession of Love.

“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 mine inheritance.”

“Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to 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.” (Pg. 241-242).

“A sovereign God, however, works through flawed human instruments to whom He has given the power of choice. Sometimes the choices are mistaken. Divine sovereignty permits those mistakes.” (Pg. 266).

Auntie says

In a time of male domination in the Victorian Era, Amy Carmichael was called by God to the Missions field. As Elizabeth Elliot tells the story, Amy determined to follow her Lord in spite of many issues that would not qualify her for service abroad. She had chronic pain and was not a particularly strong woman in sense of physical health. She found learning foreign languages difficult, and found conflict resolution very distasteful. She wasn't a team player, things needed to be her way, period. Men who worked for her found it quite hard.

But the task that she found herself doing, required an iron will, strict determination, and a long view of her ministry which did last her entire lifetime. In a personality assessment based on animal types (re: Smalley and Trent's The Treasure Tree) she would have been a lion.

She became aware of the practice in India, of a way that people got rid of their unwanted children and babies. They were donated to the local Hindu temple for use in temple worship, specifically prostitution euphemistically termed "Married to the god". Never soliciting funds for this outreach, people in England learned of her desire to found a safe haven for these children. She always asked for prayer, and in addition to prayer, her faithful friends sent money. This book recounts over and over again, the way God provided for her at every level of need. Amy never craved attention, but felt bound to write to communicate to others the conditions she found daily that gave her hope, gave her courage and more determination. She wrote volumes!

I found one chapter heading quite illuminating, "Love is not a Sentiment". She expressed her love for all who worked with her, through her heartfelt commitment to them. She was fond of sending notes of love and encouragement to those on the Center grounds as well as those who were expressing an interest in coming from England to serve. She left notes for key people in her life that were to be opened after her death. A marvelous comfort! The children who grew up at the Center loved her. Her name was "Amma" or Mother.

I'm glad to have finally read this book, even though a lot of the way she did things on the field have changed...in a good way.

Temple prostitution was outlawed in India. Amy showed the value of an individual life through her faith. It was a stark contrast to the spiritual darkness that surrounded the Center.

Rod says

Wow, I was so excited to read about this lady. What an amazing person.

I first heard about her in Warren W. Wiersbe's book: 50 People Every Christian Should Know. Probably the greatest collection of human beings ever assembled in one book. Amy's small bio just blew me away - A woman who ended up in India saving small children from the abuses of Indian culture and Temple Prostitution. It appeared that Amy feared no one - and she made a lot of people angry in the process: I applaud her. She even upset the Church boards who sent her. Indeed - She takes orders from God. :D

This biography by Elliot really shows what Amy Carmichael was made of. She wasn't perfect - but she sure never backed down from a challenge. Her faith in difficult times is endlessly inspiring. She was always careful to live according to God's will. Sure she upset many people, but in dangerous life and death times Amy did her best - her community loved her for it.

She never married, her life was for the children and the community. I hope she is rewarded mightily in Heaven.

I read this book hoping to understand clearly her theology. I'm relieved to say she stuck to God's Word as best she could.

AJ says

Amy's life story starts out a little dry, but when you follow her to India and realize the challenges she had every single day, the story takes you into another world and into the mind and heart of one of the Saints "who from their labors rest; to Thee, by faith, before the world confessed".

mirela Darau says

A truthful description of missionary life, I'd say, since I was used -when it came to missionaries - to think only in terms of miracles, sparkles, intense and interesting life. It captures the prosaic, the long years of learning languages, the tedious days of impossible weather, even the "unfruitfulness" we all have to deal with at one point of our lives. It's an account of a woman with weaknesses, sternness, though with a strong character, belief, determination. I find it extremely balanced!!

I remember at one point, I was thinking why would someone write about such uninteresting facts like a sickening journey or of common days (after days after days), but realized in the end, it is this together with patience and motivation that builds up character. Nonetheless I still find it unexplainable how this very common woman nearly 100 years ago, could build up and lead till her later 80s and despite all the sickness, a community such as the DF... And to think she also had a low self-esteem, almost never allowed to be photographed and was in poor health from her youth.

love the attitude: *All this was part of going forth unto a land I knew not, and everything was just right, and if things went wrong it was so much the more fun* (pg.68)
the night I sailed for China, March 3, 1893, my life, on the human side, was broken, and it never was mended again. But He has been enough.

interesting to think about: *Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.* pg.55

If I by doing some work which the undiscerning consider 'not spiritual work' I can best help others, and I inwardly rebel, thinking it is the spiritual for which I crave, when in truth it is the interesting and exciting, then I know nothing of Calvary love. pg 183 ->she first heard when she got to Asia, that missionaries don't really get along with each others, so she tried to prove this wrong when it came to her by doing differently...

A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a great thing

talking about long services and sermons: *the human soul should not be drawn like a piece of elastic and held so for too long at a stretch :))* i find again and again that truly godly people are simple and comprising: *the arrangement [of the service in Dohnavur] was according to Amy's eclectic tastes, incorporating some of the silence of Quaker meetings the D.O.M [dear old man:P] had taught her to appreciate, some of the liturgy which she selected from the Anglican service and some of the freedom of the Free ChurchesI'm sure I would have loved it there!*

Manliness is not mere courage, it is the quality of soul which frankly accepts all conditions in human life and makes it a point of honor not to be dismayed or wearied by them

In one of his letters Murray called Amy 'the skipper'. There was no question of her authority. 'Under God there was only one boss and that was Amma', wrote Hugh Evan-Hopkins, who joined the Fellowship later. 'She wouldn't proceed with any course of action until everyone had agreed, but who dare oppose her? We were awed - perhaps excessively so - by her wisdom and experience. She was a remarkable woman, alarming to a raw recruit, with a sort of aura about her.' To another there was nothing of the sort. He spoke of her 'absolute humility. you never felt she was someone superior.'

I like and recognize the concept: *every gift has its story*

...a prayer tower. On its roof are two pointed shafts, symbol of the unity of spiritual and secular in the life of holiness. The men and women of Dohnavur lived a common life, but they lived it with God, for others.

yeah, I also want *the power to ride the waves instead of being submerged by them...*

Did I mention the Dohnavur fellowship was rescuing children from temple prostitution and other abandoned ones and raising them? It started with girls, and later extended to boys as well.

Oh, and Amy has also beautiful poems, actually that's how i first met her:) She was a writer of books, tons of letters and encouraging notes...

Elena Marie says

Probably one of my favorite biographies of all time.

Rebekah says

I could not have said it any better than Jennifer Nelson's review.
Her sentiments are mine, EXACTLY.

Monica says

A wonderful introduction to an amazing Godly woman. A true servant of Christ with much wisdom that we can still benefit from today.

Kathy says

I admire Amy Carmichael's life-long passion to follow Jesus and serve disenfranchised children. In her teens her burden was for factory girls, 'shallies', who were so poor that they couldn't afford hats to wear to church, so they wore shawls over their heads. The ministry grew to over 300 children, and Amy had to secure her own building for the ministry. Amy's first overseas assignment was to Japan for 15 months. She struggled to learn the language and the customs of the Japanese people, but learned the value of living as they lived. God providentially sent her to India where she served for the remainder of her life. She founded Dohnavur Fellowship, a group whose aim was to rescue the temple children. Her life showed amazing perseverance. Over the years the ministry faced immense financial hardships, poor facilities, outbreaks of deadly disease, internal strife, and the constant threat of government intervention. I was convicted by Amy's relentless and risky love for the children. She spent her last twenty years with failing health, often being confined to her bed or a wheel chair. To her last day, she was a writer... notes/letters of encouragement, poems, and over 35 books. May I learn to write so eloquently and faithfully.

He who had led will lead
All through the wilderness
He who hath fed will surely feed...
He who had heard thy cry
Will never close His ear,
He who hath marked thy faintest sigh
Will not forget they tear
He loveth always, faileth never,
So rest on Him Today-forever.

Though I don't agree with all of her choices, I admire her convictions and faithfulness.

Christina Knotts says

Having read this several times before going to India as a missionary myself, I was greatly encouraged in everything about Indian soil.

I tried my hardest to follow in Ms. Carmichael's footsteps. Her faith, above anything, was what I geared towards.

I first read the book at age 12, and then re-read it and re-read it again during preparation for my first trip to India when I was 18. I could NOT wait to get there!

I loved the book - especially from Mrs. Gren's perspective - it was a very enjoyable read... one that I might take up again in the near future!

Although I looked up to her a great deal then, I must say that her inspiration and "almost feministic" ideas toward the other sex were somewhat beneath her. I totally disagree with women missionaries who, in order to serve God to their fullest ability, shun the idea of marriage. That is not how God created it to be! (He gave us emotions and hormones for a reason, even though it IS better-in several ways-to live unmarried.

Libby May says

Sooo...

I got this book from my pastor's wife. She saw my love for kids and wanted me to read this book.

THE BOOK: 3.14 stars. (KELLYN!!! ?) So the book itself isn't bad at all. It's long and had a lot of details and other stuff and yeah. It's really descriptive of Amma (or Amy)'s life and I do highly recommend it if you're like studying her life for school or just for personal reasons. However, this is not an entertainment and took me about 3 months to finish. It was hard to get through more than a chapter at a time because it was almost dry and it was hard to read.

Amma (or Amy) herself: ok so she was ok. I did like her a lot when I first read "Amy of Dohnavur" by Frank L. Houghton (which honestly I preferred a lot more than this book. It's just as informative but shorter and not as hard to read) but some of the more detailed points of her life and the way that the Dohnavur was run under her command as well as her position, some of her beliefs and just her. It wasn't as awesome.

I admire her heart for children for sure, and her absolute dedication to God and continual denial of anything that could possibly be fleshly. I learned a lot about just Christian living in general and I really enjoyed her poetry (which actually rhymes!). However, like I mentioned before, the way she ran the Dohnavur and it's people and the struck ignorant way that she raised her kids came off wrong for me. Also, the way that the people in the Donahue community saw her as a Prophet from God and no matter what she said, still lived asking "Is this what Amma would do?" Sort of placing her as perfect (in fact some of the people interviewed did say she seemed perfect in that they knew she was human but didn't believe she ever did anything wrong). The way people spoke of her and acted around her almost seemed like they were brain washed.

Anyway, I am glad that I read this book because it gave me a more complete view of Amy where I don't love her the way I did before I knew her this way, and it's also super fat and to add it to my bookshelf and say I read it is also awesome.

Thank you for reading!

Annette says

Summary:

The life story of missionary Amy Carmichael. From her childhood, to her missionary work in Japan and India. Elisabeth Elliot's reference material was from previously published books written by Amy Carmichael and the Dohnavur Family.

My Thoughts:

Although I enjoyed reading the story of Amy Carmichael's life. The book is not warm with intimacy in regards to the character of Carmichael. At first sight, it seems Elisabeth Elliot didn't capture or flesh-out the person of Amy Carmichael. However, I believe Carmichael was captured just as she was. She was a private, no-nonsense, serious, devoted, moral, dedicated, persevering, steadfast, faithful, and intelligent person. And these qualities come through in her biography. The entire focus of Carmichael's life was in the mission work entrusted to her by God in India.

I've read remarks that she was against marriage. She was against marriage as far as her own life was concerned. She did think it best to not marry if a person was going to dedicate themselves as she had done. But, she was not against marriage. God had called her to "something different." Her "face" was set "like flint" in her mission. See Isaiah 50:7, Luke 9:51.

A Chance to Die is written chronologically, from birth (1867) and childhood in Ireland, to her "calling," to the first missionary journey to Japan, and her lengthy mission work in India, until death in 1951.

Quotes are often mentioned from Carmichael's books.

Carmichael was a devoted reader of the devotional Daily Light. This book is also quoted from in the book. I'm familiar with this book as I have read from it daily since 1999.

One of the most interesting and sad aspects of the book for me was Carmichael's work with the children in India. The little girls that were given by their parents to the Hindu temple as babies, later grew in to the horrific role of the sex trade. Carmichael worked to find girls (of all ages) willing to leave this life and live in her mission home. In modern times we hear about the sex-trade business affecting children, but this is not something new.

John says

"The devil does not care how many hospitals we build, any more than he cares how many schools and colleges we put up, if only he can pull our ideals down, and sidetrack us on to anything of any sort except the living of holy, loving, humble lives, and the bringing of men, women and children to know our Lord Jesus Christ not only as Savior but as Sovereign Lord.

"Every work undertaken in obedience to a divine command, whether the work be that form of conflict with the powers of darkness that we call prayer, or whether it be the action that follows, leads sooner or later to a new demand on personal devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ."

-- Amy Carmichael, quoted on Page 291 of "A Chance to Die."

"A Chance to Die" is a biography of a remarkable woman written by another remarkable woman.

Author Elisabeth Eliot served as a missionary to the Quichua and Auca Indians of South America for 11 years. They were the same people who had killed her husband, Jim.

Amy Carmichael grew up Irish Presbyterian, and she served as a missionary in South India for the entire first half of the 20th century without taking so much as a furlough.

She didn't particularly have a "heart" for India. Her heart was for following Jesus to reach the lost wherever He took her. That began with brief stints in the slums of English factory cities, Japan, China and Ceylon.

She didn't have a "calling" for the exploited children of South India. But Amy Carmichael couldn't ignore a need once she saw it. When she discovered girls being raised to be temple prostitutes, she started praying for them. When she discovered little boys being similarly exploited, she couldn't turn away from that need, either.

Out of those prayers and her efforts grew the Dohnavur Fellowship, which eventually cared for hundreds of boys and girls and provided a hospital that cared for Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike.

She did this without every communicating needs to anyone, except to God. Numerous instances are cited in

this book in which just enough money arrives to meet a critical need -- God's version of just-in-time delivery. Carmichael wasn't without her critics, and although Elliot clearly is a fan, she doesn't leave out that part of the story. Amy Carmichael, she writes, was no plaster saint. Some thought she played favorites. Some found it impossible to work under her. She also was notoriously camera-shy. This book might include every picture ever taken of Amy Carmichael, and there aren't many.

I can't imagine how she found the time, but Carmichael also was a prolific writer, and her prose was powerful. She also was a poet. I'm in no position to judge how good her poetry was, but much of it seems profound to me.

An excerpt:

"O Savior, stricken for my sin
O God, who gavest Him to grief
O Spirit, who didst woo and win
My troubled soul to speak relief,
O Love revealed at Calvary,
Thy glory lights eternity."

But not all of her poetry was profound. Some of it was written for the amusement of the children, such as this ode to the elephant:

"His great big flat feet pound and pound
With a rumpety -- dumpety -- crumpety sound."

Elisabeth Elliot also is a wonderful writer, and this book clearly was thoroughly, lovingly researched. I referred to Amy Carmichael and Elisabeth Elliot as remarkable women, but it's not that, really. Their lives are testimonies to the remarkable things God can do with ordinary people who are sold out to him.

"A Chance to Die" is inspirational in the best sense of the word -- not in the ooey, gooey feel-good sense, but in the sense of showing the reader that God could do great things with her, or him, too.

Sherry Elmer says

It is a blessing and encouragement to read about a life so fully dedicated to the Lord. Amy Carmichael could have lived very comfortably in England, could have married, had children, but she gave up all of that in order to go to India and spend her life preaching the gospel and rescuing children who were given to temples to serve as prostitutes. "Her great longing was to have a 'single eye' for the glory of God. Whatever might blur the vision God had given her of His work, whatever could distract or deceive or tempt others to seek anything but the Lord Jesus Himself she tried to eliminate. Why waste precious time, painful effort, on lesser things?" (p. 84). This was the goal of her life.

I loved her commitment to keeping Christ as the main attraction. When someone suggested to her that she should offer sewing lessons or some other handiwork classes in order to attract the girls to come, she said, "I would rather have two who came in earnest than a hundred who came to play. We have no time to toy with souls like this. It is not by ceremonial teamaking and flower arranging, not by wool chrysanthemum-making and foreign sewing-learning, but 'by my Spirit, saith the Lord'" (page 84). It is an idea the church today would do well to adopt.

A couple favorite quotes:

“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.”

“Satan is so much more in earnest than we are—he buys up the opportunity while we are wondering how much it will cost.”

“Missionary work in a place where Christ has never been named is sometimes less arduous than in places where, though named, He has not been honored by lives of holy obedience.”

“Amy felt that the world had far too many run-of-the-mill Christians, cool, respectable, satisfied with the usual, the mediocre. Why bother to lay down one's life to multiply the number of those?”
