

THE AUTHOR

Minke de Vries (1929–2013)

BORN TO A DEVOUT Dutch Reformed mother and a convert from Mennonite to Reformed father, Minke de Vries grew up in a world where religion was important.¹ Her father had used skillfully the opportunities provided by Dutch mobilization during World War I to leave carpentry and to become a construction engineer. Her mother was a teacher and joined the Oxford Group movement of Frank Buchman,² which Minke thought improved the family's home life.

When the Germans invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, Minke was only a young girl. World War II, the terror of German occupation and the growing deprivations had a definitive impact on her life and on all the Dutch.³ When food shortages made life tenuous, the family escaped, or so they thought, to the Island of Texel, to the farm of her maternal grandparents. They arrived just in time for the famous uprising of the Georgian troops against the Germans. It became a terrible battle: 565 Georgians, about 800 Germans, and 120 Texel islanders were killed.⁴ At some point, the family farm burned as well. The hatred of the Dutch against the Germans was a feature of Minke's life.

After the war, Minke studied at the University of Leiden, without great enthusiasm. Searching for her way in life, she became involved with the Salvation Army, whose ministry and spirituality she admired. At one point, in her searching for a place in life, she considered joining. Through

1. All of the information in this section, except as noted, comes from two sources: (1) the published interview of Cornuz, *Soeur Minke de Grandchamp*; and, (2) an interview of Minke de Vries with the author, November 2012.

2. On the Oxford Group, see Clark, *The Oxford Group*; Grensted. *What Is the Oxford Group?*

3. Zee, *The Hunger Winter*.

4. Reeuwijk, *Opstand der Georgiërs, Sondermeldung Texel*.

her mother, she had contact with a Christian “healing movement” and participated in “revivalistic efforts” in Leiden and The Hague. Her searching led her to De Hezenberg, a center inspired by the German Lutheran healing evangelist Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880) of Bad Boll. She was also reading Karl Barth (1886–1968) and the Dutch theologian Kornelis Heiko Miskotte (1894–1976).

Through a friend, Minke found her way to the Community of Grandchamp, first as a visitor. Enraptured by what she saw, she returned and began the process which ended with her profession in 1962. Eager to have a positive influence in areas of trouble in the world, she served in “fraternities,” small outposts of the community, in Paris where she worked in a factory, in Algeria, and in Lebanon.

In 1966, Sister Minke was elected assistant to the community’s second Prioress, Mother Marie Bonna-Bornand, who had succeeded Geneviève Micheli, the first Mother of the Community of Grandchamp. In 1970 Sister Minke became its third Prioress. In 1999 she stepped down due to illness and was succeeded by Sister Pierrette Guinchard who had served as Minke’s assistant for several years.

The Fruits of Grace is her story and that of the community! Sister Minke treasured the history of her community, some aspects of which she discusses in detail, others which she does not. She was well aware that the Community of Grandchamp was the project of a family and of a group of women who were testing the social and religious limits for Protestant women in early to mid-twentieth century Switzerland. They were making a place for themselves in a country where they could not yet vote⁵ or serve as clergy or professors of religion. She joined a community that had dared much and had managed to maintain its independence. As its leader she joyfully seized the baton and continued the race.

5. 1971 for national elections; after 1991, all elections.