

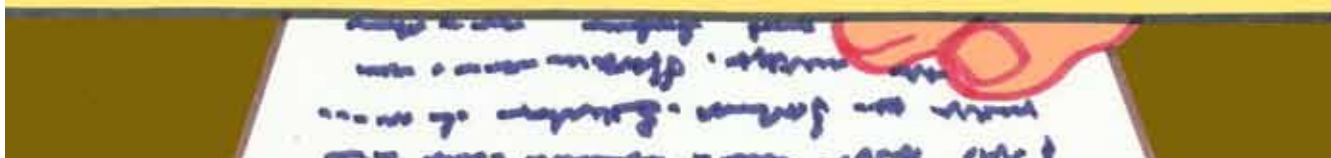


Peter Donders

A Blessed Man

In his own words and those of others

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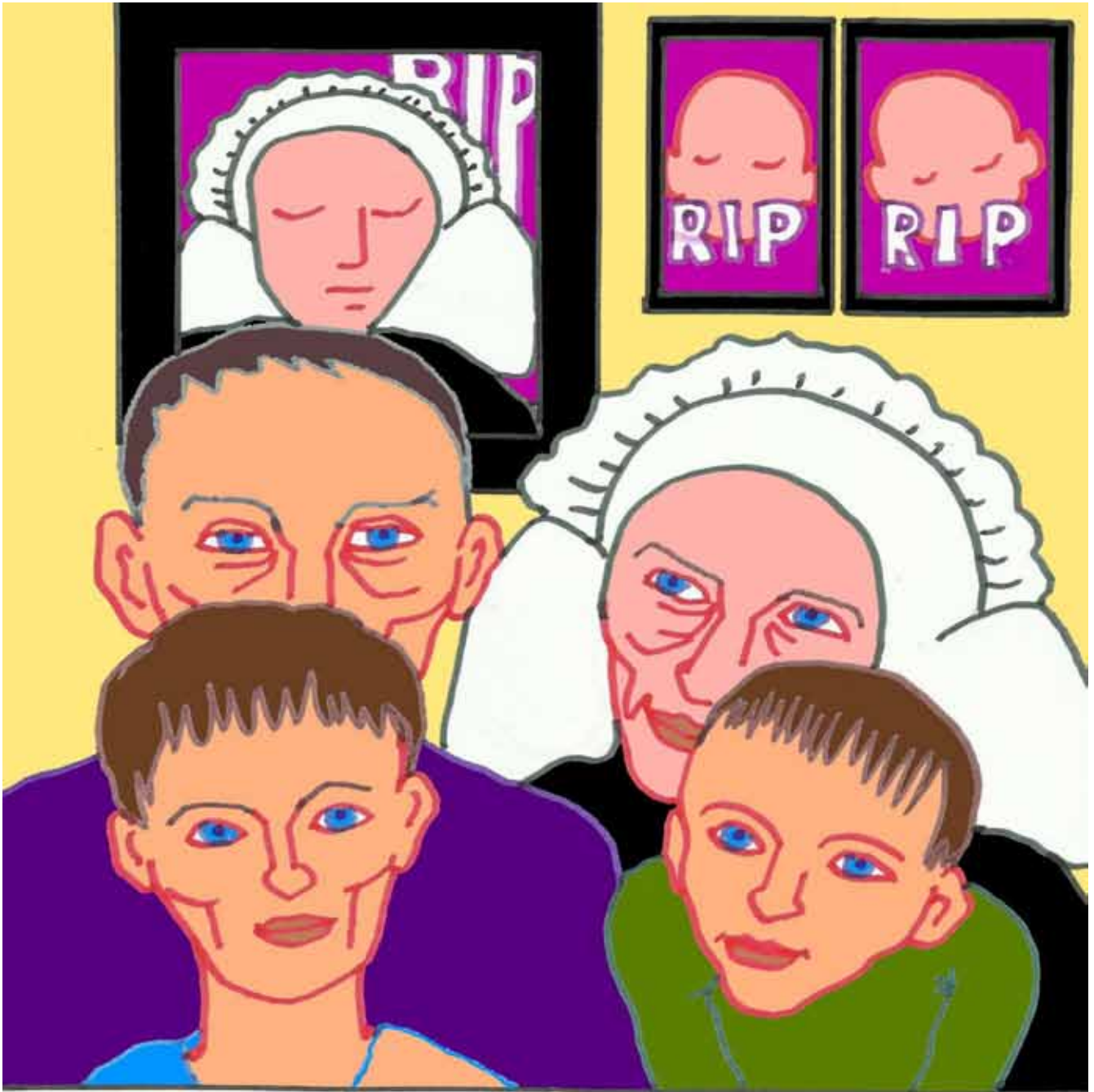
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I was born in Tilburg (on the 27th October) in 1809 and baptised on the same day.



Father - Arnold Donders was a home weaver

Mother - Petronella van den Brekel - died on the 21 st February 1816. Peter was then six years old

Stepmother - Johanna Maria van der Pas, married his father on the 19th May 1817.

Brother - Martin was born with a deformation of the spinal cord in 1811





Peter lived in one of a cluster of poor homes surrounding the main town center. The low damp lands surrounding the city were an unhealthy place.

It (the place where he was born) did not avoid the high mortality rate of the time as we see in Arnold Donders own family: two children lost in infancy; three wives dying at a very early age; Peter and Martin's poor health.





Arnold Donders was a home weaver. A weaver's lot was a poor one....'Entrepreneurs began to make arrangements with individual families, provided them with wool and in turn paid them for the cloth produced from it.

The producers, most of whom did not live in Tilburg, had local agents who organized the operation. The availability of cheap labour and nearby flocks of sheep, allowed for the production of rough, common wool cloth for sale at a much lower cost than what was available from other areas...the production of basic woolen cloth was a mainstay during Donder's lifetime.

This was the commercial context of Pete's early life.



Master Drabbe (teacher of the village school) wrote concerning Peter, 'He was a great help to his father in the weaving. Many times he set to work on his own and when he had prepared the warp, he would run his bare fingers up and down - whether it was warm or freezing... Whenever there was a great deal of work to do, the weaving went on everyday until ten o'clock at night. From then on until the beginning of Lent, it would go on everyday until eleven o'clock and then it would go back to ten o'clock on Holy Thursday. It was not unusual when there was much work to do, for the labour to go on until midnight everyday including Saturday; it would start up again on Sunday night at the same time. At these times however, Peter would send his father and little Martin off to bed and worked on alone as hard as he could.'





Master Drabbe: 'To help his parents make ends meet, he would take on other odd jobs as well. "The poor little drudge", I was told by a old man who knew him, "How hard he had to slave away for his daily bread! I could even see him cutting grass along the roadside and gathering up wood".'

This life was not imposed by insconsiderable or greedy parents. A grandson of Master Drabbe recalled this story from his grandfather. 'It was quite clear that what his father dreaded above all else for his dear boy, was catching a cold. In rainy weather he used to come to school to bring Peter home. He would take him into a forge across the street from the school, have him stand on something, as he held a bag open for him and have him step into it. Then he would wrap him up and carry him home on his shoulder.'





Peter's schooldays were not many. Despite the fact that he was frequently absent because of sickness and work, he only attended school from the time he was seven until he was twelve. At this point, he had to give up schooling because he needed to help with the weaving.

He was considered to be a slow student, but his brother Martin remarked, 'Pete lived very piously...and spent his time working, reading or praying. He read every good book he could lay his hands on from cover to cover.'





There is also the attested fact, that he excelled in learning anything to do with religion, faith or doctrine. He was so capable in these fields that the parish priest asked him to catechise the young children of the parish.



His brother Martin found him a little hard to take at times. He resented the attentions paid his brother because of his dedication and piety. All these kids flocking around Pete struck him as silly and he told his brother so. Later in life, especially after his brother had gone to Surinam, he appreciated him better and came to admit that Pete 'Will certainly have a very high place in heaven'.





One of his pupils, Peter Spijkers, recounted, 'He began by giving out the answers in the catechism, which he made us repeat. He then explained them in his own way and urged us to live up to the lessons we had learned. The children I know best - as well as I - went to his classes eagerly.'

Another woman remarked, 'The children used to listen with attention and in perfect silence to their young teacher. To gain this hearing, he would sometimes produce a few pieces of candy from his pocket to hand out.'

Peter Spijkers: 'All right now! One, two, three, Quiet!'





God was pleased to awaken in me, when I was very young, from the age of five or six, an ardent desire to enter the priestly state to work for the salvation of souls who are so dear to Him. (1)

...I had as strong desire to someday become a priest and although humanly speaking it seemed impossible because my parents were poor, I kept believing that some day I would be a priest (2)



The Good God, to whom I cannot be sufficiently grateful, preserved me from many dangers to which my salvation might have been exposed. He gave me the grace to pray often and a sure, although still imperfect, love and devotion to His Mother Mary, to whom after God I ascribed my vocation to both the priestly and the religious states of life. (2)

By marvellous dispositions of Providence (when I lacked the necessary means to take up the studies and was already twenty two years old), I came to obtain the means to accomplish it in an extraordinary manner. (1)





When I was eighteen, I had to submit to the military service lottery, and I drew a low number. Even here the Good God helped me. How? Since at the time I did not seem to possess a strong constitution and I appeared outwardly unhealthy, I was given a year's postponement by a doctor's advice. This was stretched out for five years until I was declared exempt from military service by the special providence of God.