THE VULNERABILITY OF MISSION*

by David J. Bosch

The Story of Fr Rodrigues

One of the most moving and at the same time disturbing novels of our time is *Silence*, by the Japanese author Shusaku Endo. It is based on the seventeenth century persecution of Christians in Japan. In 1549 Francis Xavier arrived in Japan and started a missionary venture that was astonishingly successful. Within thirty years there was a flourishing community of some 150000 Christians, whose sterling qualities and deep faith inspired in the missionaries the vision of a totally Christian country (Johnston 1976:3). It was »the Christian century in Japan« (Boxer 1967). Towards the end of the sixteenth century, however, opposition began to set in, culminating in the edict of expulsion of the missionaries in 1614. The purpose of the edict was the total eradication of Christianity from Japan. Some missionaries went underground, desperately trying to continue ministering to their Japanese converts. C.R. Boxer claims that the gruesome persecution that followed has been »unsurpassed in the long and painful history of martyrdom« both as regards the infamous brutality of methods used to exterminate the Christians and the heroic constancy of the sufferers (Boxer 1967:336f).

Those who were not executed were given the opportunity to apostatise. Often this took the form of placing the *fumie* before would-be apostates — a bronze image of Christ mounted in a wooden frame. All that was expected of them was to trample on Christ's face, which would then be taken as proof of their having renounced the Christian faith.

Missionaries, too, were arrested and tortured, usually by being suspended upside down in a pit filled with excreta and other filth, which quickly proved to be the most effective means of inducing apostasy. Still, for sixteen years no missionary apostatised. And then the blow fell. In October 1633 Christovao Ferreira, the Portuguese Provincial and acknowledged leader of the Catholic mission in Japan, after six hours in the pit, gave the signal that he was ready to recant (Boxer 1967:353).

Endo's story is not about Ferreira, however, but about Sebastian Rodrigues, one of Ferreira's former students in Lisbon. With two colleagues he left for Japan to carry on the underground apostolate and also to atone for the apostasy of Ferreira which had so wounded the honour of the Church (Endo 1976:25).

Eventually Rodrigues, too, was captured and tortured. And much of Endo's novel deals with his ordeal and his refusal to renounce the faith. For many months he refused. All

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along he prayed fervently, prayed to God for guidance, for a clear direction to go. But there was only silence, as though God did not hear him, or was dead and did not exist. Then, one evening, the interpreter said confidently, »›Tonight you will certainly apostatise‹«. To Rodrigues this sounded like the words addressed to Peter: »›Tonight, before the cock crows you will deny me thrice‹« (Endo 1976:261).

From where he lay, this fateful night, he could hear a ceaseless snoring, as of somebody sleeping in a drunken stupor. Late that night, as if to add insult to injury, the interpreter returned with Ferreira, who had meanwhile assumed a Japanese name. And it was Ferreira who told him, »›That's not snoring. That is the moaning of Christians hanging in the pit‹« (Endo 1976:263). Then Ferreira explained why he himself had apostatised. It was not because of being suspended in the pit, he said, but because »›... I was put in here and heard the voices of those people for whom God did nothing. God did not do a single thing. I prayed with all my strength; but God did nothing‹« (Endo 1976:265f). And now once again, with Fr Rodrigues in the same cell, God was doing nothing for those suspended in the pit. Then the official told Rodrigues, »If you apostatise, they will immediately be rescued«. Rodrigues asked, »But why don't they apostatise?« And the official laughed as he answered, »›They have already apostatised many times. But as long as you don't apostatise these peasants cannot be saved‹« (Endo 1976:267). And, of course, all he had to do was to trample the fumie, already trampled by thousands of Japanese apostates. It was as simple as that! This was the devilishness of the scheme: While God remained silent he himself would save not only his own skin, but also the lives of many Japanese Christians!

It was this silence of God that has given Endo's novel its title — the silence of a God, a Christ, who did not respond to prayers or to torture. Still, in the end the silence was broken. Christ did speak to Rodrigues — not, however, the beautiful, haloed, and serene Christ of his devotions, but the Christ of the twisted and dented fumie, the Christ whose face had been distorted by many feet, the concave, ugly Christ, the trampled-upon and suffering Christ. And what this Christ was saying to the priest shocked him to the marrow, »›Trample, trample! ... It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross‹« (Endo 1976:271). And the novelist writes: »The priest placed his foot on the fumie. Dawn broke. And far in the distance the cock crew« (Endo 1976:271).

The Blood of the Martyrs

I shall return to the story of Fr Rodrigues, for certainly there is more here than meets the eye. For the moment, however, I wish to pursue another point. The growth of Christianity was severely impeded by the persecutions in Japan, but not extinguished. The Christians went into hiding until Japan was reopened in 1865, for more than two centuries clinging tenaciously to a faith that ruthless vigilance could not stamp out (Johnston 1975:11f). What happened, then, was another confirmation of the famous saying of Tertullian, the second century North African theologian: »Semen est sanguis Christianorum« (freely translated: »the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church«). What happened

in Japan has happened in thousands of other places, throughout two millennia of Christian history. True church growth, it would seem, takes place not where Christians call the shots, but where they suffer and perform their mission in weakness. A contemporary case in point is China. Even if China has, since 1989, again begun to wrap itself up in its own cocoon, we now know that a remarkable degree of growth had taken place in the Chinese church during the years of persecution and of the Cultural Revolution. In the wake of the Communist takeover in 1949 the work of *all* foreign missionaries was terminated. There was widespread despair over what was termed the missionary »débâcle« in China (Paton 1953:50). Many believed that the events had spelled the end of Christianity in China. And yet, today one has to ask whether China would have had as many Christians as it now has if the missionaries had stayed and been allowed to proceed with their work unhindered. The same story has frequently repeated itself elsewhere. Time and again the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church (even if many of us might have grave reservations about the type of Christianity that has emerged in some of these places).

It has even been suggested that the twentieth century has witnessed more martyrs for the faith than all previous centuries combined (cf. Hefley 1988). One may think of the genocide of Armenian Christians in Turkey between 1895 and 1915. On one fateful day alone, 24 April 1915, an estimated six hundred thousand were slaughtered (Hefley 1988:318f). One may also think of those killed in Nazi Germany, in the Soviet Union, in Africa, in Latin America, and elsewhere. Not only *Christians* were the victims, however. We know of the six million Jews annihilated by Nazi Germany, of thousands of Buddhist monks killed in the eastern Soviet Union, and of hundreds of Muslims slain by Christian Phalangists in the Beirut refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila — to mention only a few examples.

We may therefore never celebrate only our *own* martyrs. We are profoundly involved in all pain and tragedy occurring anywhere in the world. *Gaudium et Spes*, the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, puts it as follows in its opening lines:

> The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.

Whence Evil and Suffering?

There is thus, quite apart from suffering for the sake of one's faith, also the phenomenon of *general* suffering in the world and, more poignantly, *the suffering of the innocent,* the presence of *inexplicable* evil. This has led to the problem of *theodicy*, that is of justifying God in the face of evil, pain, and tragedy. As far back as the third century BC the Greek philosopher Epicurus formulated the problem in classical fashion (quoted in Lactantius, *Liber de ira Dei*, caput XIII):

> God is either desirous of removing evil but incapable of doing so; or he is able to do it but unwilling; or he is neither willing nor able; or he is both willing and able. If he is willing to eliminate evil but not able to do it, he is weak — something unheard of in God. If he is able to do it but unwilling, he is malicious — also something foreign to God. If he is neither willing nor able to do away with evil, he is both malicious and weak and therefore not God. If he is both willing and able to remove evil — the only posture that befits God — *where then does evil come from? Or why does God not take it away?*

Unde malum? Whence evil and suffering? This is a problem with which all religions wrestle. The commonest — and easiest — response is to explain suffering as the just punishment of God or the gods (cf. Ratschow 1986:169–173). We find it in all religions, including Christianity and Judaism, also in the form of punishment being meted out even to the children of the guilty. According to John 9:2, Jesus' disciples, when faced with a man who had been born blind, asked: »Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?« And in our own time we often hear that people who contracted AIDS are simply getting their deserved punishment. Sometimes this view becomes a rigid dogma that sees a simple cause-effect relationship between transgression and retribution.

At other times, however, there is a shift away from this: the »solution« is then found in the conviction that the creature can never criticise or even explain what the Creator does. One then flees into the doctrine of inscrutability of God. God has the *right* to do as God pleases. Nobody has the »right« *not* to suffer. This belief can manifest itself either in the form of resignation or fatalism, as in Euripides, or in the form of acceptance and faith, as in Job (Ratschow 1986:171–173).

The latter view would find its consummation in Martin Luther. He distinguished between the *Deus absconditus* — the hidden, incomprehensible God — and the *Deus revelatus* — the revealed God, whom we know in Jesus Christ. The Christian has to face both *God's opera aliena* — God's strange and inexplicable deeds — and *God's opera propria* — God's proper or salvific works.

Luther's *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) thus attempts to give us some kind of handle on the theodicy question. I wish to use this as the basis for my reflection on theodicy but also for what I wish to say about mission in weakness.

First, however, I would like to ask whether it is perhaps not just a bit too neat to attribute the starvation of children in Ethiopia, the »killing fields« of Cambodia, the Holocaust, the occurrence of one natural disaster after the other in the Philippines, the misery caused by racial discrimination in all its many forms during the last few centuries, the tragic history of the Kurds, the plight of the civilian population of Vucovar and Ossijek, and similar atrocious occurrences simply to God's »strange works«? Have we »explained« these horrendous things once we have given them a label? I do not think so. Can we ever »explain« the shattered limbs and broken skulls of the innocent; can we ever, in our theologies, account for houses being reduced to rubble, forced removals, and emaciated children staring at cameras out of hollow eyes? There remains an unfathomable mystery here, and at the same time something so repugnant that we can never find peace with it, never supply it with a tag and file it away into our theological systems.

The Christian faith gives articulation to this mystery by saying that whenever the world suffers God is suffering too, with the world (cf. Ratschow 1986:176–179; Triebel 1988:8–15). The profoundest expression of this suffering-with, this *com*-passion, is God's *passion*, God's suffering-for. God is not an apathetic being. God is *pathetic*, in the original sense of the word, as one who suffers. Long after the terrible ordeal he had gone through, Fr Rodrigues was arguing bitterly with Christ, saying to him, »›Lord, I resented your silence‹«, to which Christ replied, »›I was not silent. I *suffered beside you*‹« (Endo 1976:297; emphasis added).

A Divine Beauty Contest?

It is this dimension, more than any other, that distinguishes the Christian faith from other faiths. I do not say this by way of cheap comparison, with the aim of scoring points. Too often such interreligious comparisons are nothing but »divine beauty contests«, as Koyama refers to them. And, of course, in such contests one compares beauty with beauty, strength with strength. We shall not, however, find the Christian gospel's distinctiveness along this road. Rather, its distinctiveness is to be looked for in its *weakness*, in its *inability* to prove itself or to force its way.

Another way of saying this, is to submit that Christianity is »unique« because of the *cross of Jesus Christ*. But then the cross must be seen for what it is: not as sign of strength, but as proof of weakness and vulnerability. The cross confronts us not with the power of God, but with God's weakness. A cross — symbol, above all, of shame and humiliation — cannot feature in a divine beauty contest: who would ever think of suggesting a cross as sign of beauty and strength?

And yet, this is precisely what Christians have often been tempted to do. We have done unimaginable things with the cross and in the name of the cross. Like Constantine and thousands of others since his time, we brandish it as a weapon, as a club, with which to clobber our own and God's enemies. Sometimes we try to hide it from the probing eyes of others, for a cross is such an embarrassment in public. At other times we wallow, masochistically, in the pain caused by the cross, since this makes us feel so much more virtuous; we even devise stratagems to make it heavier and more uncomfortable than it already is. Alternatively, we attempt to fit the cross with a handle, so as to make the carrying easier. We can then »whistle and light-footedly follow Jesus ›from victory to victory‹ … If necessary, we can even walk ahead of Jesus instead of ›follow him‹« (Koyama 1976:2).

The gospel picture of the cross, and of a faith based on the cross, is, however, a very different one. Helpless, painracked in body and spirit, a victim of trumped-up charges, taunted by the bystanders, Jesus hung between two thieves. Listen to Luke's description of the crucifixion and the jeering (Luke 23:35–37, 39):

> The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Jesus. They said, »He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.« The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him vinegar

> and said, »If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself« ... One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: »Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!«

According to all the bystanders that day (including Jesus' disciples), Jesus would have saved himself if he truly was the king of the Jews or the Son of God. According to their unassailable logic a strong God would not have allowed his son to suffer the way Jesus did. And so, if Jesus does nothing about the matter, it can only mean *one* thing: he is *unable* to do anything about it; so he is *not* the king of the Jews, *not* the Christ, *not* the Son of God. Nobody who can help it would have allowed things such as these to happen. What point is there in worshipping God, in claiming to be God's Son, if God renders no help in one's greatest need? Jesus »had not brought down rulers from their thrones — they had brought *him* down instead; he had tried to lift the humble, but had been trampled by them in return; he had on occasion filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away, but the rich now had their revenge« (Bonk 1991:120).

The logic behind all of this is indeed irrefutable. On Calvary Jesus failed the divine beauty contest, and he failed it miserably. After all, only the one who is victorious can claim to be divine. And we shall only follow such a lord, for in that way we too shall share in his victory and be successful and triumphant in everything we undertake.

This was, incidentally, also Satan's logic in the story of Job. In the very first chapter of the Book of Job (1:9, 10), we hear Satan say to God:

> »Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?«

This, then, is Satan's explanation for the phenomenon of religion. People serve God for what they get out of it. Religion pays dividends. This and this alone is the reason for Job's piety.

Satan's religious logic is not foreign to our own time, even to Christians. Only too often we find that Christianity is marketed in a »things-go-better-with-Jesus« wrapping, that preachers tell us that it pays to be a Christian. I once found the following words on the dust cover of a book by the popular American preacher, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale:

> Let Dr. Peale give you ten simple, workable goals for developing confidence; three proven secrets for keeping up your vigor; thirteen actual examples of how prayer power helped people in need; four words that lead to success; five actual techniques used by successful men to overcome defeat; an eight-point spiritual healing formula; a ten-point guide to popularity.

In this paradigm Christianity wins the divine beauty contest hands down. And it is from within *this* perspective on religion, *this* definition of what the entire phenomenon of religion is all about, that Satan challenges God (Job 1:11),

> »... (just) stretch out your hand now, and touch all that (Job) has, and he will curse you to your face.«

In other words: the moment religion ceases to pay dividends, it forfeits its very reason for existence. Religion is a matter of give and take: if I pay homage to God, I want something for my trouble in return, otherwise there's no point in it. Why serve God if he does not fulfil his part of the bargain?

Christ's kenosis and the Christian Mission

The gospel's reply to this is that, in the suffering Jesus, God embraces the suffering of the world for the sake of humanity (Ratschow 1986:179). Moreover, in Christ, God does not necessarily save us *from* suffering, but *in* and *through* it (Vicedom 1963:13). It also means, as Fr Rodrigues discovered, that Christ suffers when we suffer. The pain people suffer is the pain of Christ himself. Saul was not only — as he had thought — persecuting the *church*, but Christ as well (cf. Acts 9:5). Christ identifies himself with his followers; what is done to them, is done to him also (Vicedom 1963:26). Paul even says, »... in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church« (Col 1:24). He can say this only because Christ himself is suffering in him.

The cross is not accidental to the Christian faith. When the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, his *scars* were proof of his identity; it was because of them that the disciples believed (Jn 20:20). Even so, it belonged to the essence of his life and ministry that he could not force his person and message upon people. Whatever he did was characterised by a complete inability to convince and dominate people by arguments based on the trappings of human culture. His ministry was a manifestation of the complete weakness and helplessness of unarmed truth (cf. Comblin 1977:81f). One New Testament term for this, made famous by Paul's Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5–11, is *kenosis*, »self-emptying« (cf. also Neely 1989). It is only in the way of giving up himself that Christ came to us. In his self-denial he came to us. In his dying for us he came to us (Koyama 1975:73). The broken Christ is the one who heals the broken world. The Japanese character for »sacrament«, I am told, is a combination of the characters for »holiness« and »brokenness«. »When holiness and brokenness come together for the sake of the salvation of others, we have Christian sacrament« (Koyama 1984:243).

This brings us back to the taunts hurled at Jesus on the cross: »He saved others, but he cannot save himself.« For the onlookers this meant that he was not what he had claimed to be. And yet, this is precisely the point the gospel is making: it is *false* gods who save themselves; the *true* God, however, saves others. It is in *not* saving himself that Christ reveals the fundamental character of the true God (cf. Koyama 1984:260).

It is at this point that the missionary significance of the cross emerges. I have said that, when we suffer, Christ suffers also. But the opposite is equally true: When Christ suffers, we suffer. »If any want to become my followers«, Jesus says (Mt 16:24), »let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.« To those termed a chosen race and a holy people, designated to proclaim the mighty acts of God who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light, the author of 1 Peter 2:21 directs the words, »For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,

so that you should follow in his steps.« And Hebrews 13:13 exhorts us: »Let us then go outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.« Similarly, when Ananias is sent to the penitent Saul in Damascus, he is given a message from Jesus for Saul, »I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name« (Acts 9:17). And years later Paul echoes these words when he says, »I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body« (Gal 6:17).

The affliction missionaries endure is intimately bound up with their mission. William Frazier (1987:46) refers to the Roman Catholic ritual that usually crowns the sending ceremony of missionary communities, when the new missionaries are equipped with cross or crucifix:

> Somewhere beneath the layers of meaning that have attached themselves to this practice from the days of Francis Xavier to our own is the simple truth enunciated by Justin and Tertullian: the way faithful Christians die is the most contagious aspect of what being a Christian means. The missionary cross or crucifix is no mere ornament depicting Christianity in general. Rather, it is a vigorous commentary on what gives the gospel its universal appeal. Those who receive it possess not only a symbol of their mission but a handbook on how to carry it out.

»There is nothing attractive, easy, secure, comfortable, convenient, strategically efficient, economical, or self-fulfilling about taking up a cross« (Bonk 1991:118). And yet, says Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship* (1976:78),

> To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity … the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

Exemplar or Victim?

Let me now, on the basis of what has been said so far, reflect briefly on missionary communication. Looking at our theme from the perspective of a general theory of religious communication, we find that there are three fundamental and interlocking communicative ingredients in all religions: *myths, rites of passage*, and *sacrifice*. It is in the last of these that we may observe the most desperately urgent and dramatic attempt at communication, namely when destructive violence is unleashed on an innocent victim in sacrificial ritual (Verryn 1983, drawing on Rollo May and René Girard). In the area of missionary communication this has profound consequences, for the missionary can enter the communications process in but one of two possible roles — as a model or as a victim.

Not surprisingly, it is the former that has always been the more popular. But it also has devastating consequences. It almost inevitably creates a master-disciple relationship, with

a general loss of freedom among the disciples who must perforce rely on their missionary-masters to lead them every step in the strange and new world they have chosen to enter. They cannot really cope, however, since they have to perform on the missionaries' terms (cf. Verryn 1983:23). The result is what Hendrik Kraemer (1947:426) once described as a relationship of »controlling benefactors to irritated recipients of charity«. In a slightly different context, David Paton has portrayed the hearts of many Third World Christians as »the scene of a warfare between gratitude, politeness, and resentment« (Paton 1953:66).

The missionary can, however, also enter the communications process as *victim*. Victim-missionaries, in contrast to exemplar-missionaries, lead people to freedom and community (cf. Verryn 1983:23f). It seems to me that this is what the apostle Paul does, particularly as he comes across in 2 Corinthians (cf. Baum 1977; Bosch 1979; Prior 1988). No one has stressed the fragility and weakness of the missionary more than he does (Comblin 1977:80). He could have laid claim to the loyalty of the Corinthian Christians by virtue of his apostolic ministry, or the fact that he was the founder of that church. However, he declines to do this. He is prepared to take the risk of being rejected. He creates enough room for them to say no to him. Throughout the letter, he struggles with two issues: the thorn in his own flesh, and the controversy with the »super-apostles« who are arguing that he is weak and inefficient in his ministry, whereas they are powerful and successful. And gradually, painfully, he develops »the courage to be weak« (cf. the title of Baum 1977). He accepts the thorn in his flesh. And he opposes the impressive arsenal of his opponents with very weak and simple weapons: patience, truth, love, weakness, service, modesty, and respect. Then, towards the end of his letter, he makes one of the most astounding claims ever made in religion: »Whenever I am weak, then I am strong« (2 Cor 12:10). He says this on the basis of his experience of Christ who has taught him: »My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness« (2 Cor 12:9).

It is this message he communicates to the church in Corinth, a church which is sorely tempted to follow the »high road« offered by the »super-apostles«, the road of success and power and progress, the road of proving the validity of the Christian faith by conducting divine beauty contests. Paul, however, teaches them about the validity of paradox, about a God who, in spite of being all-powerful, became weak and vulnerable in his Son, about a Christ who, in spite of the fact that he could ask the Father to dispatch twelve million legions of angels to rescue him from the cross and destroy his crucifiers, stayed on the cross and prayed: »Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing«.

It is this life in paradox that gives Paul the courage to be weak and the power to continue his ministry. He expresses this in a moving litany (2 Cor 4:8–10):

> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
> perplexed, but not driven to despair;
> persecuted, but not forsaken;
> struck down, but not destroyed;
> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Nowhere, however, has this life in paradox been portrayed more profoundly than in yet another litany (2 Cor 6:8–10):

> We are treated as impostors, and yet are true;
> as unknown, and yet we are well known;
> as dying, and see — we are alive;
> as punished, and yet not killed;
> as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;
> as poor, yet making many rich;
> as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Nils-Peter Moritzen (1966:30 — my translation) says:

> Nobody denies that Jesus did much good, but that in no way saved him from being crucified ... It belongs to the essence of God's merciful movement to people that it needs the weak witness, the powerless ambassador of the message. Those who are to be won and saved should, as it were, always have the potential to crucify the witness of the gospel.

So Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4:9–13:

> ... I think God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.

The Ambience of Colonialism

The lines just quoted almost sound like a depiction of Fr Rodrigues's experiences. So let me return to him and attempt to put him within the context of what we have been exploring.

Perhaps you have been getting the impression that I tend to idealise the victim-missionary and to glamorise martyrdom. However, if we scrutinise the life and ministry of Fr Rodrigues (and, for that matter, the ministry of most missionaries) there is much in it that cause warning signals to flash. In order to identify these, it will be necessary to make some critical observations about the modern missionary enterprise from the West. I know that it is fashionable to do so in some circles today. The missionary has become an anti-

hero, often looked upon as a throwback to a more primitive and bigoted era. Even in missionary circles the missionary enterprise is referred to as a »selfish war«, aimed at little but the self-aggrandisement of Western religious institutions (cf. Heisig 1981:363–386). I do not wish to join in this chorus and I have no intention of indulging in mission- and missionary-bashing. I wish to state unequivocally that I endorse the mission enterprise. I say this because I believe that the Christian faith (like Islam, for that matter) is intrinsically missionary, that the church — as Vatican II put it — is »missionary by its very nature«. Christians (again, like Muslims) care what other people believe and how they live. It is impossible to expunge the universalistic dimension from the Christian faith; if you do that, you cripple it. It is truth not only for me, for us; it is, as Polanyi says, a commitment held »with universal intent« (quoted in Newbigin 1989:35). As the World Council of Churches document *Mission and Evangelism* puts it: »Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people« (para. 41).

Also, I do not wish to suggest that everything that went wrong in the so-called Third World and in Third World Christianity during the last four centuries or so is exclusively to be blamed on the West. Many Westerners, in their eagerness to exculpate the Third World, may not realise that this, too, may be an expression of paternalism: they do not even grant other people their own guilt but rob them of that as well.

Having said this, I have to go further and point out that much of what went wrong in Third World Christianity (to which I limit myself for the moment) undoubtedly had to do with the way in which the missionary enterprise from the West penetrated other cultures and religious hegemonies. Our scanty information about the Jesuit missionaries who went to Japan in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries does not tell us whether they entered the communication process as »exemplars« or as »victims«. Still, we know that their enterprise coincided with the beginning of the colonial expansion of the West and that, within the overall Christendom thinking of the era, it was *natural* for Western nations to argue that where their power went their religion had to go also. In the Catholicism of the time this found expression in the »royal patronage« (*patronato* in Spanish; *padroado* in Portuguese), a ruling of Pope Alexander VI who, in 1493 and 1494, for all practical purposes divided the non-Western world between the kings of Spain and Portugal, on the condition that they would christianise the inhabitants of the countries they colonise. Where the Spanish and Portuguese colonisers went, Catholic missionaries went also.

It is this close liaison between mission and power that, during the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, prompted Swāmi Vivekānanda to tell the delegates what he heard people in India say about Christian missions (quoted in Neill 1970:6):

> All those that come over here from Christian lands to preach have that one antiquated foolishness of an argument that the Christians are powerful and rich and the Hindus are not, ergo Christianity is better than Hinduism, to which the Hindu very aptly retorts, that that is why Hinduism is a religion and Christianity is not; because in this beastly world, it is Blackguardism and that alone that *prospers*; virtue always suffers.

Still, it seems that, as long as the Japanese rulers were unaware of the intentions of the Europeans, the missionaries were welcomed and the church expanded rapidly (cf. Boxer 1967). This was soon to change. Around 1597 the pilot of a stranded Spanish ship, in an effort to impress the Japanese, boasted that the greatness of the Spanish Empire was partly due to the missionaries who always prepared the way for the armed forces of the Spanish king. This was enough to infuriate the Japanese ruler Hideyoshi, who had formerly been on intimate terms with the Jesuits (Johnston 1976:5). The outlawing of Christian mission and the persecutions that would lead to the apostasy of Fr Rodrigues almost half a century later, can be traced back directly to this incident.

Again, we do not know how the missionaries viewed things and whether they indeed saw themselves as the vanguard of the colonisation of Japan by Spain or Portugal. But in the final analysis this made little difference. What David Paton said with reference to China just before the Communist takeover certainly also applied to the Japan of Fr Rodrigues's time (Paton 1953:23):

> In a country which is being revolutionised by the invasion of the Western world, a Christian missionary who comes from the Western world, be he as harmless as a dove, as unpolitical as Jane Austen, is in himself by his very existence a political fact.

So, even if the missionaries themselves were innocent, they could not help but carry something of the atmosphere of Western colonialism with them, just as the smell of stale cigarettes clings to the clothes even of a non-smoker coming out of a room full of people smoking.

Thus, Rodrigues and his confreres were by implication colluding with the colonial powers. And in the Japan of the early seventeenth century this was suicidal. It is interesting though that, throughout the period of persecution, the Dutch continued to trade with Japan virtually without difficulty. But by this time the shrewd Dutch Calvinists, under the influence of the early stirrings of the Enlightenment, had already begun to distinguish between trade and colonisation on the one hand and Christianity on the other. In the hostile political climate of Japan they could therefore conveniently suspend the idea of getting involved in mission work — even if they did do mission work in the more »congenial« climates of Formosa (Taiwan), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and the Cape of Good Hope.

»Crusading Minds«

On the whole, however, the Dutch, and later the British and other Western colonial powers, were no different from the Spaniards and the Portuguese. Neither were their missionaries. The military terminology used during and after the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference betrays much of this. Expressions such as »soldiers«, »forces«, »strategy«, »crusade«, »campaign«, »tactical plans«, »marching orders«, and the like abounded. The conference was praised as »a council of war« and John Mott compared to a military strategist. Mott himself lent credence to this when he concluded his final

speech at the conference with the words: »The end of the conference is the beginning of the conquest …« (references in van't Hof 1972:28f). It is out the ambience of this culture that we still sing hymns like »Stand up, stand up for Jesus« and »Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war …«.

In varying degrees, then — leaving aside, for the moment, the very important exceptions — missionaries from all these countries were guilty of paternalism. It is, of course, a simple fact that the activities of adherents of *any* religion which holds that it has a message of universal validity will invoke images of paternalism. And since the Christian faith, as I have suggested, is intrinsically missionary, it will often be *experienced* as paternalistic, even where it is not. This is, if you wish, simply an »occupational hazard« of Christian missionaries. The fact that these missionaries often were paternalistic, even condescending, and that the general world situation since the sixteenth century has helped to bring this about, is, however, an entirely different matter. Christianity, says Koyama (1974), exhibits a »crusading mind«, not a »crucified mind«; and it suffers from a »teacher complex« (Koyama 1975). In these circumstances it is easy for its missionaries to perceive themselves as »exemplars« rather than »victims«. Seventy years ago already Ronald Allen saw this with astounding clarity (Allen [1912] 1956:183 f):

> … we have preached the gospel from the point of view of the wealthy man who casts a mite into the lap of a beggar, rather than from the point of view of the husbandman who casts his seed into the earth, knowing that his own life and the lives of all connected with him depend upon the crop which will result from his labour.

Allen, who was comparing Paul's missionary methods with ours, was actually suggesting the model of the »victim« missionary. So was D. T. Niles, one of the most remarkable Third World Christians of our time, who was wont to depict mission or evangelism as one beggar telling other beggars where to find bread. The point is, however, that we are as dependent on the bread as those are to whom we go. And it is only as we share it with them that we experience its true taste and nutritious value.

There is yet another ingredient to the story of Fr Rodrigues. William Johnston, the translator of Shusaku Endo's novel, remarks in his preface, »If this Christianity had been less incorrigibly Western, things might have been different« (Johnston 1976:12). This is an important point. Latourette (1971:416–482; see especially 478–481) suggests that the church has never successfully been planted in a previously alien culture unless there was also a profound and extensive communication between the Christian culture from which the missionaries came and the culture to which they went. Throughout the period Latourette surveyed in his multi-volume work on the history of the expansion of Christianity the church remained »largely identified with the culture of Europe« (1971:479). Koyama agrees, and suggests that this has been the case because of Western missionary Christianity's »crusading mind« and »teacher complex«. This »one-way-traffic Christianity«, as he calls it, has been an »ugly monster« (1975:73) and he adds (1975:74), »I submit that a good hundred million American Dollars, 100 years of crusading with 100,000 ›Billy Grahams‹ will not make Asia Christian.«

Suffering and Hope

From what we have surveyed and deduced from the story of Fr Rodrigues, we have to say, then, that not every persecution the church suffers is persecution purely for the sake of the gospel. Even our beautiful and moving stories about »Christian martyrs« contain elements that have little to do with dying for the sake of the gospel.

Whether we have eyes to see it or not, the time of the exemplar-missionary is over — in fact, it should never have been. Fr Bernard Joinet, a French Roman Catholic missionary, tells the story of how he first went to Tanzania some twenty years ago (Joinet 1972). He had been trained to »take over« the missionary enterprise the moment he arrived in Africa, he said. So he went with the idea that, metaphorically speaking, he would be the chauffeur of the missionary car. It took him some time to discover that what was needed was not a chauffeur, but a spare wheel. The chauffeur takes over the whole show and steers it in the direction he has chosen. The spare wheel's role, however, is merely complementary. It does not foist itself on the missionary »car«.

Fr Joinet had to make the painful discovery that he was not to enter the communications process as exemplar, but as victim. There are numerous other such victim-missionaries in our time. Was it not as such a victim-missionary that Terry Wait went to Beirut and was this not the role he played there during five years of captivity? I suggest that Desmond Tutu is another example of the victim-missionary. I remember 18 October 1977, the day when the South African government outlawed nineteen organisations, several of them explicitly Christian, arrested many of their leaders and served banning orders on others. That same afternoon the leadership of the South African Council of Churches held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation. Speaker after speaker took a strong stand on the need for a confrontational approach, the need for showing the state its muscle. Then Desmond Tutu remarked, »I fear that we have all been so seduced by the success ethic that we have forgotten that, in a very real sense, the church was *meant* to be a *failing* community«.

A church that follows the model of the victim-missionary is one that is called to be a source of blessing to society, without being destined to regulate it (cf. Verryn 1983:19). It knows that the gospel ceases to be gospel when it is foisted upon people. Such a church will also take upon itself the sins of its own members and of its nation, as Toyohiko Kagawa did when his country had invaded China in the 1930s, as some German church leaders did in the Stuttgart Declaration of 1945, and as the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa is beginning to do today, even if only haltingly and ambiguously.

Only if we turn our backs on false power and false security can there be authentic Christian mission. Of course, this will lead to opposition, perhaps even suffering, persecution and martyrdom. But martyrdom and persecution have always been among the lesser threats to the life and survival of the church. Moreover, they will not have the last word. Just as the last word in Scripture is not the cross but the resurrection and the triumph of God, so the last word for us is not suffering but *hope* — a hope, to be sure, that does not sever itself from suffering in and for the world, for that would cease to be *Christian* hope. True hope is hope-in-the-midst-of-adversity, and yet anchored in God's coming triumph over his rebellious world (Beker 1987:84). After all, we know and confess that God's fi-

nal triumph is already casting its rays into our present world — however opaque these rays may be and however much they may be contradicted by the empirical reality of adversity and suffering (Beker 1982:58). Caught, for the time being, in this inescapable tension, oscillating between agony and joy, we nevertheless trust that God's victory is certain. And on this we wager our mission and our future.

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