

THEY GAVE THEIR LIVES : A TRIBUTE TO THE KNOWN AND UNKNOWN NURSE MARTYRS OF OUR TIME — Part 1

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Abstract

An interest in the development of nursing from early Christian times and the persecution of women in the Early Church has led to this study of nurses and martyrdom. Historical research using secondary sources was undertaken to identify and describe the experiences of nurse martyrs with special reference to the present century. Martyrdom does not belong to the past as generally believed. The twentieth century is recognised as a century of Christian martyrdom unparalleled since the earliest Christian times. Women have been major contributors to the missionary calling and during the course of the nineteenth century many woman missionary societies were founded. Education and health care go hand in hand with the Christian message. While a few examples of nurses who suffered martyrdom in the mission field have been recorded, it is necessary to examine the events which led to their death. This article pays tribute to known and unknown nurse martyrs. Subsequent articles describe the suffering of nurse martyrs identified in selected world regions.

Opsomming

'n Belangstelling in die ontwikkeling van verpleging vanaf vroeë Christentye en die vervolging van vroue in die vroeë Kerk het aanleiding gegee tot die indiepte studie van verpleegsters en martelaarskap. Navorsing was gedoen om die ondervindinge van verpleegmartelare vanaf die vroegste Christelike tye tot op hede te identifiseer en te beskryf. Soos algemeen aanvaar behoort martelaarskap nie aan die verlede nie. Die twintigste eeu word gekenmerk as die eeu van ongeëwenaarde Christelike martelaarskap. Vroue het die grootste bydrae tot die roeping van sending gelewer. Gedurende die negentiende eeu is baie vroue-sending-verenigings gestig. Onderwys en gesondheidsorg gaan hand aan hand met die Christenboodskap. Alhoewel 'n paar voorbeelde van verpleegsters wat martelare op die sendingveld was, aangeteken is, is dit ook nodig om die gebeure wat tot hul dood gelui het te ondersoek. Hierdie artikel bring hulde aan die bekende en onbekende verpleegmartelare. Opvolgende artikels beskryf verpleegmartelaarskap soos dit in geselekteerde wêreldstreke geïdentifiseer is.

INTRODUCTION

The term "martyr" stirs the imagination because it conjures up scenes of early Christians being persecuted for their faith. The word was derived originally from the Greek word meaning "witness". Over the centuries this term has come to be applied, in the context of the Christian faith, to those who could have saved their lives if they had been prepared to deny Christ. In contemporary times it is a rare occurrence for a Christian to be condemned on the grounds of faith alone; the death penalty is generally justified by the assumption of proven crime, political or otherwise. One of the characteristic features of this century is an almost unbroken sequence of persecutions all over the world, yet it is only the occasional name, such as that of Edith Cavell, or the

occasional atrocity such as the Elim massacre in Zimbabwe, which claims the attention of nurses. It is a largely unappreciated fact that nurses have been overwhelmed and perished in these waves of persecution in many regions of the world.

The primary aim of this study is to identify and describe the experiences of nurse martyrs with particular reference to the present century. A study of the literature and a computer search revealed that little information about nurses and martyrdom has been recorded in nursing literature. A few publications pay tribute to missionary martyrs, while the persecution of others are recorded in the works on the lives of Saints.

It is hoped that the present article will fill a current gap in nursing literature. Martyrdom is

an important topic with multiple ramifications - ramifications which are moral, historical, political, religious, philosophical, psychological and, of course, profoundly human and deeply emotive.

MARTYRDOM IN OUR TIME

Reports of martyrdoms have appeared from time to time as news stories in newspapers and journals, while several have been the subject of books. Men and women have given their lives under many tyrannies and under many different kinds of oppression.

Examples of martyrdoms can be cited in which Christian men and women suffered violent death in the struggle for Christian belief and values and freely laid down their lives for truth, justice, the love of God and the service of the poor. In 1900, for example, Chinese Christians died in the Boxer Rebellion because of their friendship with foreign missionaries; numerous German, Dutch and other European Christians died protesting against the injustice of Hitler's treatment of the Jews, while thousands have died because they rejected an atheist philosophy which the state tried to compel them to accept. Purcell (1983), in analysing the faith which motivates all kinds of people in all ages past and present to accept martyrdom maintains that, while the conditions to accept martyrdom may vary in detail, the principle does not. In every instance of martyrdom, there is a challenge to display the ultimate courage on behalf of one's faith.

James and Marti Hefley (1979) believe that it is an oversimplification to say that Christian martyrs always died directly as a testimony for Christ as when details of their deaths are known, it becomes apparent that many Christian martyrs have died in circumstances indirectly related to their witness for Christ.

O'Malley believes that, if the word "martyr" has fallen into disuse, the reality has not and writes that "Martyrdom has nothing to do with heroic stature or heroic struggle or heroic image. It is a remarkably sober and undramatic way to die unlike the heroism which is really a misnomer

for foolhardiness Martyrdom is located in precisely the opposite direction. It is not the urge to surpass all the others but to serve all the others at whatever cost. Martyrdom cannot be imposed. Either a whole lifetime prepares one for it or it will never occur" (O'Malley: 1980, ix).

While the classical concept of martyrdom is well known, there is a movement to enlarge this concept. Contemporary persecutors of Christians do not give their victims the opportunity to confess their faith and accept a death to which they are sentenced by a court as was the case in early Christian times. In broadening the traditional concept of martyrdom, Rahner suggests that we can appeal to the authority of Thomas Aquinas who said that "someone is a martyr through a death that is clearly related to Christ if he is defending society (*res publica*) against the attacks of enemies who are trying to damage the Christian faith and if in this defence he suffers death" (Rahner: 1983, 11).

WOMEN AND THE MISSIONARY CALLING

Christian mission work has been closely interwoven with Western political, economic and cultural expansion. In the Roman Catholic Church, religious orders were the main vehicle for the missionary task whereas missionary work in Protestant churches has been due to the initiative of dedicated lay men and women. The imperialist expansion of Western nations in the latter half of the nineteenth century divides the pre-colonial era of missionary pioneers from the era of missionary guidance which coincided with the colonial era (Neill & Weber 1963). During the former period, ordinary men and women of extraordinary courage fought on their own initiative for the right to establish Christian missions in many parts of the world, particularly on the continents of Asia and Africa. The emergence of women as major contributors to the work of the Church during the 19th century may be seen as one of most significant aspects of the emancipation of women in Western Europe and the U.S.A. Once released from the obligations of nursing ailing parents or looking after younger siblings, many women in the Victorian era determined either to teach or nurse in the foreign field. A further important extension in the sphere of women's work was the growth of Protestant religious orders in England. A number of sisterhoods were established at this time which became the vehicle whereby many women were able to enter the mission field. The Anglican sisterhood of St John the Baptist at Clewer became the nucleus for a large body of associates who remained as men and women pursuing their secular vocations. It was at the Clewer Hospital that the pioneer of nurse training in South Africa, Henrietta Stockdale, learnt the arts and skills of nursing, and subsequently entered the mission field in this country.

The nineteenth century was also marked by the predominance of Christian missionary institutions which provided the services of Western lay missionaries in many parts of the world. Christian doctors and nurses, teachers, artisans, administrators, and the wives of lay missionaries, were sent out to full-time missionary service, and women became a major force in the missionary field. Yet, as Fairchild (1974) maintains, because they were not ordained as preachers and were not appointed in executive positions, women remained a subservient position. Men assumed the roles of leaders as preachers and administrators whereas women did most of the teaching, and all nursing and home visiting. A further factor which encouraged functional specialization in foreign missions during those years was the rapid growth of the number of woman student volunteers; disqualified from clerical ordination, they took up missionary careers in education and nursing.

NURSING AND MARTYRDOM

In mission work all over the world, education and health care go hand in hand with the Christian message and mission hospitals have been established in countries whose governments have experienced difficulties in providing health care. It soon became evident that lay and religious mission-trained doctors and nurses were sorely needed and had to be appointed.

MISSIONARY WORK ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

In helping to open Africa to foreign trade and colonisation, missionaries ultimately sowed the seeds of defeat for European domination. The Hefleys maintain moreover that the largest number of conversions to Christianity, from any non-white area in the world, took place in Africa. Mission schools have educated a greater percentage of Africa's population than similar schools elsewhere. While most African leaders of the twentieth century were educated in mission schools, a number were also indoctrinated in Marxism and other beliefs. Wars and uprisings in Africa, some of which have been aggravated by communist support and interference, have resulted in great loss of human life and many missionaries and African Christians have lost their lives in the deadly crosscurrents of this violence (Hefley J and Hefley M 1979).

MARTYRDOM IN THE BELGIAN CONGO

The English Baptists were the first Protestant missionaries to set up missions on the Congo River in the nineteenth century. The Roman Catholic Capuchin order have undertaken mission work in the Congo since the seventeenth century (Neill & Weber 1963). At the beginning of this century in 1908 the land owned by King Leopold II of Belgium was ceded to Belgium and under this administration

missionary activities increased. In June 1960, the Congo, now Zaire gained independence and during the following civil war, approximately 10,000 Congolese and hundreds of foreigners including 179 Catholic priests and nuns and 30 Protestant missionaries were killed (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

MARY BAKER, ROBINA GRAY AND AUDREY SHARPE - DIED 25 NOVEMBER 1964

Mary Baker, a trained nurse from Virginia USA, and her colleague, Nurse Margaret Hayes, both members of the Unevangelised Fields Mission, (U.F.M.) were working at Bopeke, Northern Zaire. They had been so busy nursing and teaching in the spring and early summer of 1964 that they gave little thought to the impending danger of rebel attacks. In August 1964, Miss Hayes went to Banjwadi where the UFM had a hospital, for a well-earned rest. The day after her arrival two nursing colleagues, Robina Gray, an Irish trained nurse and Audrey Sharpe, the wife of the mission doctor, left on a trip. At about the same time the missionaries were becoming concerned about rebel advances in the area and a few days later the Mission Hospital received a call from Mary Baker at Bopeke who said that the revolutionaries were asking about her radio. Miss Hayes, concerned about her colleague, decided to return immediately to Bopeke, and was escorted, at the request of the British Consul, by a French doctor. Back at Bopeke, the rebels, who were in control of the area told the two nurses to continue their work. The next day they forced the two nurses to walk to the town of Banalia where they were told that Simbas (rebels) were trying to find the Sharpe family and Nurse Robina Gray. Two months later other Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries who had been captured were also brought to Banalia. On 23 November 1964, Margaret Hayes was called out to a waiting truck by the rebel soldiers. She was taken to an unknown destiny.

Up until this time, the medical and nursing missionary staff at Banalia had been permitted to continue with their work; Dr. Sharpe in particular according to the rebels, was too "valuable" to be kept in confinement. On 25 November, however, the Simbas pulled Dr Sharpe out of theatre where he was operating and told him that they would kill his family but would allow him to live if he continued his work. He refused to accept these bizarre conditions and immediately was speared while other Simbas beat him to death with their guns. The rebels then murdered his wife, Nurse Audrey Sharpe, and their children. The two other nurses, Mary Baker and Robina Gray, were killed, together with another missionary couple and their children. The Simbas threw all the bodies of the slain victims into the river. Seven months after the massacre in June 1965, Nurse Margaret Hayes was rescued with a group

of Catholic nuns, by mercenaries (Hefley J and Hefley M 1979, 490-95).

MARTYRDOM IN ETHIOPIA

More Christians have died during the twentieth century in this ancient and historic land than in any other nation in Africa. Ethiopia, with almost three million Christians, had managed to hold its own against the Muslims for over a thousand years. Protestant missionary work became established for the first time in the country during the nineteenth century (Neill & Weber 1963).

The largest and most influential foreign group working in Ethiopia was the Sudan Interior Mission, which had begun work in the area in 1927. SIM workers became the first martyrs in 1937 when the Italians, who had established themselves in Eritrea in 1896, invaded Ethiopia.

ANNA STRIKWERDA - DIED 1974

In 1974 political trouble began to brew in the Province of Eritrea, where a civil war, whose aim was independence from Ethiopia, was initiated. Anna Strikwerda, trained as a nurse in Holland and her American nursing colleague, Deborah Dortzbach were working at the American Evangelical Church Hospital in Ghinda, Eritrea. Early in the summer of 1974, Eritrean nationals seized an American oil company helicopter and landed at the hospital where they attempted to kidnap both nurses. Anna Strikwerda forcibly resisted this, was shot and killed. Deborah Dortzbach, pregnant at the time was taken captive by the guerrillas so that she could provide their medical care. She was released several months after that fatal day (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

MARTYRDOM IN ZIMBABWE

The growth of missions in Matebeleland began at the close of the nineteenth century. Gelfand maintains that the Catholic missions which followed the arrival of the Marianhill Fathers, resulted in excellent medical and nursing care in the north Western region of the country at the mission stations of Fatima, St Luke's and St Paul's. In 1968, a modern maternity block was opened at St Paul's Hospital which created a need for more trained nursing staff. By 1972 the mission hospital had two qualified nurses in charge of the midwifery training and the general hospital (Gelfand 1988).

SISTER JOSEPH WILKENSON - DIED 6 FEBRUARY 1977

A Dominican nun, Sister Joseph Wilkenson, was working in the mission hospital at St Paul's at the time of the civil war. She was an English trained nurse and midwife from Lancashire, England and since leaving England in 1937 she had given nursing and midwifery care in Rhodesia for 37 years. Sister Joseph cycled to the hospital everyday from the convent as she was determined that war would not stop her from carrying out the work she loved. The

Dominican nuns at the mission station believed that there was "no cause to fear that anyone would want to harm five women, who between them had given 185 years of unselfconscious service to the Black people of Africa" (O'Malley 1980, 97).

On the evening of 6 February 1977, the Head of St Paul's Community, Father Dunstan Myerscough, was confronted by a young revolutionary with an AK-47 rifle and was taken to the dining room where other missionaries had been rounded up. Sister Joseph, still in her white hospital uniform, stood among the frightened and confused group. Father Myerscough, the only person who survived the attack, said that the priests were told to remove their trousers. Without warning, three revolutionaries suddenly broke away from the group and, kneeling down, raised their guns and fired. When the wounded Father Myerscough regained consciousness he found the blood covered bodies of his fellow missionaries on the ground next to him. The following day the army and police found one hundred and eleven spent cartridges from RDP machine guns and AK-47 rifles on the spot. A month later, in a subsequent attack, a note book which described the attack on St Paul's was found on the body of a soldier who had been killed in crossfire. The last lines recorded read "We shot four Europeans who were Priests. Sisters were five and altogether there were nine, eight dead. No comrades were injured in action" (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 120-22).

JOYCE LYNNE, NÉE PICKERING, AND WENDY WHITE - DIED 23 JUNE 1978

These two nurses were members of the Elim Pentocostal Church which ran a hundred-bed hospital at Caterere in Northern Rhodesia. The mission had been started by Dr Cecil Brian and his wife in 1946 and by 1971, apart from the hospital, it ran a school, a church, and numerous chapels in the outlying bush.

Joyce Lynne, a trained nurse from Yorkshire, England was the Matron of the Hospital at Caterere. The Rhodesian Civil War had been going on for some time before the threat of the Patriotic Front or Freedom Fighters became a reality to the people at Elim. The first contact with the rebels came one night in April 1976, when Freedom fighters approached the mission hospital and demanded medicine and food. A nursing sister, Joy Bath, was disturbed by the barking of her dog and, looking outside, she saw the figure of the matron, Mrs Lynne, being escorted from her house by a group of guerrillas. Both nurses were then taken to the hospital where they reluctantly gave the group medicine and drugs. The decision was then made by the Elim authorities to move the mission to what had been a Preparatory School for European Boys at Vumba, thirteen miles from Umtali.

It was at Vumba on Friday night, 23 June 1978, that Matron Lynne and a nursing colleague,

Wendy White, were among the group of nine adults and four children who were massacred by Freedom Fighters. Wendy White, a nurse, teacher and qualified social worker, had not been long with the mission when she was killed (Purcell 1983: 144-47). The two nurses and other adults, along with the children, were taken into the bush and slain. Ian McGarrick, a Pentocostal missionary who was sleeping in his quarters at the school, discovered the mutilated bodies early the next morning. Matron Lynne, her face battered beyond recognition, lay with her left hand touching the battered head of her three-week old baby, Pamela. A few feet away from the other missionaries, Ian McGarrick found the corpses of the single women, including that of Nurse Wendy White (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

JENNY BOYD - DIED 27 SEPTEMBER 1978

Sister Jenny Boyd, an Australian trained nurse came to Rhodesia in 1974 in the middle of Civil War. Her special qualifications as community health nurse enabled her to fill a much-needed post in the rural areas in Mashonaland Province. The dangers and increasing difficulties which she experienced because of the on-going war did not deter her from visiting the many rural clinics in the bush. On 27 September, unperturbed by the obvious and increasing danger to herself, she travelled with an armed escort to one of the outlying clinics. Freedom fighters lay in wait, ambushed their vehicle, and killed Sister Boyd and her escorts. After her death she was posthumously awarded Membership of the Legion of Merit by the Rhodesian Government. Jenny Boyd's name was also placed in the Nurses' Bay of the Cloisters of the Anglican Cathedral in Salisbury, Zimbabwe (Lock 1984).

There have been many martyred nurses in Africa whose stories have not yet been told. McDonagh maintains that victimhood and martyrdom are intimately related and believes that "martyrs" share the conditions of victims and by offering endure the final victory of Calvary. They remind Christians of the prevalence and depth of human victimhood and challenge them to oppose in turn. They remind them of the contemporary Calvaries which crown the world. They seek to live the prayer "Thy Kingdom come" by seeking to remove the victim conditions of the neighbour even at the price of ultimate victimhood" (McDonagh 1983: 36).

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