

THE TANZANIAN MARTYRS

INTRODUCTION

Before presenting an account of the martyrdom of our Tanzanian martyrs, it is important to take a cursory look at what was happening in the two continents of Europe and Africa towards the end of the 19th century and see how the movements in these two continents might have influenced the plight of our German pioneers who started to come to Africa in 1888.

- 1) There was ferment among the European countries to obtain territorial possession of some areas of the vast continent of Africa.
- 2) There was a flourishing slave trade by the Arabs who preyed on the helpless African natives.
- 3) There was an influx of European missionaries, among them our own Sisters, who were ill-prepared for the climate and the general living conditions of the mission territories.
- 4) There were scattered tribal groups with their own sporadic but determined efforts to protect their own territorial integrity.

THE MOTIVATION OF THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT TO COME TO AFRICA

Germany shared the same motivation as the other European countries that colonized Africa.

The Scramble for Africa (1880-1900) was a period of rapid colonization of the African continent by European powers. But it wouldn't have happened except for the particular economic, social, and military evolution Europe was going through. (Allistair Boddy-Evans, About.com African History)

The 19th century in Europe was a time of industrialization. Factories in Europe required raw materials to be manufactured into marketable products. As a result, Europeans sought both a source of raw materials, as well as, a market for manufactured goods in Africa. This economic motivation played a large role in the colonization of Africa. (African History, the Era of Global Encroachment: Colonial Exploration and Conquest of Africa)

HOW TANZANIA CAME UNDER THE COLONIAL RULE OF GERMANY

The Berlin Conference of 1884

In 1884 at the request of Portugal, German chancellor Otto von Bismark called together the major western powers of the world to negotiate questions and end confusion over the control of Africa. Bismark appreciated the opportunity to expand Germany's sphere of influence over Africa and desired to force Germany's rivals to struggle with one another for territory.

At the time of the conference, 80% of Africa remained under traditional and local control. What ultimately resulted was a hodgepodge of geometric boundaries that divided Africa into fifty irregular countries. This new map of the continent was superimposed over the one thousand indigenous cultures and regions of

Africa. The new countries lacked rhyme or reason and divided coherent groups of people and merged together disparate groups who really did not get along.

Fourteen countries were represented by a plethora of ambassadors when the conference opened in Berlin on November 15, 1884. The countries represented at the time included Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway (unified from 1814-1905), Turkey, and the United States of America. Of these fourteen nations, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal were the major players in the conference, controlling most of colonial Africa at the time.

Following the conference, the give and take continued. By 1914, the conference participants had fully divided Africa among themselves into fifty countries.

Germany took Namibia (German Southwest Africa) and Tanzania (German East Africa). Often we hear of Belgian Congo. Our Sisters' convent in Nairobi, Kenya is built on what used to be the farm of Karen, the Englishwoman of "Out of Africa" fame. In graduate school, I once heard one of my African classmates say sadly, "The Europeans divided among themselves the different countries of the continent of Africa."

"The Berlin Conference was Africa's undoing in more ways than one. The colonial powers superimposed their domains on the African continent. By the time independence returned to Africa in 1950, the realm had acquired a legacy of political fragmentation that could neither be eliminated nor made to operate satisfactorily."* (de Blij, H.J. and Peter O. Muller *Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997. Page 340.)

PART I

THE TANZANIAN PIONEERS

Although this conference is primarily on our four Tanzanian martyrs, it would be good to include a brief account of the experience of the first four Sisters who were our brave Tanzanian pioneers. Among these sisters was SISTER MARTHA WANSING who was one of the martyrs.

(I shall be quoting extensively from the "Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, Priory of Ndanda, Tanzania, Part I)

The first four Missionary Benedictine Sisters who braved the frontiers of Tanzania consisted of the following:

SISTER MARTHA WANSING (23 years old) who was one of the first ladies who joined the St. Benedict Mission Society of St. Ottilien (later called Missionary Benedictines).

SISTER BENEDICTA SEVERING (33 years old) who entered in Reichenbach in 1885.

SISTER RAPHAELA KAMPHAUS (22 years old) who entered in Reichenbach in 1886.

SISTER LIOBA ELLWANGER (23 years old) who also entered in Reichenbach in 1886.

Their young age is noteworthy. Except for Sr. Benedicta who was 33 years old, the other three were all in their early twenties.

This first group of Sisters were sent out solemnly from St. Ottilien on November 11, 1887 together with ten monks of St. Ottilien. Upon arrival in Rome on November 13, the whole group started their retreat in preparation for profession. On November 21, the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, they pronounced their vows in the church of Mary in the Campo Santo. On the following day they attended the Mass of the Holy Father Leo XIII. Following the mass they had an audience with Pope Leo XIII together with some French pilgrims. Among these pilgrims was fourteen-year-old Therese Martin who dared to ask the pope to let her enter Carmel at age 15. We all know that St. Therese of Lisieux was declared "Patroness of the Mission" later on.

The group of four sisters and 10 monks began their journey to Africa at the beginning of Advent. Boarding the steamship Berenice on November 30, 1887 they set sail from the harbor of Trieste.

The ship had a brief stopover at Jiddah which at that time had the largest slave market of Arabia. For the first time the band of missionaries came face to face with slaves, women and children who were hungry, wearing only rags and looking miserable. All they could offer them was the bread that they had.

The second time they encountered slaves was in Zanzibar. While the ten monks had proceeded to Dar es Salaam, the four sisters stayed with the French Missionary Society of the Holy Spirit and acquired practical knowledge for treating tropical diseases at the mission hospital of the French Sisters. While waiting for a chance to crossover to Dar es Salaam, on January 25, they reported the following:

"Towards evening we witnessed a pitiable scene which aroused our outrage and our deepest compassion and really upset us. For the first time we saw a sight not uncommon here – several black slaves returning from work, fettered by heavy iron chains around their necks. Their necks in a thick iron ring, wagon chains of about a meter's length attached front and back . . ., linking them to each other. Thus they march one behind the other in rows of four, five or eight slaves, laden with buckets of water, wood or other burdens. Most of them are youthful, sturdy persons, many of them covered with scars; even poor girls 16 to 25 years had to wear these dreadful necklaces. Thus they have to perform the heaviest labors. . ."

"These two experiences made the new missionaries brutally aware that they had arrived in a land where slavery was still part of life. (Ibid, p. 65)

While the ten monks could proceed to Dar es Salaam in January, Sisters Benedikta, Lioba, Martha and Raphaela could follow only on March 17, 1888. After boarding a dhow and arriving in Dar es Salaam, the four Sisters proceeded to Pugu on foot accompanied by Fr. Bonifatius and 25 porters. In Pugu the Brothers had built two small houses and chapel made of wood and clay. These monasteries, one for the sisters, and the other one for the monks, were dedicated to St. Benedict and St. Scholastica. In front of the church a wooden cross, nearly 20 feet tall, "pointed skyward as the first wordless proclamation of the message of salvation."

“Soon people with wounds and infections came to seek the Sisters’ help. Confidence in the mission grew stronger. Quite often men, women and children would appear in chapel during services, seating themselves quietly behind the missionaries at prayer, eyes and ears attentive to what was happening. (Ibid. p.66)

At first the missionaries were concerned with the care of the children in the vicinity as well as those that came to the mission through their parents. Soon there were also some ransomed slave children.

AND THEN THERE WERE TWO

The Superiors were greatly concerned about the health of the brothers and sisters who were often sick with fever. Nowadays people in Tanzania know that if cerebral malaria is not treated immediately and properly, the patient can die in a couple of days. In the accounts regarding the illness of the missionaries, malaria was hardly mentioned, if at all. Often they were reported as having fever.

One monk died already in March, 1888 at the age of 18.

SISTER LIOBA EALWANGER, who served as the cook, suffered much and died suddenly on August 14, 1888 at the age of 24.

After a monk had to leave East Africa in August because of poor health, **SISTER RAPHAELA KAMPHAUS** also returned to Germany because of frequent illness. We don’t hear anything more about her.

Sisters Benedikta and Martha, the two remaining Sisters had their hands full. Sister Benedikta took over the kitchen and the garden and cared for the sick. Sister Martha took charge of the education of the children and the training of the girls. Life in the mission seemed to go on without any sign of trouble.

BREWING TEMPEST IN THE POLITICAL SITUATION

What brought about the change in the political situation in East Africa?

- 1) “The immediate cause for the wide-spread uprising was the lowering of the Sultan’s flag and raising of the GEAS’ flag (German East Africa Society) on August 16 due to an agreement between the Sultan of Zanzibar and the GEAS. The sultan had agreed to cede control of the East African coastal area to the German East Africa Society for about 50 years. The GEAS was entitled to levy customs duties in the harbors and in turn had to pay an annual rental fee to the sultan. The change of flags was a protest signal for the coastal traders, mostly Arabs and Swahili. (Ibid. p.69)
- 2) Unknown to the missionaries, the Arabs decided to wage an open revolt. The leaders of the revolt were Bushiri el Harthi and Bwana Heri. They carried out raids on German settlements when both German and English authorities increased their opposition to slave trade. The Arabs needed slaves to transport ivory, to work in the sugar cane plantation and look after their spice crops.

The missionaries in Pugu were not aware of what was happening outside the mission!

THE REBELS ATTACK PUGU

On January 10, the Brothers and Sisters went about their life as usual although they heard the thunder of canons from Dar es Salaam. In the evening of the following day, the sky was red with fires from the city. The freed slaves fled in panic. Only three men, six women and three boys remained. The people of the neighboring area fled to the forests. By Sunday, January 13, everything seemed peaceful again although the missionaries were uneasy about the situation.

During this time, Father Bonifatius, the superior, was in Zanzibar for some business and was taken ill. He was confined at the hospital.

Br. Fridolin wrote an account of the days that followed:

“They began a novena to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in whom alone can there be peace and security, strength and consolation and surrender. They did well for the apparent peace was the calm before the devastating storm. When the Brothers rose from their meal on the veranda to go to the chapel, a shot shattered the humid quiet of midday, a second shot followed, and the several hundred rebels attacked the mission with wild shouts and ceaseless firing and ceaseless firing of their rifles. Br. Petrus Michl and Br. Benedict Kantweg were fatally struck by bullets

SISTER MARTHA, THE PROTOMARTYR AMONG THE PIONEERS

“With joyful resoluteness I accepted the red cincture which should remind me of my readiness to shed my blood for the holy faith.”

SISTER MARTHA WANSING had hurried to the chapel and there at her place was shot down. She was 25 years old. The two little boarders were stabbed to death.

Br. Rupert recounted that he was severely wounded, was taken to the chapel and he was surprised at what he saw there. “I was utterly shaken when I entered. SISTER MARTHA lay stretched out on the floor, dead. Her hands were folded as in prayer, her face radiating a profound calm, a heavenly peace. (Ibid. p. 71)

The mission buildings were set on fire. The conflagration cremated the corpses of Br. Petrus Michi, Br. Benedict Kantweg and SR. MARTHA WANSING. SR. MARTHA had written to her family on leaving for Africa her generous willingness to die for the faith. “With joyful resoluteness I accepted the red cincture which should remind me of my readiness to shed my blood for the holy faith.” Little did she know that her oblation would be accepted that soon. (Ibid. p.72)

SISTER BENEDICTA’S CAPTIVITY AND ORDEAL

SISTER BENEDICTA remained the only living Sister among the four pioneers. Together with her two kitchen helpers Jaja and Feida, they were led as prisoners together with Br. Romuald Hofman, Br. Robert Hochberger and Frater Ildefons Kauer.

At night after an extremely painful march, the prisoners reached the camp of SELEMANI BEN SAIF, the leader of the rebels in Dar es Salaam and Konduchi. An officer of Selemani told the following to the missionaries in captivity:

“If we had known that you are Padri (missionaries) we would not have harmed you. We were told that you were Germans connected with Leue (head of GEAS in Dar es Salaam) possessing much powder and many guns, and that you would defend yourselves; also that you had the slaves who had been taken from us by force; therefore, we assembled such a large force to fight you and to shoot you!” Selemani himself visited the prisoners and offered the same arguments. However, he seemed to be quite content that at having the missionaries in his power and added. Through you I shall get the imprisoned Arabs back.” (Ibid. p. 72)

Among the worst ordeals that SR. BENEDIKTA were the following:

1. “ While the brothers had to March for three days with heavy chains about their necks and chained to each other, the Sister was allowed to walk unchained, though escorted by guards. But she was insulted and beaten. After one long painful march on bush paths in the burning heat, she was nearly dying of thirst. Panting, she begged for a little water. But she was told, “There is no water.” When she staggered, she was driven on with heavy blows of the fist. Another time she experienced more consideration. She collapsed by the wayside and nearly remained lying there. But then one African man in the caravan was ordered to carry her. Like a bag of goods she was lifted onto his shoulders.” (Ibid. p. 73)
2. “In Konduchi SR. BENEDIKTA suffered the worst moments of her captivity. One day an Arab came and counted all the girls and women, including the (p. 73) Sister. They learned that they were to be sold shortly to a slave dealer in Konduchi. The next and following day they endured the same procedure, the Sister always being counted in. What dread SR. BENEDIKTA must have endured at the prospect of being sold to a Muslim and spending her remaining life in a harem! Her psychic endurance broke down. She had borne all previous sufferings with courage. But this shock hit her hard, to the point of clouding her awareness. For one week she seemed to be out of her mind. At night she was tormented by frightful nightmares. Her screams annoyed the Arabs, arousing them from sleep, and they talked about killing her. But the brothers watched over their Sister and stated resolutely that they would rather die instead of her. The threatening horror passed, at least for the Sister, when the girls and women were taken from the camp, the white woman was left behind, possibly because a high ransom was expected for her. Soon SR. BENEDIKTA’S mind cleared and she regained her composure, becoming again, as she had been before this severe trial, a model of the calm balance which has not failed her for a moment since then. (Ibid. p.74)

ATTEMPTS TO RESCUE THE CAPTURED MISSIONARIES

1. Many efforts were made to get the prisoners free. The superior General of St. Ottilien prepared an appeal to German Catholics to support the ransoming of the captives. (Ibid. p. 75)
2. The diplomatic negotiations with Bushiri seemed doomed to failure since the Arabs kept demanding the withdrawal of the GEAS from the East African coast in return for prisoners' release. Admiral Deinhard on the German side was determined to break off negotiations with the Arabs. When this was known to Courmont of the Society of the Holy Spirit who was Vicar Apostolic of Northern Zanzibar, he asked the superior of Bagamoyo mission, Ft. Etienne Baur, to find ways of freeing the German Benedictines.
3. Unmindful of the danger to his own person, he crossed the area controlled by the rebels to reach Bushiri's camp. At one point, he was nearly shot by the camp sentry posted in the tall grass, who had recognized the priest just in time. Fr. Etienne was probably the only person who could risk such treks to intercede for the German contacts with them. Above all he had Bushiri's confidence. One of his discussions with the Dar es Salaam leaders about the release of the other captives lasted four hours, and though supported by Bushiri's person, did not succeed. The rebels were not satisfied with the list of Arabs offered by the opponents for exchange. Only the ransom was lowered from 6000 rupees by about 400 – 500 rupees.
4. Fr. Etienne's persistent and prudent dealings with Bushiri brought good results: On February 28 Br. Rupert, most severely injured, was released and received with brotherly love by the French missionaries at Bagamoyo; Br. Romuald followed at the beginning of March, also because of weakened health; on March 11 SR. BENEDIKTA and Bro. Ildefons were also released by Bushiri in exchange for the release of ten Arabs from German captivity and payment of payment of 6000 rupees as ransom (Ibid. pp.75-76)

THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS IS THE SEED OF CHRISTENDOM

The news of the death of our missionaries in Tanzania did not discourage young women to enter our congregation.

“The first notable results of the Pugu holocaust were requests of many young people for admission in St. Ottilien because of the reports of the mission's destruction. As far as we can determine today, at least six women decided to enter the mission house in Upper Bavaria for this reason, and all of them remained in the congregation until death.”(Ibid. p. 78)

It is of interest to know that one of these is MOTHER BIRGITTA KORFF, our first Mother General who entered in December of 1889.

THE LAST DAYS OF SR. BENEDIKTA SEVERING

Upon her return to the Motherhouse, SR. BENEDIKTA was the only professed sister among all the novices. On February 28, 1890, a year after the destruction of Pugu, the Apostolic Prefect of the African Missions requested for as many Sisters possible to the new foundation in Dar es Salaam.

“ SR. BENEDIKTA SEVERING of strong physical constitution and gentle disposition, did not return to Africa. She spent the remaining 36 years of her life in quiet, unobtrusive service, especially in the kitchen,

at St. Ottilien and Tutzing. She was known to have hardly ever spoken about her African experiences.”
(Ibid.p. 78)

“The obituary praised her everyday virtues of untiring diligence and love of good order. The younger Sisters revered her as model of prompt obedience. SR. BENEDIKTA desired to begin each day with an hour of silent prayer before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and so she asked to rise one hour earlier. She entered eternal joy on Holy Saturday, April 11, 1925 at the age of 71 years.”(Ibid. p. 79)

In those days, lacking our present day practice of debriefing following a traumatic experience, we can only surmise that SR.BENEDIKTA’S serenity and faithful service in community in spite of her having endured captivity and severe endurance of insult, cruelty and deprivation of food, sleep and rest, can only come from her deep faith and prayer.

PART II

SISTERS FELICITAS HILTNER AND CORDULA EBERT

It took sometime after the destruction of Pugu that Missionary Benedictines were sent again to Tanzania. The next batch was sent to Dar es Salaam, Peramiho and Nyangao, little by little as soon as the new young ladies that had entered were ready for profession.

What follows is the account of the martyrdom of our two next martyrs.

SISTER FELICITAS HILTNER was born on October 1, 1876 in the Archdiocese of Paderborn. She made her profession on February 28, 1901 in St. Ottilien. Before her departure for Africa she had been assigned to nursing and as potress at the St. Ottilien Mother House. She was especially fond of the poor children who went there. (Ibid. p. 92)

SISTER CORDULA EBERT was born on December 10, 1878 in the Diocese of Wurzburg and made her profession on September 8, 1902 in Tutzing. Sr. Cordula had worked in housekeeping. She distinguished herself by her spirit of prayer. Even before her entrance into the convent, she had a great devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus. (Ibid.p. 93)

From the day of their departure from Tutzing traveling to East Africa, Sr. Felicitas and Sr. Cordula were close fellow sufferers. (Ibid. p. 93)

The Vicar Apostolic was eager to bring Benedictine Missionaries to Dar es Salaam. Bishop Cassian Spiss was eager to take along two brothers and Sisters Felicitas and Cordula with him to Kilwa. On July 31 Bishop Cassian together with the two Sisters and a new missionary boarded a ship in Dar es Salaam for the voyage to Kilwa. (Ibid. p.93)

FULL OF EXPECTATIONS FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE BISHOP AND COMPANIONS

- Br. Gabriel Sonntag awaited them. He had arrived a few days earlier from his previous assignment at the procurator's house in Lindi in order to hire sixty Wangoni porters for the trip. (Ibid. p.94)
- Meanwhile the Sister and monks of Peramiho were looking forward to celebrating a pontifical high mass in St. Benedict's Church on August 15 which was the date of the anniversary of Bishop Cassian's First Mass. Archabbot Norbert Weber was on visitation and was supposed to be the celebrant.

THE TRIP TO AND BEYOND KILWA AND THE FLIGHT OF THE PORTERS

- The group of Bishop Cassian traveled towards Kilwa while passing through Singino Hill. On Saturday, August 5, he requested some guns at the district office for his Wangoni porters. On Saturday he passed the checkpost on Singino Hill. All set out for the interior of the country from the camp on Singino Hill near Kilwa. (Ibid. p. 94)
- The caravan already was several days' march beyond Kilwa when on August 13 there was news of the military station of Liwale being attacked. Thereupon, the porters ran away during the night. Only the two assistants Bernhard and Leonhard and an Anglican Christian remained.
- Realizing the grave danger, the travellers decided to turn back and abandoned all but the most essential baggage. On the morning of August 14 the most Reverend Lord Bishop celebrated Holy Mass, and the Brothers and Sisters received Holy Communion. After Mass all prayed together on their knees and Bishop gave the blessing (probably general absolution). Then they started marching back, taking only two crates and two guns. The Sisters and Br. Andreas were riding, the bishop and Br. Gabriel walked.

THE FATAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE REBELS

- About nine in the morning, they suddenly saw a great crowd of the rebels approaching them. The Bishop sent the two men to meet them and to indicate that he wanted to talk to them. The others knelt down and prayed.
- Then the bishop himself approached the warriors who had completely surrounded them and said they were missionaries, desiring only to do good things to the people, like teaching their children, etc. But they did not let him finish talking. The leader immediately thrust a spear into his neck, whereupon the Bishop fell to the ground and was pierced by more spears.
- The Sisters had sat on the crates. When they saw the Bishop falling they covered their eyes with their veils. First, Sr. Cordula was pierced on the side by a spear, then also Sr. Felicitas and Br. Andreas, Br. Gabriel first was wounded by a rifle shot. He cried out and ran a few steps, until he also was killed by spears. The Christian from the Anglican Mission was also killed.
- Bernhard and Leonhard saved themselves by fleeing quickly. In the evening Bernhard cautiously returned to the site of the tragedy and found the bodies stripped of all clothing. The corpses at least had been left with their under-shirts (chemises) on. Bernhard covered the Bishop's body as well as he could. Being alone and without tools, he could not bury him.
- Two eye witness reports reached Dar es Salaam on August 24. The two native Christians after escaping the attack went by steamer from Kilwa to report the tragedy. (Ibid. p. 96)

MIKUKUYUMBU AND THE TWO SISTERS

- The site of the attack was called MIKUKUYUMBU by the local people because of the trees growing there. Beatrix Biefel recounts: “Although their violent death cannot be called martyrdom in the strict sense of the word, still they sacrificed their lives in the service of God and for saving souls and converting the heathens. Certainly their blood will call rich graces upon our mission.” (Ibid. p. 96)
- Sr. Felicitas and Sr. Cordula were killed two months after the announcement of their mission assignment. They did not reach their destination, did not get the chance to preach the Gospel or to show God’s love by welcoming the children or taking care of the sick. But just through their total self-giving to God in profession and through their death they gave rise to a place for pilgrimage where missionaries, priests, religious and the faithful go to pray to obtain God’s Grace. Mikukuyumbu has become a place of pilgrimage for missionaries and on special events for the Diocese of Lindi.

PART III

SISTER WALBURGA DIEPOLDER

(In 1985 the Generalate published “In the Service of Love, Lives of Some Benedictine Sisters”. It is a compilation of manuscripts on the lives of ten of our Sisters from different parts of the world edited by Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB. I found the article on the life and martyrdom of Sr. Walburga as an excellent testimony to her faith and courage. With Sister Mary John’s permission I am quoting it here. I added the subtitles.)

THE YOUNG WALBURGA’S DETERMINED NATURE

It seems outright foolishness that an only daughter would leave her dearly loved parents and the homestead to enter a Missionary Congregation, struggling in its beginnings and having to record already several sisters murdered in German East Africa. Others had died after but a few years there – all, under 30 years of age. But that was Josepha’s determined nature, a “strong woman” who would 16 years later, on that memorable Sunday, August 27, 1905 (her 35th birthday) be inspired by the prayer of the Mass: “almighty and eternal God, in the abundance of your kindness, you give us more than we deserve, more than we ask. Pour out on us your mercy; take away what troubles our conscience and grant us what we dare not ask” to give her life to God praying after Holy Communion, “Lord, if you accept a sacrifice, take me and spare the other;” and that, in the face of imminent danger, when the Maji-Maji warriors were only a short distance from the Mission Station of Nyangao.

When Josepha Diepolder entered in 1889, she was recommended by the Pastor of Gronenbach, near Augsburg, as “diligent” and of modest behavior”, “very attentive”, and “not at all discouraged by the news

coming from Colonial East Africa" (now Tanzania) about the Bushiri Uprising of 1888/89 and the consequent killing of missionaries.

DESTINED FOR EAST AFRICA

Together with Sister Birgitta Korff, SISTER WALBURGA was sent to East Africa in June, 1894. With great zeal she devoted herself to the sick, at first three years in Dar-es-Salaam, then four years in Lukuledi and Nyangao. Father Maurus Hartman, the Apostolic Pro-Prefect, said of her, "I have seldom met such a zealous, and at the same time, kind-hearted woman." Challenged by the daily hardships of life she would respond generously and calmly. Yet, in 1898, SISTER WALBURGA had to return to Europe to recover her health.

She was again sent to the Mission. Her transfer to Nyangao was just a few months before the Maji Maji Uprising.

THE MAJI-MAJI UPRISING

This movement was directed against both, the German Colonial force, as well as the Benedictine Missionaries who were seen as collaborators with the German Government, as Father Sebastian Napachihi writes in his doctoral dissertation. The master mind was a certain Kinjikitile Ngwale. One morning, in 1904, he is reported to have disappeared in a pool of water. He emerged 24 hours later unharmed and began to preach his prophetic salvific message entrusted to him, as he claimed, by God. He taught that all black people were one, and tribal differences were not to be taken as ground for separation. God had entrusted him with a message and a medicine, "Maji", meaning "water", to enable the "suffering African to drive the white man out of the country." This medicine would make the warriors immune to bullets.

There was no grudge against the missionaries as such, but the aim was to get rid of all foreigners, all "red" people, as the Africans named the Whites. Almost all tribes in southern Tanzania took part. It is not clear, how far Islamic elements were involved, but a letter or Sultan Songea bin Ruufu to a Muslim chief states that "We have received an order from God that the Europeans must leave the country."

THE MISSION STATION OF NYANGAO UNDER ATTACK

There was no open declaration of war, but the people got impatient, and the fight began on June 28, 1905. By August 28, the Benedictine Mission Station of Nyangao was under attack by Maji Maji warriors. They looted all they could get and set fire to the buildings. Someone betrayed the hiding place of the missionaries who had left on Sunday, August 27, about 15:00. So far, excerpts from the book of Father Sebastian Napachihi.

We also know from Sister Bernadette Hefele, then the Superior of Nyangao, through her letter, written after the flight and her memoirs, put down much later in 1955, about these events: On August 15, instructions came from the Lindi governmental office: "Arm yourselves or flee." Then the missionaries heard about the death of Bishop Cassian Spiess, Brothers Gabriel and Andreas and Sisters Felicitas Hiltner and Cordula

Ebert on August 14. Sister Bernardine writes: “We Sisters (Sr. Bernardine Helena, Avia and Walburga) together with the children slept in the two-story-house of the brothers. We prepared for death, ready for anything Thus two days passed The restlessness among the population increased. When we received Our Lord that Sunday morning (for the last time in our little Mission Church) we all thought it might be our very last Holy Communion. We offered ourselves to God that He might dispose of us according to His holy will. Few people had dared to come for Holy Mass, whereas at other times our Church was crowded We took our noon rest as usual . . . when Thomas, our faithful teacher, came running, telling us of the danger Father Superior (Leo Lang) said, “Quickly – take something to eat and some blankets. We must flee. The warriors are but half an hour away....”

THE FLIGHT OF THE MISSIONARIES

A last glance back to the place we treasured so much – and we were in the wild bush where we hoped to find shelter Faithful Christians supplied us with clothing, blankets, wine and other things and took us for the night into a hut, near Nghawa. Next morning they led us to a hide-out where we sat down with a heavy heart, praying.

At 8 o'clock we heard a gun-shot, signaling the attack on the Nyangao Mission. Then there was deep silence. Several messengers arrived. At last, a man came, assuring us that all they wanted was our property, not our lives. Again the oppressive silence. Only the wind played in the trees. The, at about midday, a horde of wildly yelling warriors dashed out of the bush, just 15 – 20 meters away. We had been betrayed! We believed ourselves lost. We knelt down and praying awaited the death – blow or bullet. During the ensuing gunfight, Father Leo was hit in the arm. With a loud he gave us three times his blessing and the General Absolution. Brother Gabriel kept shooting till he, too, was wounded. It seems the attackers were frightened by the blessings and withdrew in one direction. We fled in the other. It was then, that Sister Walburga stayed behind. She had been at the rear with the children, and we thought she will follow soon.” So far Sister Bernardine.

SISTER WALBURGA GETS SEPARATED FROM THE SISTERS AND KILLED

It was August 28, Father Sebastian adds, that SISTER WALBURGA stayed behind, due to injuries. The victims of the fight included four warriors, all relatives of a certain warrior. “On the side of the missionaries, two girls were killed as well as SISTER WALBURGA DIEPOLDER, who was killed the next day by” that certain warrior, “probably to avenge himself of the loss of his four relatives.”

We can only imagine that SISTER WALBURGA must have endured, due to injury, fright, thirst and the final confrontation with her killer.

For the fleeing Missionaries it was the greatest pain to have lost her, not being able to return, because they were pursued for a very long stretch. Later, only her Holy Rule and a veil could be found.

SISTER WALBURGA'S RESTING PLACE

Fifty years later, the parish community of Nyangao made a pilgrimage to the place near Nghawa, where SISTER WALBURGA had found her death on the 29th of August 1905. People strongly believe, that while the Station of Nyangao was burned down, they had seen a cross above the smoke.

During the early Christian era, Roman authorities considered the people who followed “The Way” as unwanted foreigners, because they did not offer sacrifices to the gods and the “divine Ceasar”. Full of courage, Christians would support and help each other, risking everything. There are many parallels in Church History. Also in Africa, many Christians were forced into the Maji Maji Movement, but some showed a “a most courageous behavior” – as Father Sebastian writes – in protecting a missionary and were ready to suffer rather than betray his whereabouts. Many Africans paid or risked their lives in trying to save missionaries. (Also according to a letter of Father Leo Lang.)

Only faith can give that courage. We thank the many unknown heroes and especially our SISTER WALBURGA, who, like SISTER MARTHA WANSING, SISTER FELICITAS AND SISTER CORDULA gave her life in active faith.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARED REFLECTION

1. What would you consider as exemplary from the lives of our four missionary martyrs.
2. If you were a student of missiology, what lessons could you glean from the way our missionary pioneers were prepared for their mission to Africa?
3. If you were to act as a “devil’s advocate” in the canonization of our Tanzanian pioneers, what arguments would you present against their canonization?
4. How would you refute the arguments’ of the “devil’s advocate”?

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