

Early Jesuit Missionaries in Japan 9

Father Diego Carvalho (1578-1624), a Sendai Martyr

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(An article from Francis Britto's *All about Francis Xavier*)

(1) The Early Years

Next to Blessed Jerome de Angelis, Father Diego Carvalho (1578-1624), who died as a martyr in the waters of the River Hirose in Sendai in 1624, must certainly be rated as one of the great missionary pioneers in northern Japan.

Father Carvalho was born in 1578 in Coimbra, then the cultural and scientific center of Portugal, but little is known concerning his earliest years. His father's name was Alvaro Fernandes and his mother's, Margarita Luis. As a sixteen year old boy, Diego entered the Society of Jesus in Coimbra on November 14, 1594 and volunteered for the India Mission while he was still a scholastic.



1. Ieyasu

The young man had not long to wait, for as early as A. D. 1600, we find him en route to India in company with 16 other Jesuits. They landed in Goa towards the end of the year after a long and hazardous voyage, and from there, Carvalho set out in the following year for Macao in company with a number of other missionaries destined for Japan. It was in Macao, at the Central College of the East Asiatic Mission, that he finished his philosophical and theological studies and was ordained as a priest. Though still far from Japan, the young man was able to devote considerable time to the study of Japanese during these years in Macao and was able also to learn many other things that proved useful in his later mission career.

After arriving in Japan in 1609, he devoted himself to the study of the language for another year and was then assigned to the Island of Amakusa, where he spent his first two years as a missionary. It seems to have been in 1612 that he was transferred to Miyako. He was not destined to stay there long however, since the anti-Christian policies of the Tokugawa were already making themselves felt. First victims of this *purge* were a number of Christians who were the direct vassals of the Tokugawa along with knights and several of the leading Christian ladies. Hara Mondo, who had headed one group of Ieyasu's bodyguard, was also removed from his post. Active persecution broke out in Edo (Tōkyō) in 1613, and in 1614 a general Edict of proscription was issued, branding Christianity as a danger to the realm and ordering all churches to be destroyed and all missionaries to be sent into exile.

Only a few of the missionaries succeeded in remaining in Japan in secret at that time. Carvalho was one of the 73 Jesuits who were put aboard three Chinese junks early in November 1614, and deported to Macao. Twenty-three others were exiled to Manila in company with Takayama Ukon and a number of other Christian nobles.

The Superiors in Macao then assigned him and Father Francis Buzomi, a Neapolitan, to establish a mission in Cochinchina [southern regions of Vietnam] and Father Carvalho spent one year in that country. When he heard, however, that there was a chance of getting back into Japan in secret, he quickly obtained permission from his Superiors to go back to his beloved mission in this country.

He was one of the first to undertake this risky venture which entailed so many hardships, and could, to all appearance, end only in martyrdom. Returning to Japan, he spent one year in the Omura district and was allowed in the following year to make his Solemn Profession. It was not long after that, that he received another assignment to a new mission, which was to bring him many difficulties but also consoling results, and, in the end, the final consummation of martyrdom.

(2) Mission Work in the Northland

In 1615, Father de Angelis had gone to northern Japan with money and other gifts to visit the Christians who had been sent into exile there. It is recalled that when the persecution broke out in 1614, a group of 71 Christian nobles of the Kyoto and Osaka areas had been sent into exile to the Tsugaru area, where they settled in Takaoka (now Hirosaki) and its environs. A large number of other Christians also fled to that area of their own accord and sought to make a living there by farming or by working in the mines. For the time being, they were comparatively safe in this district.

Father de Angelis had, in the course of a very difficult mission trip, visited all of these Christian groups and remained in the area hoping to develop a strong mission there. It was too much, however, for one solitary missionary, and he was forced therefore to call for help. It was in response to this plea that Father Carvalho arrived there in 1617.



2. Blessed Jerome de Angelis

The task was such that it required men of wisdom and experience, and also men of great physical strength and endurance. Father Carvalho, then forty years old, was tall, hardy and vigorous, knew the Japanese language and had a great deal of experience, and was, furthermore, “a zealous man who loved work and was animated by a great spirit of brotherly love” (Annual Letter of 1619).

Travel in the still undeveloped northland was difficult in those days and was made much more difficult by the fact that the missionaries had to travel incognito. Though the persecution was not yet as violent as it became later, the priests had to exert the utmost care and generally disguised themselves as merchants or miners. For this reason, they also adopted Japanese names—Carvalho called himself *Nagasaki Goroemon*—avoided the busier highways and were often forced to hide for whole days in holes or between double walls. The Church had already gone *under ground*.

Writing In 1699, a Dutch Protestant contemporary (qtd in Boxer, 1951) described the life and work of the hidden missionaries as follows:

The priests are usually concealed in holes in the earth under the floor boards of the rooms of the houses wherein they lie, which holes are covered over with planks and mats; others stand all day long in a small space behind the privy, in dirt and filth, wherein one would not expect to find a beast, let alone a man; others conceal themselves between two partitions or behind the wainscoting which appears to be thinner than it really is.

As the pursuit grew hotter, leper's huts became a favorite hiding place;

for the lepers, of whom there are many in Japan, are greatly abhorred; and nobody will be easily persuaded to enter into their huts or hovels, which are very miserable and merely slight things of straw put up to keep on the rain at night since they go abroad to beg in the daytime (Qtd in Boxer, 1951).

The only consolation and the only reward the missionaries received for their labors was to be found in the unswerving loyalty and the ardent zeal of their Christians and in the rich harvest of souls they were still able to garner. The Annual Letter for 1619 reports that “Oshu is situated at the outermost limits of Japan where the persecution is not yet so severe. Two of our priests are now working there with wonderful and really extraordinary success.”

Reinforcements came in 1620 as we can see from the *Catalogus* of the Society, which lists the missionaries of the northern district as follows: Father de Angelis, Superior; Father Carvalho, “Missionary in Oshu and Dewa”; Father Matthew Adamo, and the Japanese lay Brother, John Yama. In addition to these, there were several catechists (*Dōjuku*) including Simon Empo, the long-time companion of Father de Angelis, who was received into the Society of Jesus shortly before he was martyred in 1623. Two years later, we find another missionary in this area in the person of the Japanese priest, Father Martin Shikimi. Even so, missionaries were too few, and the work was organized in such a way that each of the Christian groups would be visited at least once a year.

We still have a long and detailed report concerning the three months' trip Father Carvalho made in 1620 to visit the various Christianities of the northland including those in

Ezo (Hokkaido). Father de Angelis had visited Hokkaido two years earlier and had not only visited the Christians there but had also gathered as much information as he could concerning the land and its people and the available opportunities for mission work.

The discovery of gold during the two intervening years had brought on a veritable gold rush to the northern island. Carvalho himself tells us that more than 50,000 people had gone to the gold mines there in 1619 and some 30,000 in 1620. Many Christians also took part in this venture. Since it was easier to get to Tsugaru (Aomori-ken) from Ezo than it was to get there from Dewa (Akita) or from Nambu (Iwate-ken), Father Carvalho decided to go to Ezo first and to visit Tsugaru on his return journey.

From Oshu he probably went by way of Miwake (Mizusawa), then one of the principal centers, and then across the mountains to Kubota (Akita) in order to visit the Christians and to wait for a chance to get transportation.

Father de Angelis had made his trip disguised as a merchant but as such, of course, he had to carry some wares with him. Carvalho, on the other hand, had neither the money nor the wares and was unable to find any rich benefactor to provide him with such things. The only thing he could do, therefore, was to travel with one of the organized groups of miners disguised as one of them. In such cases, it was the leader of each group who carried the list of all of the members and secured the necessary entry-permits for all of them. As a general thing, these groups set out in the spring so as to be able to get to work as soon as the snow had melted, but by the time Father Carvalho was ready to travel, it was already summer time and it was difficult for him to establish the necessary connections.

In Kubota, the priest was fortunate enough to meet a Christian acquaintance from Oshu who happened to be making the trip to Ezo himself. In order to take advantage of this golden opportunity, Father Carvalho speeded up his work in Kubota by hearing confessions and visiting the Christians day and night for three or four days so as to be ready to leave at the appointed time. Together with his own companions, he then joined the nine men belonging to the group of the afore-mentioned Christian, set sail with them on July 25 and reached Matsumae in Ezo after a short and uneventful Voyage. One of the three catechists accompanying the priest was Simon Empo, who had gone to Hokkaido two years earlier with Father de Angelis and was therefore acquainted with conditions there.

When de Angelis went to Hokkaido for the first time, the Daimyo of Matsumae had paid little attention to the Edict proscribing Christianity for the reason that "Ezo is not a part of Japan anyway" and had even shown him a great deal of kindness. Conditions had changed, however, and it would seem that the Daimyo now felt that it would be wiser to yield to the orders received from the Edo Government and had forbidden the Japanese living in his territory to join the Catholic Church. He paid no attention, however, to the religion of the immigrant miners with the result that the Christians were still quite undisturbed.

It was in August when Carvalho arrived, and he proceeded immediately to call together the Christians then living in Matsumae. Since he had brought along his Mass-kit, he was able on August 5, the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows, to say the first Mass ever said in Hokkaido. This proved to be a great consolation to him as can be seen from his own written report:

I was able to say the first Mass ever said there. When Father de Angelis went there, it was for the purpose of exploring the possibilities and to study the area, and he had not taken a Mass-kit along with him. It was on the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows that I said the first Mass, and it would appear that Our Blessed Mother wishes to take this realm under her very special protection. The Christians were very happy since some of them had been there for two or three years and had been waiting for me since last year in order to go to confession. Others, whom I had baptized in Oshu, wept for joy at seeing that I had come to visit them outside of Japan. There were others too, who had fled from Kami (Central Japan) and other places because of the violent persecution raging there and had been unable to find a priest who could hear their confessions. When they found that they could go to confession and hear Mass so easily in Ezo, which is outside of Japan, they rendered ceaseless thanks to God and expressed their gratitude also to me for the pains I had taken in their behalf.



3. A Japanese VIP

Under the circumstances, they felt that they were well rewarded for the expenses and the dangers of their passage to this area since they had found the means for saving their souls in a place where they had least expected it. Others who had been baptized in the area attended Mass with great devotion, and when they had heard the sacrament of penance explained to them, they also went to confession much to their own consolation, and much, also, to my consolation since I could see with what fervor they received the sacrament. All of them wanted me to stay there but when I explained that that was impossible they resigned themselves to the inevitable but asked me to visit them every year in the future.

Father Carvalho spent a week in Matsumae and then went a day's journey inland to visit the Christians who were working in the gold mines and said Mass for them there on the Feast of the Assumption. He himself reported on the work as follows:

I spent a week hearing the confessions of the people in Matsumae and was anxious then to hear the confessions of the people who are working in the mines about one day's journey distant from the city. Since it would have been difficult for all of them to come in over the steep mountains and the bad roads, I decided to go there myself and

to take my Mass-kit along with me. The Christians provided horses and arranged to have a number of people go along with us but since the roads were so bad that horseback riding was impossible in many places, we made most of the journey on foot.

One of the mountains that we had to cross en route to the mines was so high that from its top we could see the nearest mountains of the Japanese mainland and although they were ten or twelve Spanish miles away, they seemed to be at the very foot of this mountain. The view from this mountain-top was very beautiful and extended over several realms, seas and islands. When I reached a village of the settlers near the mines—all the huts were newly built—I found that they had already set up an altar made of boards in the home of one of the Christians, and I immediately proceeded to fit it out with all the necessary equipment and ornaments. The walls of the hut were made of branches from the trees while the roof was made of bark, but everything was neat and decorated with curtains in Japanese style.

It was there that I celebrated the Feast of the Assumption, and I could not but weep when I remembered all of those other places in Japan where I had celebrated the same Feast in large and beautifully decorated churches and remembered also the plays and other festivities which had been connected with the Feast in those places. I really do not know whether the tears came because of these recollections or whether it was the thought that I was the first one to celebrate the Feast on an island which was the last one to have been discovered.

I spent a week in this place hearing the confessions of the Christians as they came one after the other from the various mines and was also able to visit the sick. After baptizing a few others who were able to take out enough time from the mines, I returned to Matsumae. There it was touching to see with what love and affection the Christians came to bid me farewell before my return journey. There were two men who stood out especially, and they were both former catechists (*D juku*) of ours but were now working in the mines and were making themselves very useful to the other Christians. Not only did they help the existing Christians, but also taught religion to the non-Christians and were able to baptize a large number of them.

Carvalho also gives us an interesting description of the methods by which people hunted for the gold—a description which recalls the techniques of the gold diggers of America during the nineteenth century.

The procedure followed by the gold miners is as follows: when a new place is discovered which, in the judgment of the connoisseurs, may contain gold, a group of relatives or friends band themselves together and buy up lots from the local daimyo along the rivers which flow through the gold field. For this they must pay a number of gold pieces whether gold is actually found later in the place or not.

Vast numbers of people rush to the scene, divert the streams from their channels and then dig down in the sand to rock-bottom, where they find little pieces of gold, similar to the pebbles on a beach, hidden away in the crevices in or between the rocks. This gold is washed down from the mountains by the water and since it is heavy, it sinks down in the sand until it finally lodges in the cracks and crevices mentioned above. Sometimes they find large pieces worth as much as 300 cruzados or even more.

After his return to Mastumae, Father Carvalho had to wait for another week for a chance to get transportation back to Japan proper. He used this time to make further enquiries concerning the land and its people in order to supplement the information obtained earlier by Father de Angelis.

Carvalho also believed that Ezo was a peninsula jutting out from the mainland of Asia, that it was connected in the west either with Korea or Tartary and that the eastern coast reached out in the direction of New Spain, i.e. Mexico. The thing that surprised him most was the tremendous abundance of fish, especially of salmon, that was to be found not only in the seas but also in the rivers in this area. He writes:

In order that Your Reverence may know how rich this area is in fish, and especially in salmon, I might say that at times 3,000 salmon are caught by letting down the net only once. In order to keep the net from being broken, the fishermen must then allow some of them to escape with the idea of catching them the next time.

The Japanese who live in Matsumae say that there is no river or stream, no matter how small it may be, which does not have innumerable salmon coming in from the sea especially in the fall of the year. They also provide the means by which the daimyo supports his vassals since he apportions the streams of his domain to them in such a way that the fish they catch can provide them with their support. Ezo has no rice or wheat or other grain with the exception of millet and a similar grain called *Hie* by the Japanese. And yet, they could have everything in abundance since the soil is rich and fruitful.

Two Christians had made all necessary arrangements for transportation and paid all expenses, and the return trip was made without incident. Disguised as returning miners, they were able without difficulty to get through the customs and border control in Tsugaru and then went on to Takaoka, the capital of Tsugaru province. Father Carvalho tells us:

From there we went on to Takaoka which is the capital of Tsugaru province. The Christians in that area live in a village which is situated a day and a half's journey from this port city, and all of them were waiting for us with great eagerness since they knew that we would visit them on the return journey from Ezo. Using a few 'mental restrictions' as demanded by the circumstances, we took up our

residence as 'travelers in quest of shelter' in the home of the principal Christian there.

I myself proceeded immediately to one of the rooms in the rear of the building, while my companions stayed and talked with the Christians of the neighborhood. The Christians immediately came in to welcome me and to congratulate me on the happy ending of my voyage through waters where many ships are lost as also on the ease with which we got thorough the border control in Tsugaru. All of this was regarded by them as a proof of God's special Providence. I then began to hear confessions, beginning with the Christians from Miyako and also gave them Holy Communion. Going over to a different house which had been prepared for me, I then heard the confessions of the people from Osaka to give them a chance to receive Holy Communion also. We then went on to another village, where the Christians of Hokkoku are congregated, and there I also found the three children of the Kyukan (Ukita) who had died in exile as a result of the sufferings he endured there.

In these two villages I heard the confessions of all of the Christians and gave them Holy Communion, and I do not know who was the more deeply consoled, they or I. When leaving, I urged them to be mindful of their condition as holy exiles and to do nothing that would be unworthy of their status and encouraged them to continue to be the glory and the models of the Church in Japan as they had been in the past. I then returned to Takaoka, where I had left my three companions whose function it was to keep up the pretense that we were but ordinary travelers.

On the day before our departure, I talked with the Christians about the best way of getting through the Tsugaru customs control in such a way that the vestments would not be discovered. This was a problem since the guards at this customs control station were accustomed to examine all clothing to see whether the travelers were carrying any contraband goods.

One of the Christians solved the whole problem by sending along a letter and a gift for the chief of the guards, who not only did not examine my clothes but treated me with great courtesy and promised me the same kind of treatment every time I passed that way. He asked me to come that way every year, and I promised to do so, happy in the fact that the kindness of this man enabled me and my companions to pass this customs control station without any difficulty. All this was a great relief for us since we had been really worried as to how we could get the vestments through if our clothes were searched.

Our good fortune was all due to the Christians for whose consolation God had made it easy for us to pass this control station which was notorious throughout the country and had become proverbial in the phrase *Tsugaru no seki*. Someone made the joking remark that when Japan was converted, people would sing new songs in place of the

old Japanese *Mai* 'dances' to commemorate the ruses and tricks we use to get by the customs stations rather than the exploits of the heroes of old.

These words prove that Father Carvalho still retained a sense of humor in spite of all of the difficulties he had to face and in spite of the dangers and persecutions to which he was exposed.

The priest avoided the province of Nambu on his return journey, probably because of the political disturbances going on there, which had also prompted Father de Angelis to by-pass that area. He did, however, meet a delegation of Christians from that province who had heard that he was passing by and came to see him—a fact which proves that the system of communications existing between the various Christian groups of the northland must have been quite effective and well organized. These Christians had rented a house in a certain village in order that they could meet and entertain the priest in an unobtrusive way. Father Carvalho stayed with them for three days, heard their confessions, baptized a number of catechumens and even deputed one of his catechists to go back with them to baptize the catechumens that were under instruction there.

The priest himself then set out for Akita and was worried again upon reaching the border-control as to whether he could get his vestments through safely. When he told the inspectors, however, that he had already passed the inspection at the Tsugaru control station they contented themselves with a superficial glance at his belongings. He himself wrote as follows:

I tell Your Reverence all of these details so that you can see the difficulties we have to face in behalf of our Christians and so that you can see also the ease with which God helps us out of these difficulties. All this is a sign that God is pleased with these journeys on which He has so often saved us from the imminent danger of death.

On one occasion, I had to cross a mountain in the stygian darkness of night at a time when it was raining heavily. All of my companions experienced some mishap, but mine was probably the most serious and dangerous. Since even my horse could not see the road, it tumbled into a ditch and got stuck there in such a way that three or four men found it impossible to pull it out. If I had fallen under it, it would have probably been the end of me. Pitch dark as it was, I could not have chosen any spot to which I might jump, but I found myself suddenly seated on level ground and in perfect safety just beyond the ditch. It was almost as if an angel had picked me up bodily—in *manibus suis portavit me*—and put me in a place of safety, for there was absolutely nothing that I could have done for myself. On another occasion when I was crossing a river in a small boat, the boat struck a log that was hidden under the surface. As a general thing, when that happens, these boats capsize but on this occasion it stood perfectly still to the great surprise of everybody. These and similar

blessings are granted to us very often and for this reason we do not reckon the difficulties we have to face, but feel that God is pleased with our efforts.



Having arrived in Kubota, Father Carvalho resumed the work that he had had to interrupt when he left for Ezo. One of the first things he had to do now was to hear the confessions of the Christian women living at the court of the Daimyo. The records tell us of one woman, a secondary wife of Satake Yoshinobu, Daimyo of Akita, who was then living at the Kubota court and had already studied the catechism and tried as far as possible to lead a Christian life. Her adherence to Christian principles precipitated a number of quarrels between her and the Daimyo, but as long as she was still in residence at the court the priests had refused to baptize her though they did baptize a number of her servants and ladies in waiting. These converts devised various tricks to elude the castle guards and to visit the priest in order to go to confession.

From Kubota the priest also visited several mining districts of the northland where some of the Christians had settled. At Innai he again had considerable difficulty about getting his vestments through inspection without being detected as can be seen from the following report.

Since a ten percent duty was collected on all cloth that was taken across the border, it is impossible to get anything through without having it inspected very closely. For this reason, it had always been impossible for us to say Mass in that area although there were many Christians living there.



4. Carrying a *hasami-bako*

On this occasion, however, I succeeded, thanks to a ruse on the part of the Christians in getting the vestments through and was thus able to say a number of Masses for the people. The ruse was carried out as follows. When the Christians heard that I was coming, one of them, an official working under the orders of the commandant, came from the castle to meet me. He had brought along his *hasami-bako*, a light box in which the Japanese place their clothing and which was carried by a servant who followed in the train of his

master. After placing all that was needed for saying Mass into this box, we disguised ourselves as miners en route to the mines and proceeded to follow our Christian friend on his return trip. When we arrived at the border patrol, this Christian spoke up for us saying that we were acquaintances of his and harmless mine-workers.

In this way we were able to negotiate both our entrance and exit without having our things inspected in any way though the border patrol usually examined everything they could find even in the sleeves or inside the shirts of the passersby. This meant also that the Christians were deeply consoled not only by the Sacrament of Penance, but also by the fact that they were able to hear Mass for the first time in that area. Thus ended my mission trip which had lasted for three months.

In the following year, Father Carvalho again made a seven days' journey to Tsugaru to administer the last Sacraments to Ukita Osa. On the return trip, he again visited the Christians in Kubota who were at that time threatened with another persecution. Satake had been incensed over the fact that his secondary wife and her maids had refused to pray in the temple and had dismissed her. This, of course, gave her a welcome opportunity to receive the Sacrament of baptism and to contract a regular marriage with a Christian.

During the year 1620 a superstitious sect known as the *Daigan-sh* began to cause trouble in the same province and especially in the district of Yokote. Some people spread the rumor that these people were really Christian in disguise, and when the government sent soldiers to quell the disturbance, a number of non-Christians in Kubota began to slander the local Christians and to use violence against them.

Just one day before the outbreak of this persecution, a dark cross, an omen perhaps of what was to come, appeared above the house where one of ours was then staying. Happily, Father Diego Carvalho had arrived in the city of Kubota in the district of Semboku just at the time when these rumors began to spread, and he was able to remedy the situation to a great extent....

These incidents had taken place without the knowledge of the daimyo Satake-dono who was then visiting the Shogun, and the Christians were worried for fear they would excite his wrath. To prevent this from happening, they therefore followed the priest's suggestion that they should carry on a Forty Hours Devotion to beg God for five blessings which were listed on a sheet of paper and placed upon the altar. These blessings were the following: (1) that God might prevail upon the Daimyo to change his mind and prevent the persecution; (2) that God might enlighten him and his whole province so that everybody would embrace the true faith; (3) that God might grant this same grace to the Emperor and to the whole nation; (4) that God might grant the will and the courage to all the mighty lords of Japan to do the same; (5) that God might in His

Goodness open the eyes of all of the people of Japan and give them the grace to enter upon the way of salvation.

For these five blessings the people prayed ardently in memory of the Five Wounds of Our Divine Saviour. While the people were still at their prayers, they received word on the Eve of Pentecost that Satake-dono was greatly displeased over the outbreak of the persecution. The Christians immediately reported the matter to the priest and asked him to come to join them in giving thanks for so great a favor. The priest therefore set out immediately and was often asked en route who he might be but never answered this question. His companions simply answered, instead, that he was a surveyor whom they needed to survey their fields. To the priest they then explained their answer by saying that those 'fields' were their own souls and that they wanted him to 'survey' these fields with a view to levelling them off, weeding them, planting the seed, etc, as was required in each case. (Annual Letter, 1622)

Concerning the work of the Jesuits during the year 1622, the Annual Letter gives us a brief summary as follows:

Four priests and one brother have spent the year in the eastern district in the midst of great hardships and in extreme poverty, but the results of their work were so consoling that the sacrifices were well worthwhile. No less than 500 persons were baptized. It was during this year also that our missionaries pushed forward for the first time to the district of Shonai (now Tsurugaoka) in the realm of Dewa. On this occasion a number of the Christian inhabitants had sent a written invitation to Father Carvalho, who was then staying at a distance of two days' journey from their place asking him to visit them. Though the trip entailed many and great dangers, he succeeded in getting to Sakata which is the principal city of the district. The Christians were overjoyed at being able to attend Mass there for the first time, and the priest spent three days in their midst and did much for the salvation of souls. He then went on to the city of Kubota which is situated in the province of Akita. Father Martin Shikimi, a Japanese, was the first one of our priests to reach the capital of Nambu (Morioka) where he was received by the Christians, much to their own spiritual welfare.

Fathers Jerome de Angelis and John Matthew Adamo made two trips to Echigo and Sado, districts which are almost completely separated from Japan. There also they found a great opening for the preaching of the Gospel.

During this same year Father Carvalho made a second trip to Ezo to visit the Christians there.

(3) Outbreak of the Persecution

The principal base of operations for the missionaries in northern Japan was the domain of Date Masamune, which was generally referred to as Ōshū in the early mission reports. The tolerant attitude of the Daimyo made this district relatively safe, and a number of well-organized Christian communities were to be found there. Date's own city of Sendai was too dangerous, of course, and the Franciscan Fathers therefore centered their work in the domain of Hasekura Rokuemon, while the Jesuits selected Miwake (Mizusawa) in the domain of Got Juan as their center of operations.



5. Date Masamune

After Father de Angelis was recalled to Edo in 1622, Father Carvalho served as the Superior of the Jesuit mission in the North. Miwake was at that time entirely Christian and after his strenuous missionary expeditions, Father Carvalho liked to go back to that district since it afforded him a fine opportunity to renew his own vigor both of body and of spirit without any danger of betrayal. Even from the viewpoint of mission organization and strategy, Miwake was favorably situated since it was secluded enough to escape easy detection but was at the same time quite close to the highway leading from Sendai to Nambu and Tsugaru as also to another road leading to Akita which followed the course of the Isawa River. It was therefore relatively easy for a priest living at Miwake to keep in touch with all of the northern missions.



6. Hasekura

It is that things had changed somewhat since Hasekura Rokuemon returned from his ambassadorial trip in 1620. Date had issued a general edict against the Christians, probably with a view to allaying any suspicion the government might have that he still maintained relations with the Christians or with the foreigners. There were a number of martyrs at this time, but in general conditions were not too bad since the persecution was not much more than a gesture to conciliate the government, and Date did not want to have recourse to violent measures.

Date was willing to allow Got Juan to practice the Christian religion in secret provided he would promise three things as follows: 1) not to allow the priests to live in his district; 2) to do nothing for the spread of the Faith; 3) to say nothing about the permission he had received to live as a Christian. After talking things over with the priests, Got said that he could not take such an oath and would rather die than do so. "The Daimyo was quite angry about this at first but finally calmed down and did nothing to press the matter."

The first danger was thus eliminated. Things were rather quiet throughout Japan during the year 1622, and some optimists began to hope that the Edict of Proscription would be abrogated or fall into desuetude. When Hidetada retired from the Shogunate and Iemitsu was named in his stead in July, 1623, these hopes were even strengthened. People remembered that Iemitsu had been on friendly terms with the priests in Sumpu when he was a young man and had been rather easy-going if not actually soft in his ways. Even in later years he had never shown any particular aversion towards Christianity.

These hopes, however, were destined to be dashed to the ground. In point of fact, it was Iemitsu who during his long reign from 1623 to 1651 brought about the most rigid enforcement of the Edict of Proscription and set up a nation-wide organization of inquisitors to bring such an enforcement about. Installed in office, he proceeded forthwith to give unequivocal proof of his attitude—a proof whereby he aimed also to prevail upon all of the daimyos living in Tokyo to follow his example.



This proof was given on December 4, 1623, when Fathers de Angelis and Galvez along with 48 lay Christians were led through the streets of Tokyo and burned to death just outside the city gate and in the immediate vicinity of the great highway leading from Tokyo to Ky to and Osaka.

How effective this example was can be seen from the fact that, even those Daimyos who had hesitated about enforcing the Edict of Proscription now began to carry it out effectively in their own domains. Two of the most determined persecutors now were Asano in Hiroshima and Date in Sendai.

7. Juan Goto

While the storm clouds were thus gathering in Edo, the Christians in Miwake were still able to celebrate the feasts of Christmas and the Epiphany in perfect tranquility. The Feast of the Epiphany was an especially memorable day for Got Juan since Father Carvalho received a letter on that day from the Superior General of the Society of Jesus hailing Got as a special benefactor of the Society and entitling him to a share in all of its spiritual benefits.

Father Carvalho spent the entire Christmas season with Got Juan and his people, perhaps without knowing anything about the martyrdom of Father de Angelis and his companions. It was the last Christmas celebration for the Christian community in Miwake.

Date Masamune, who had gone to Ky to for the installation of the new Shogun, was still in Edo at the time when the fifty martyrs met their death there. On January 26 of the following year, Iemitsu invited him to the castle and after a festive dinner spoke in veiled terms about the fact that there were still many Christians in his domain. Date took the hint and on the very next morning sent a messenger posthaste to Sendai ordering that all of the Christians be investigated.

To Gotō Juan, Date sent a personal letter urging him to apostatize. Gotō, however remained firm even when a number of his friends urged him to yield at least externally merely for the sake of appearances.

Father Carvalho was still in Miwake when the storm broke. Gotō Juan had sent him word immediately to let him know how serious the situation was, and both of them proceeded to prepare themselves for martyrdom. The priest called the Christians together, encouraged them to persevere in the Faith, and heard their confessions for the last time. He then betook himself to Orose, a small hamlet on the upper reaches of the Isawa River where the road over the mountains branches off towards Akita. It seems that the hamlet of Orose was at that time almost completely Christian.

In Orose, he built himself a tiny hut behind the house of the head Christian, Matthias Jihyōe and there kept himself in hiding. He had brought neither catechists nor servants along with him, his only companions being two Christians who were faithful to him unto death.

Only a few days later, apparently on February 6 or 7, the minions of Date Masamune arrived at Miwake, took possession of the home of Gotō Juan, and then pillaged and burned the homes of the Christians. This was the last warning to Gotō, who, however, remained firm in the faith and set out on the following day for his place of exile in the Province of Nambu.

(4) Martyrdom

After hearing about what had happened at Miwake, Father Carvalho along with sixty Christians fled farther back into the mountains and took refuge apparently in the valley of the Maekawa River. It would seem that the hamlet of Orose, which now comprise only about a dozen households, was at that time a place of much more importance. Most of its inhabitants were former vassals of Takeda Shingen, who had fled to this secluded spot and were now bound to no feudal lord. Orose was the last stopping off place on this mountain road to Akita and served as a link between the many mines in the surrounding valleys. As such Orose must have been a place of some importance, and the fact that it was the residence of so many Christians indicates that the missionaries had considerable success in their work there. Situated at a distance of 25 kilometers from Miwake, Orose probably served also as a stopping over place for the missionaries when they were going to Akita. Even now a local tradition points to a spot where a foreign missionary is said to have kept in hiding.

Concerning the arrest of Father Carvalho the Annual Letter gives us the following report:

The Christians in Orose were greatly disturbed over the report of what had happened (in Miwake), and sixty of them went into hiding

in a certain valley where they lived together with Father Carvalho in hastily erected make-shift huts. Father Diego was worried only about what had happened to Gotō Juan and about the final outcome of the whole affair. He did not as yet know that the spies of the daimyo were already searching everywhere. Even before the fires set to the house (in Miwake) had died down, one spy reported that Father Diego and a large number of Christians were hiding in Orose. The *Bugyos* therefore sent men immediately to arrest them and to bring them in to the public prison. After arriving in Orose, however, these people could find neither the priest nor any of the Christians even though they searched every nook and corner of the hamlet. Disappointed in their search, they started off on the return journey but continued their search in a valley they passed en route. Seeing a number of huts there, they knocked at a door and asked what sort of people were living there. The people answered that they were Christians who had taken refuge there to escape persecution. As soon as they heard the word 'Christian', the search-party immediately fell upon the innocent refugees with inhuman cruelty, bound their hands behind their backs and set fire to all of the huts.

When Father Carvalho heard the tumult and saw that his flock was in danger, he immediately stepped forward for the glory of God and the salvation of souls and cried out in a loud voice that he was the one whom they were seeking, that he had preached the Gospel and had taught the people the only and true way of salvation. Scarcely had he uttered these words when he was seized and taken with the others who had been unmercifully stripped of their garments and led to the house of the judge in Miwake (Orose?). Since the judge, however, would not see them immediately, they were forced, naked as some of them were and suffering severely, to wait out in the open until late at night. In the end, however, Father Carvalho was brought before the judge along with two of the Christians, Matthew Magoby e and Paul Kisuke, and was asked about his name, the land of his birth and his work in preaching the Gospel. He answered the various questions and added that he was willing, because of his great love for God, to shed his blood and to die in defense of the Gospel. The two Christians were then examined also, and one of them admitted that he had given shelter to the priest while the other admitted that he was the priest's disciple. After that all three of them were taken to a certain house where Father Carvalho spent most of the night hearing Confessions.

On the following morning, February 9, the captives were hustled off to Mizusawa. Two old men who could not keep up with the group were simply beheaded and then quartered according to the system known as *tameshi-giri*.

It was winter-time and the snow was deep so travelling was difficult, and it took two days to reach Mizusawa. The hearings began again, and the two *Bugy* , Sasaoka Bingo and Hashimoto Bungo, did everything they could to make both priest and Christians apostatize. Since neither flattery nor promises were of any avail, the persecutors resorted to threats and torture and two of the Christians were given the 'foot-screw' treatment.

Since this also failed to accomplish the desired result, it was decided to send the priest and the principal Christians to Sendai.

The trip to Sendai was made on foot rather quickly with all of the Christians bound, and each of them accompanied by a soldier. Though they were now on the main road to the city, the captives had much to suffer from the cold, but those who suffered most were the two whose feet had been all but crushed in the 'foot-screw'.

Since another Christian had volunteered to join them en route, the captives numbered a total of nine when they reached Sendai. They were confined in the city's prison, and the priest hoped that he might be able to give testimony to the Gospel at a public hearing, but he was given no chance to do so.

The exact date of their arrival in Sendai is not known but it was probably the 16th or the 17th of February. February 18 was the last day of the Japanese year, and some of the officials suggested that the whole case be put off until the following year. Their plan was rejected, however, and at about two o'clock in the afternoon the prison guards led the captives to the edge of the Hirose River. There, a large hole had been dug at the base of the Ohashi (bridge) leading up to the castle, and the captives were forced stand naked in the icy water for several hours while a large crowd of people looked on from the bridge itself.

On the shore, only about four feet from the river, there was a big, round hole in which a series of stakes had been erected and which was flooded with water about two feet deep. As soon as the captives arrived there, they were stripped of their garment and tied to the stakes in such a way that all of them had to sit in the icy water. This torture lasted for about three hours, but not a single complaint was heard. On the contrary the captives constantly repeated the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary along with such ejaculations as 'Praise and Benediction to the Blessed Sacrament', 'Blessed and praised be the Holy Name of God' etc. Father Carvalho was as motionless as the cold was unbearable and gave courage to his companions not only by his words but especially also by his courageous example. Whenever he stopped speaking, he sat there with downcast eyes and such an air of self-discipline that he seemed simply to be making his meditation. Vastly different was the crowd of onlookers who urged the Christians to yield and to abandon Christ. The only answer they received from the Christians, however, was that they were willing to suffer a thousand other things for Christ also, whereupon the mob began to vent their wrath on the priest and utter all kinds of insults and blasphemies. Father Carvalho, however, accepted all this with an air of holy indifference and continued simply to encourage his companions in suffering.

It was not the intention of the tyrant that the Christians should die in that spot, and they were, therefore, taken out of the icy pool. Their sufferings had been such, however, that they could hardly move, and most of them fell to the ground as if they had been paralyzed by the

cold. Father Carvalho alone was able with superhuman effort to kneel down with head bowed as he was accustomed to do in his own residence and with his arms crossed upon his breast continued to pray. Even the non-Christians were impressed by such an example of fortitude and peace of soul. Two of the others, Matthias Sohyōe and Julian Emon, died as soon as they had been taken out of the pit.

While the group still lay prostrate on the banks of the river, the governor sent word to the priest that he could save himself and all of the others if he would prevail upon them to apostatize. The priest, wishing to show them that the fire of divine love still burned in his breast and had not been diminished in any way by the cold, answered quietly that he had done nothing more than his duty and had already urged all of the Christians to accept all the sufferings of this world rather than to deny their faith.

The seven survivors were then taken back to the prison where they were able, during the New Year holidays to recover their strength to some extent and to prepare for the final struggle.

On the fourth day of the new year, February 22, they were again taken out of the prison and led, not indeed to the fiery death with which they had been threatened, but back to the same watery pit on the bank of the river.

Towards noon they were led back to the pit mentioned above, and after being stripped of their clothing, they were again bound to the stakes. For a time they stood in the water which reached up to their knees, but then they were forced to sit down so that their whole bodies were submerged up to the breast. With a view to increasing their suffering they were also forced from time to time to change their position. There is no need to repeat here the insults and blasphemies which were uttered against all of them but especially against the priest who was looked upon as the cause of all the trouble. The only words the Christians uttered in the midst of their sufferings were such as these: 'Jesus, Mary! Praised be the Most Sacrament!' etc. Thus they continued to suffer and to pray until night fall when the water began to freeze and the wind grew stronger and stronger while snow began to fall heavily. With conditions growing steadily worse, it was evident that death was coming nearer and the Christians began to bid each other a loving farewell and to enumerate all the blessings they had received. They went on also to beg for new blessings and to ask the Blessed Mother to provide them with the help and strength they needed for the final contest. Father Carvalho never stopped encouraging them as he had always done, but his most ardent words were directed especially to Leo Konemon, whose sufferings seemed to be especially severe.

The hours of darkness finally brought them the relief of a martyr's death. Father Carvalho, who was a man of very robust physique, was the last to succumb and was thus able

to comfort and console every one of his fellow sufferers in their last hour. It was about midnight when he also went to his reward.

It was already the fifth hour of the night when the non-Christian onlookers went home leaving Father Carvalho as the sole survivor in his sufferings. Those Christians who had witnessed the sufferings of the martyrs and had stayed with Father Carvalho until the last tell us that he died about midnight with that same unswerving fortitude and with the same words which he had urged upon the others.

It is said that even the non-Christians were filled with admiration at the heroism of the Christians and especially at the courage of Father Carvalho who did not even seem to shiver during the ten hours of his torture but seemed rather to be aglow with an inward fire. His fame was increased by the unusual way in which the enemies of Christianity sought to make him apostatize and by this new method of execution which had never been used in Japan before.

Thus did these seven men observe their heavenly birthday on February 22, 1624, in the same manner in which the other two who had gone to their reward four days earlier on February 18. The one who pronounced the sentence of death upon them was Date Masamune while the one who gave the actual orders for the execution was Moniwa Su , one of the governors of the province.

On the following day, the bodies were taken out of the pit, cut into pieces and everything was thrown into the river with the exception of the heads of Father Carvalho and four others which are still preserved by the Christians as objects of the greatest veneration.

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