

Dutch Colonial Church and Catholic Underground Church in Ceylon in the 17th and 18th Centuries

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I.

This contribution deals with a significant period in the history of Christianity in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is well known to the general public as home country of Theravada Buddhism or as the scene of a fierce civil war. Less is known however about its remarkable history of Christianity – which goes back as far as the 6th century (when the traveller Kosmas Indikopleustes reported about the existence of a Nestorian community there). From 1505 onwards the Portuguese made their presence felt in Ceylon; with them, Roman Catholicism was established on the island. One and a half centuries later (and definitely after the surrender of Jaffna in 1658), the Portuguese were supplanted by the Dutch; from then on, in the Dutch controlled territories, only the Reformed faith was officially recognized. From 1796 to 1948, the island became a British colony and open to the various branches of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism (such as the Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists etc.). For a short period in the middle of the 19th century, the country even seemed to become completely christianized, due to the backwardness of traditional Buddhism and the modernizing influence of Western missions. Thus the various stages of missionary expansion correspond exactly to the different phases of European colonial rule on the island (Portuguese, Dutch, British). At the same time, they resulted in the establishment of Churches which even today determine the denominational range of the local Christian community (where you can find Roman Catholics, Dutch Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists etc.).

Up to this point Sri Lanka could be regarded as providing just an additional example of the direct connection between colonial and missionary expansion. However it is much less this point I want to consider but rather the opposite observation: how Christianity which had been introduced as an integral part of a given colonial system, later took a course of development very different from its colonial beginnings. I would like to illustrate this with the case of the Catholic Church under Dutch rule. After the expulsion of the Portuguese it first seemed to have disappeared completely from the island. Then however it recovered underground and experienced a tremendous revival. Despite incessant persecution by the Dutch colonial authorities, it finally became the strongest force within the Christian

camp. This is the situation even today. I will try to give an outline of the development which has led to this situation.

II.

I would like to begin at the end of the Portuguese period. Catholicism had spread over the island not primarily by means of physical force and pressure but at least partly due to a policy of granting privileges to the Catholics and of deliberate discrimination against the non-Christian subjects. Catholic Churches were to be found primarily in the littoral belt which was occupied by the Portuguese. Large and numerous communities developed particularly in the regions around Mannar and Jaffna in the north, and in the area of the former kingdom of Kotte (near what is now Colombo) in the west. As in other Portuguese overseas possessions colonial Catholicism was organized within the *padroado* system. The Church was placed under the authority of the crown (which was represented on the island by a governor-general); the crown in turn had to bear the expense of building chapels and churches, maintaining an ecclesiastical hierarchy and providing Church personnel¹. The religious orders – at first the Franciscans and later also the Jesuits, Dominicans and Augustinians – were in charge of the existing communities and responsible for mission work. The ecclesiastical network must have been very tight in the Portuguese territories at that time. A church existed in almost every village, and, connected with it, a school. The number of Catholics in the island has been estimated to have been 250 000 in the first part of the 17th century². 130 000 alone were said to have been living in Jaffna around 1650³.

This whole system collapsed like a house of cards at the end of the Portuguese rule. Tens of thousands probably gave up their Catholic faith within a very short space of time. They reverted either to their – Buddhist or Hindu – »heathenism« or adopted the Reformed faith of the new rulers. In the territories under the control of the Dutch East India Company (the »Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie«, VOC) –, only the »Reformed Christian Religion« – »as it is taught in the public churches of the Nether-

¹ T. DE SOUZA, »The Portuguese in Asia and their Church Patronage« in: M. DAVID (Ed.), *Western Colonialism in Asia and Christianity* (Bombay etc. 1988, 11–29); M. QUERÉ, *Christianity in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese Padroado 1597–1658* (Ph.D. Peradenya, Sri Lanka 1993); P.E. PIERIS, *Ceylon. The Portuguese Era*. Vol. II (Colombo 1983), 141ff; DON W.L.A. PETER, *Education in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese* (Colombo 1978).

² C.R. BOXER, »Christians and Spices«. Portuguese Missionary Methods in Ceylon 1518–1658« (*History Today* 8, 1958, 346–354), 346.

³ J. VAN GOOR, *Jan Kompenie as Schoolmaster*. Dutch Education in Ceylon 1690–1795 (Groningen 1978), 111.

land« – was henceforth declared to be valid (so the charter of 1642)⁴. And whereas this principle was only applied reluctantly or not at all against the non-Christian subjects of the Company in Ceylon, it was directed more and more relentlessly against the Catholics who were regarded as a political risk and as possible allies of the Portuguese. Their priests were expelled from the country, and it was declared a punishable offence to give them shelter or to practice the Catholic religion. Catholic churches and schools were destroyed or taken over, and the faithful now streamed in their thousands into the Reformed houses of God⁵. Already in 1658, a Dutch source reported that not only the Portuguese had disappeared from Ceylon, but that also the »papist idolatry« which had prevailed there such a long time had now been successfully exterminated⁶. For quite a number of years, Catholicism was regarded as having vanished completely from the island.

At the end of the century however, clear signs of a Catholic revival were to be seen. This revival is connected with one particular person, the Father *Joseph Vaz* (1687–1711)⁷. Joseph Vaz was a Goanese priest. He belonged to a Brahmin family which had been Christian for two generations and was a member of the oratory of Philipppus Neri. Touched by the news of the miserable state of the Catholics in Ceylon, Joseph Vaz succeeded in coming to the island in 1687. Disguised as a beggar, he travelled first through the northern parts of the country (Mannar, Jaffna), then to the Western coast (Negombo) and to the central mountain region around Kandy. Always in danger of being discovered by the Dutch authorities and having to hide, he visited his coreligionists who were scattered around the

⁴ Text to be found in: PERNIOLA, *Documents* I,1. – Regarding the religious policy of the VOC cf.: C.R. BOXER, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800* (London 1977), 132–154; K.M. DE SILVA, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Dehli etc. 1981), 195ff.; T. MÜLLER-KRÜGER, *Der Protestantismus in Indonesien* (Stuttgart 1965), 39ff.; S. ARASARATNAM, »The First Century of Protestant Christianity in Jaffna 1658–1750« (*ICHR* 19, 1985, 39–54); K. KOSCHORKE, »Die ersten Herrnhuter auf Ceylon« (*Unitas Fratrum* 18, 1986, 53–68); L.J. JOOSE, »Schoone dingen sijn swaere dingen«. Een onderzoek naar de motieven en activiteiten in de Nederlanden tot verbreiting van de gereformeerde religie gedurende de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw (Leiden 1992); C.A.L. TROOSTENBURG DE BRUYN, *De Hervormde Kerk in Nederlandsch Oost-Indie onder de VOC, 1602–1795* (Arnhem 1884).

⁵ P. BROHIER/S.D. SAPARAMADU (Eds.), *A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon by Philippus Baldaeus* (Colombo 1959), 318; BOUDENS, *Church* 76; VAN GOOR, *Kompenie* 10.

⁶ PERNIOLA, *Documents* I, 3.

⁷ BOUDENS, *Church* 89–115; S.G. PERERA, *Life of the Venerable Father Joseph Vaz. Apostle of Ceylon* (Galle 1942); Id., *The Oratorian Mission in Ceylon* (Colombo 1936); Id., *Life of Father Jacome Gonçalvez* (Madurai 1942); T. DE SOUZA, »The Oratorians of Goa (1682–1835). A Model of Non-colonial Missionary Approach« in: Id., *Goa to Me* (New Delhi 1994, 98–105).

island and administered the sacraments to them. In addition, he led many former Christians back to the Catholic faith which they had abandoned. Later he moved around more freely and, in the more remote areas, openly revealed himself to be a priest. As early as 1689 we hear of open air services which were attended by hundreds of people. When Joseph Vaz died in 1711, the existence of strong Catholic communities on the island no longer could be denied. In addition they no longer had to live underground in anxiety, but made their presence more and more openly felt.

How is this revival of the supposedly dead Catholicism to be explained? Certainly quite a number of different factors have to be discussed. I will mention just a few of them.

a. Catholicism obviously was much more firmly anchored at least in specific segments of the Ceylonese society than it had appeared after its sudden end in 1658. This applies especially to the castes of the Karavas and Paravars, i.e. to the fishermen along the coast who represented the majority of the Catholics at that time. Those groups were the lowest in the insular caste system, as they had immigrated quite recently to the island and were engaged in fishing – an activity considered as inferior by the Buddhist majority. Adopting the Christian faith, they enhanced their social status, a move which would otherwise have been inaccessible to them. They manifestly held to this new – Catholic – identity even after the Portuguese had left⁸.

b. Joseph Vaz (and the other Oratorian priests to follow him) succeeded in linking the dispersed and isolated Catholic communities with one another. Vaz repeatedly marched through the whole island and also visited villages with just a few Catholic inhabitants. When necessary he was able to take refuge in the Kingdom of Kandy (in the centre of the island) which was outside Dutch control. Joseph Vaz managed to escape persecution from the Dutch authorities partly because he was an Indian. The Dutch carried out strict controls in the harbours of the island to prevent 'papistic priests' from infiltrating. Catholic priests from Portugal or other European countries repeatedly fell victims to these controls, but Vaz (and the other Oratorians of Goan origin) did not. We can suppose that this consideration – the greater aptitude of Indian Christians for evading Dutch control in Ceylon – already played an important role when Joseph Vaz re-established the Oratory of St Neri as an Indian community in ca. 1686⁹. And it

⁸ Regarding the sociological aspects of Catholicism in the Portuguese and early Dutch period cf. Perniola, *Documents I*, XXIII f.; T. Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon 1594–1612* (London 1966), 205ff.; van Goor, *Kompenie* 127. 109; F. Hou-tard, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka* (Colombo 1974), 158ff. – In parts of Ceylon, for example on the Mannar peninsula, the spread of the Catholic faith by the south Indian Paravas was initially entirely independent of the Portuguese (cf. S. Gnana Prakasar, *A History of the Catholic Church in Ceylon* [Colombo 1924], 39ff.).

⁹ Boudens, *Church* 90f.

were these Oratorians alone who ensured the supply of priests for the Catholics in Ceylon during the next 100 years. In a certain sense, this mission of the Indian Oratorians may be regarded as one of the first examples of an intra-Asian ecumenical cooperation.

c. Certainly the consequences of persecution played an essential role. The Oratorians had to act underground, they depended on support by the local people. So they had to adopt to their way of life, to share their food and to speak their language (which was a foreign language to them as well, coming – as they did – from Goa). This approach was totally different from the way the Dutch *predikanten* behaved who lived in coastal towns and were primarily in charge of the Europeans living there. Thus they had only sporadic contact with the local population, especially in the rural areas, and very often could hardly be distinguished from other colonial officials in their way of appearing in public.

d. The revival of Ceylonese Catholicism was to a considerable extent facilitated by the failings of the colonial church system. In the territories of the VOC, the Church was a constituent part of the colonial administration. The church personnel – the *predikanten*, the *proponenten*, the *krankeziekers* and school masters – were employed and paid by the VOC; correspondence with the Dutch mother Church was permitted only through the official channels of the VOC (and not independently from it). Although Ceylon was relatively well provided with church personnel in comparison to the other possessions of the VOC, their number always remained limited. In Jaffna for example, the preacher Philippus Baldaeus (serving in Ceylon 1658 – 1665) had to serve an area which in Portuguese times had been covered by up to 40 friars¹⁰. Even though their presence in Dutch territory was illegal, the Roman Catholic communities in 18. century Ceylon usually had many more priests ministering to them than the Protestant congregations had *predikants*. Dutch Church organisation was centred on the few urban centres along the coast and neglected the rural areas. In many aspects, Ceylonese Calvinism was a slavish copy of the Dutch model. Catechism sermons, for example, were held at three o'clock in the afternoon – as in Holland but exactly during the hottest hours of the tropical day; and the black church clothing prescribed in the Netherlands was in the same way required for presbyters and deacons in Ceylon¹¹.

These shortcomings however did not go unnoticed. On the contrary, the discovery of a large network of underground Catholic communities was a shock to the Dutch authorities. Among other things, it resulted in a number of quite remarkable reform projects among which the establishment of two seminaries for the training of an indigenous clergy on the island ought to be mentioned. Two such seminaries were founded, one in Jaffna (1692),

¹⁰ Brohier/Saparamadu, *Baldaeus* XVIII; van Goor, *Kompenie* 109.

¹¹ Cf. MÜLLER-KRÜGER, *Protestantismus* 51.

the other one in Colombo (1696)¹². In spite of all enthusiasm and some initial success the results turned out to be quite disappointing. The number of students remained smaller than expected, and many of the graduates applied for a job in the public service rather than in the Church. The seminary in Jaffna had to be closed again in 1722, whereas the other one in Colombo continued to exist until the end of the Dutch period.

In the meantime however, the revival of Catholicism continued. The number of followers was increasing, and likewise their self-confidence. On the 11th of December 1706, an official announcement («plakaat») was published not far from Negombo in which the children of that region were obliged to attend a Dutch-reformed school nearby. Earlier, the Catholics would have tried to circumvent such orders by means of passive resistance. This time however, something different happened: a public demonstration of about 200 people started and a petition was delivered to the secretary of the political council of the island. In this petition, the Catholics on the one hand confirmed their political loyalty to the Dutch authorities. On the other hand they openly declared themselves to be Catholics and requested to be exempted from the regulations of the *plakaat*. In fact this petition remained ineffective. But at least, the political council was forced to discuss the various Catholic complaints in detail before imposing a fine on its signatories¹³.

The Catholics were not only active among the Eurasian community in the Dutch settlements. At the same time they succeeded in converting quite a number of Buddhists and Hindus. Such conversions have been reported from different regions of the country, from territories that were under Dutch rule and from those that were not. At times they must have comprised remarkable numbers. So we learn in the life of the Oratorian priest Joseph de Jesus Maria who had passed away in 1729, that »there was not a single year in which he did not convert large numbers of pagans and sometimes even whole villages«¹⁴. How this conversion of whole villages took place, is described in numerous reports. Often it was connected with miraculous events, such as a successful exorcism for instance, or a prayer for rain which has been heard, or the sudden recovery after baptism of a person who had been ill for many years. Whole villages – often previously described as a »hotbed of idolatry« – were thus led to adopt the Catholic faith¹⁵. In addition, the local people were impressed by the habits and way of life of the Oratorian fathers, their courage and intrepidity, their ascetism and their celibacy. The *saddhu's* of the Hindus and the

¹² Details of this very remarkable experiment are to be found in: VAN GOOR, *Kompenie* (passim).

¹³ BOUDENS, *Church* 104ff.

¹⁴ PERNIOLA, *Documents* II, 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 200f.45.

bikkhu's of the Buddhists were held in high regard for similar qualities. Chapels were often built at places which already had been holy places in pre-Catholic times. Pilgrimages, processions, candles, statues, vows – all this was part of the Catholic tradition; but at the same time it was also well known to the Hindus and Buddhists. In spite of all polemics against »pagan« practices, Catholic Church life corresponded in many respects exactly to the needs and patterns of a culture which had been deeply influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. This religiosity in many ways fitted much better into the given cultural context than colonial Calvinism, which largely ignored such expectations and focussed instead on preaching the right doctrine and on scrupulous adherence to the Church discipline¹⁶. But preaching the Gospel required control of the local languages. And it is exactly here that the VOC Church had many problems.

It cannot be denied that the Dutch authorities again and again stressed the need of »preaching the Gospel to the natives in their own language«. Yet how difficult it was to achieve this may be illustrated with the example of the Dutch *predikant* Mathias Wermelskircher, serving in Ceylon first as professor and later as rector of the Colombo seminary (1741–1757). He is frequently mentioned in the Minutes of the Colombo Church Council, among other things because he »has not yet learned the Singhalese language«. This complaint is first found under the date of 27 April 1744. On the 27th of October of the same year, we learn that unfortunately he has not yet been able to find a suitable teacher; and six years later (!), at the meeting of 16 December 1750, we are still confronted with the sad fact that the *Eewaardene Dominee* Wermelskircher »has not yet been able to make but a fair degree of progress in these studies«. On 2.12.1751, he finally announced that he would hold a sermon and asks for this to be mentioned in the annual report to the government in Batavia. On the 13th of the same month, he submits his sermon at least in written form although he still has not been able to preach it. Already two months later (17 February 1752) we find him appointed Rector of the seminary of Colombo – that seminary which originally had been founded to train an indigenous clergy for the Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon.

I cannot describe the further development in detail here. This development is characterized by a steady increase of subversive activities by the Catholics on the one hand and an increasing nervousness on part of the Dutch authorities on the other hand. The longer the more the Catholic movement became something like an organized resistance movement against the Dutch colonial administration and its repressive religious politics. For instance, Catholic parents increasingly refused to let their children be baptized and registered in a Reformed church. Instead they pro-

¹⁶ Cf. Houtard, *Religion* 162ff; Boxer, *Dutch Seaborne Empire* 140ff.

duced certificates issued by their own »clandestine« priests working underground. This happened so often that these certificates finally became acknowledged by the Reformed Church authorities at least tacitly – provided they were also confirmed by two members of the Dutch Church¹⁷. – Again and again extraordinary meetings of the Colombo Church Council were held, dealing with the »increase and spread of this baneful doctrine of Popery«¹⁸ and complaining about »the daily-increasing pernicious creeping influence of Popery in these Ceylon quarters«. This happened, we learn, »in spite of all the wholesome orders and plakaats issued by the authorities, has nevertheless ... again raised its head so much and so vigorously that the so called priests and vagabonds ... have no longer any respect or regard, and openly by day practice their seductive religious exercises with the pealing of bells and the exposition of their idolatrous images; yes, and they even baptise and marry the people in the land in their own shed at their meeting places, and incite them to openly blaspheme the doctrine and the teachers of the Reformed religion; and in places where they have strong influence, especially like in the district of Negombo, act with oppression and scorn of the members of the Reformed Church ...«¹⁹ – On 23 March 1754, 200 to 300 Catholics marched through the streets of the town in a public procession with banners, candles and statues of saints under a canopy. Being »afraid of a rebellion«, the authorities did not dare to intervene any longer²⁰. The Dutch preachers not only had to watch passively at the public activities of the Catholics. In places with a Catholic majority (like Negombo) they found it also more and more difficult to carry out their duties (for example to perform baptisms and even to enter the Church)²¹. Only tacitly tolerated at first, the insular Catholicism was finally legalized in 1762. People whose marriages had been blessed by Catholic priests now officially were declared to be legally married²². At this time, the Catholic community already comprised many more Church members (and above all non-European Church members) compared to the official Dutch Reformed Church. The latter collapsed completely in 1796, at the end of Dutch rule in Ceylon. In 1806, a British visitor of the island described local Calvinism as dead. The Catholic communities in Ceylon, on the other hand, were portrayed as prospering. So, of the two forms of Christianity which existed on the island during the Dutch period the non-colonial had prevailed over the colonial one.

¹⁷ DRC Minutes 16.12.1750 (Vol. 4A/2, 40 [p. 6]).

¹⁸ DRC Minutes 8.7.1744 (Vol. 4A/2, 34 [p. 196]).

¹⁹ DRC Minutes 2.12.1751 (Vol. 4A/2, 50 [p. 23]).

²⁰ BOUDENS, *Church* 154f.

²¹ This happened in Negombo on September 20, 1750.

²² The decision of the Political Council of 31.7.1762 to be found in: PERNIOLA, *Documents* III, 200. Cf. BOUDENS, *Church* 156ff.

III.

What is the significance of this paradigm in the context of our symposium? Christianity came in various successive waves to Asia, partly as an accompaniment to Western colonial expansion and partly quite independently of it. The latter may be illustrated by citing the St. Thomas' Christians in medieval India or the Nestorians in pre-Ming China or – to take a more recent example – the quite unique beginnings of Corean Catholicism in 1784 (which had been spread in the country by local Christians, formerly Confucian scholars, some 50 years before the first western missionaries were able to enter the hermit nation). Sri Lanka on the other hand certainly represents the opposite case – having been exposed to 450 years of uninterrupted colonial rule and having thus inherited the whole range of Church establishments from its successive colonial masters. At the same time however the story of the Catholic Church in Dutch Ceylon shows how colonial Christianity could free itself from the initial context which gave rise to its emergence and develop a new identity and present a religious alternative to the then prevailing system.

In a paper on »The Portuguese in Asia and their Church Patronage« Teotonio de Souza once remarked: »It is a fact largely admitted even by the foes of the Roman Catholic Church that once it had been firmly implanted, even if in a very simple, or else in adulterated or syncretistic forms, it persevered in the midst of severe odds«. He refers to the severe persecution of Roman Catholics in Tokugawa Japan and to the Catholic communities in the Dutch territories of Batavia, Malacca or South India who, whenever they had a chance, and often at considerable risk to themselves, as a rule would »leave the (Calvinist) *predikant* preaching to empty pews while they heard mass, or had their children baptized ... by some passing Roman Catholic priest in disguise«²³. The Christian Paravas at the South Indian Coromandel coast for example, we learn from Philippus Baldaeus, fled the Churches which had been emptied by the new Dutch masters of the »idolatrous« images and statues of their Catholic predeces-

²³ T. DE SOUZA, *Portuguese* 19; more details in: BOXER, *Dutch Seaborne Empire* 140ff; Id., *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion 1440–1770* (Baltimore/London 1978), 102ff. As exceptions Boxer (*Dutch Seaborne Empire* 145f) cites Formosa and Amboina. Cf. W. CAMPBELL, *Formosa Under the Dutch Described from Contemporary Records* (London 1903). – The role of the Eurasian communities in south Asia (where there was also the continuing genetic presence of the Portuguese, to quote a phrase used by R.G. Wagner in response to this paper) as carriers of the continual cultural and religious influence of the Portuguese in areas that were outside Portuguese control demands a more extensive examination. Even at the beginning of this century for example, Portuguese was still being used as a liturgical language in some Protestant churches in Sri Lanka.

sors²⁴. Similar observations can be made in those parts of Africa and Iberoamerica where in the 17th century the Dutch at least temporarily took over from the Portuguese²⁵. Attempts to replace the ›Papist superstition‹ with the ›True Christian Reformed Religion‹ usually met only with limited success. Not only in Elmina (Gold Coast) was attendance of the Calvinist catechism classes poor because ›most of those here are Roman Catholics or Lutherans, and the Reformed are always too occupied with their daily business‹ (as the Rev. Jacobus Eliza Joannes Capitein [1717–1747] complained, Negro *predikant* and as such the only ordained African in Dutch service)²⁶. And in Caribbean Curaçao – as Armando Lampe has shown in his paper – Catholic slaves were even deliberately left unconverted by their Dutch Reformed masters thus establishing a kind of religious apartheid system²⁷. – In Dutch Ceylon however Catholicism did not simply survive. It increasingly transformed itself into what might be called the rallying point of an emerging resistance movement and platform of anticolonial protest²⁸. And it is very remarkable that it lost this function in the 19th century, under the liberal rule of the British. Then the Oratorian priests – held in such high regard in Catholic circles at the times of Dutch persecution – increasingly came to be regarded as outdated, unable to cope with the demands of a new time.

Abstract

Sri Lanka is a country whose history of Christianity runs a more or less parallel course with its colonial history: with the Portuguese (1505–1658) came Roman Catholicism, with the Dutch (1658–1796) Calvinism, with the British (1796/1815–1948) the various branches of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Under the Dutch, however, a situation arose in which the Catholic Christianity of the old, and the reformed faith of the new rulers, entered into a new form of rivalry. Catholicism, which – after its sudden end

²⁴ PHILIPPUS BALDAEUS, *Wahrhaftige Ausführliche Beschreibung der Berühmten Ost-Indischen Küsten Malabar und Coromandel* (Amsterdam 1672), 143f.

²⁵ Cf. C.R. BOXER, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415–1825* (Reprint Lisbon 1991), 106–127.

²⁶ Id., *Dutch Seaborne Empire* 152f; cf. A. EEKHOF, *De Negerpredikant Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein, 1717–1747* (The Hague 1917); D.N.A. KPOBI, *Mission in chains. The life, theology and ministry of the ex-slave Jacobus E.J. Capitein (1717–1747)* with a translation of his major publications (Zoetermeer 1993).

²⁷ Cf. *infra*, p. 106–116.

²⁸ Not in the sense of a fundamental questioning of Dutch colonial rule in the island: in their numerous petitions the Catholics repeatedly stressed their loyalty to the colonial authorities. But the Catholic protest movement resulted in a real loss of Dutch control in the ›Catholic belt‹ around Negombo.

in 1658 – for a long time was believed to have died out, regenerated itself underground and was increasingly supported by local people, while the official VOC-Church lost ground. Long before the end of Dutch rule on the island, Catholicism – which for a long time had been subject to severe persecution by the Dutch colonial authorities – established its position as the most numerous and powerful member of the country's Christian community.

*Holländische Kolonial- und katholische Untergrundkirche
in Ceylon, 17.–18. Jahrhundert*

Sri Lanka ist ein Land, dessen Christentumsgeschichte seiner Kolonialgeschichte weithin parallel geht: mit den Portugiesen (1505–1658) kam der römische Katholizismus, mit den Holländern (1658–1796) der Calvinismus, mit den Briten (1796/1815–1948) die unterschiedlichen Spielarten des angelsächsischen Protestantismus ins Land. Unter den Holländern entwickelte sich freilich eine Konstellation, in der das katholische Christentum der alten und der reformierte Glaube der neuen Herren in ganz neuer Weise in Konkurrenz gerieten: Der nach dem jähen Ende 1658 lange Zeit totgeglaubte Katholizismus regenerierte sich im Untergrund und wurde zunehmend von der einheimischen Bevölkerung unterstützt, die offizielle VOC-Kirche hingegen verlor immer stärker an Boden. Bereits lange vor dem Ende der holländischen Herrschaft auf der Insel 1796 setzte sich der anfangs heftig verfolgte Katholizismus als stärkste Kraft in der christlichen Gemeinschaft des Landes durch.

*La Iglesia colonial holandesa y la Iglesia Católica clandestina
en Ceylon, siglos XVII y XVIII*

Sri Lanka es un país donde la historia del cristianismo va acompañada de la historia colonial: Los portugueses (1505–1658) llevaron el catolicismo romano al país, los holandeses (1658–1796) el calvinismo y los ingleses (1796/1815–1948) las diferentes variantes del protestantismo anglosajón. Bajo el dominio por parte de los holandeses se desarrolló una constelación, en la que el cristianismo católico de los antiguos dueños compitió con la fe reformada de los nuevos dueños: Después de su fin abrupto en 1658, el catolicismo parecía muerto largo tiempo, pero volvía a regenerarse clandestinamente y encontraba cada vez más apoyo de la población indígena, mientras la iglesia oficial de »VOC« perdía más y más territorio. Mucho antes de que terminara el dominio holandés en la isla (1796), el catolicismo, que fue al comienzo motivo de persecución, se imponía como la fuerza más importante en la comunidad cristiana del país.