



### **Bold humility**

Not so long ago the most typical images of mission came from the military. We were at “war with paganism” and determined to “conquer new lands” for Christ. It was great for encouraging commitment and endurance but it was also superior and defensive and often prevented us from seeing the good in the cultures and religions with which we were “at war”.

Cardinal Hume put it well. When he returned from the Synod on the Family he told reporters that while dozing during a long speech he had had a dream, “I saw in a dream a vision. It was a vision of the Church. I saw a fortress, strong and upstanding. Every stranger approaching seemed to those who defended it to be an enemy to be repelled; from that fortress the voices of those outside could not be heard.” It is difficult to hear the voices of those with whom we are at war or whom we regard as needy and ignorant.

I am reminded of my time working in a parish in Germany. My generation was brought up on German war movies so when I would go on house visitation in Germany I was often shocked to see photos of relatives in German helmets on the wall. My instinctive reaction was that is the enemy but to them it was their lost father or uncle. Back in Australia I heard a German-Australian industrialist comment on why he gave scholarships every year for a few young Australians to study in Germany. He explained that in every war each side has propaganda about the other, painting as bad a picture as possible because otherwise they wouldn't fight. He then made the telling point that at the end of the war the vanquished have to rethink their propaganda because the victor insists but the victor rarely has to rethink their propaganda. He thought living and studying with German students might help a few young Australians to see through our propaganda. You can win too “many wars” and never have to rethink your basic assumptions.

We can become too powerful and too superior. The Japanese missiologist, Kosuke Koyama, challenged Western missionaries to give up their “crusading minds” and “teacher complexes”. We have to learn to be wary of our urge to change people and of our need to be always in charge and always the giver, the teacher.

I think David Bosch had the best insight when he said we should operate out of a bold humility. We can be bold and confident, as Jesus was, because we have something to share but we also need to be humble and respectful so that we can maintain a habit of mind that is open and able to reflect on experience, and grow through relationships. Most conversions come through relationships between humble people bold enough to share.

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