

A Brief Historical Glimpse of the Catholic Church in Fujian Province

· Peter Barry ·



SOME OF THE PRIESTS IN FUJIAN TODAY

In the rear, from L-R:

Frs. Feng Xiaoqin, Xu Zifei,
Cai Yizhong, Shen Chaoyi, Li Wugang,
Chen Mingyuan, and He Dunqian

In the front, from L-R:

Fr. Huang Ziyu, vicar-capitular of Xiamen,
Bishop Joseph Lin Quan of Fuzhou,
and Fr. Zhang Shizi, vicar-capitular of Funing

(Picture taken
December, 1982)

This year marks the 350th Anniversary of the arrival in China of the Dominican Fathers. Disregarding a few earlier visits of a temporary nature, the Dominicans calculate their history in China from the year 1633 when one of their number, Juan Baptista de Morales reached the Province of Fujian. Fujian, and later, Taiwan was to become the main area for subsequent Dominican missionary activity. As part of the celebration of 350 years, Tripod offers the following brief summary of the history of the Catholic Church in Fujian. Such a study also offers those interested in Chinese Church history an additional bonus, for the history of the Church in Fujian parallels to a great extent not only that of the Dominican Order in China but also the history of the Church throughout China as well.

The Church in Fujian, especially in its early years, produced a variety of famous personages who were to make their mark in Church history. Also, the effects of the Church's experience in Fujian were not only felt locally but had repercussions throughout the whole of China. For these two reasons, Fujian Church history can well serve as a microcosm for historians concerned with the whole history of the Church in China. Consider the following people and events that belong to the Church history of Fujian. The Jesuit, Giulio Aleni, resided for almost 25 years (1625-1649) in Fujian. As mentioned above, Fr. Juan Baptista de Morales, who would later play a prominent role in the Rites Controversy, arrived in Fujian in 1633. The first vicar apostolic for south China, Francois Pallu, reached Fujian in 1684. He was accompanied by Charles Maigrot, a member of the newly founded Paris Mission Society. Pallu died later in the first year of his arrival and was buried in Moyang, outside Fuan. Luo Wenzao, the first Chinese bishop, was born in a village near Fuan. He was baptized by Antonio de Santa Maria, a Spanish Franciscan priest, who had come to Fujian with de Morales. A disturbance in Fuan in 1723 led to a nationwide prohibition of Christianity by the Yong Zheng emperor in 1724.

The historian Fang Hao (方豪) wrote of Giulio Aleni, who came to China in 1613, that of all the foreign missionaries who ever lived in China, none was more welcomed by Chinese scholars than Aleni. Aleni was called "the Western Confucius", Fang Hao noted, a title that even the great Matteo Ricci did not receive. As a missionary, Aleni followed Ricci's policy of accommodation to the Chinese Rites. During his career Aleni spent time in Hangzhou, Yangzhou and Shaanxi, before being invited to Fujian by the official Ye Xianggao (葉向高) in 1625. While in Fujian he lived in Fuzhou (福州), Quanzhou (泉州) and Xinghua (興化). It is reported that by the late 1630's Aleni and other Jesuits had built churches in each of the eight prefectures of the province. Aleni died

in 1649 at the age of 67, in Yanping (延平山) in the hills of western Fujian, where he had gone to seek refuge from the invading armies of the new Qing (Manchu) dynasty. He was buried outside the north gate of Fuzhou City.

The Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary was founded in the Philippines in 1582 to administer the activities of Dominican missionaries in the Philippines, China and Japan. In 1624, some Dominican priests accompanied a Spanish expedition to Formosa. On Formosa the Dominicans established a mission at Danshui (淡水). It was from there that they launched missionary forays to the China mainland. In 1630, Father Angelo Cocchi reached Fujian, where he was welcomed by Aleni. Cocchi died in 1633, but in response to a request for help which Cocchi had sent to Manila, Fathers Morales and Santa Maria arrived that year in Fujian.

Before the 1630's the Jesuits and the Portuguese had a monopoly on the missions of China. Ever since Pope Alexander VI's Line of Demarcation in 1493, the Spanish had to come to the Orient by way of the Atlantic Ocean, Mexico, the Pacific Ocean and the Philippines. Further obstacles encountered by the Spanish Dominicans were: Macao became off limits to them after 1640, they were expelled from Formosa by the Dutch in 1642, the unfriendliness of the Jesuits (especially during the Rites Controversy), and the opposition of Chinese authorities. An example of the latter was the expulsion to Macao of eight Spanish Dominicans and Franciscans who arrived in Fujian in 1637.

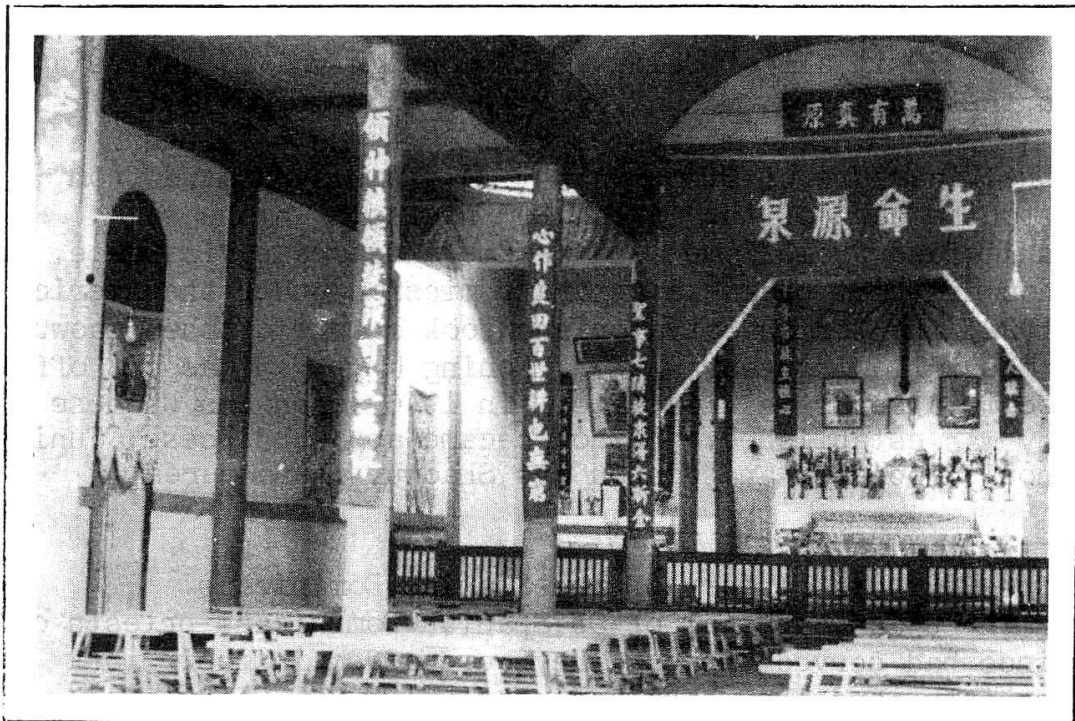
In spite of the abovementioned difficulties, the Spanish missionaries did manage to build a church in Fuzhou in 1655. Their most flourishing Christian communities, however, were around Fuan, north of Fuzhou.

In an attempt to regain control of the China missions from that of the Portuguese Padroado, Rome, in 1658, established the institution of vicars apostolic. The first three appointed were La Motte Lambert, Francois Pallu and Ignace Cotolendi. Their jurisdictions were as follows: Lambert - Cochin China, Pallu - China south of the Yangtze River, and Cotolendi - Nanking, Korea and part of north China. These three men were also instrumental in founding the Paris Foreign Mission Society in 1663. After two previous attempts (in 1662 and 1670), Pallu finally succeeded in reaching Fujian in 1684. He died later that year in the arms of Charles Maigrot.

At Pallu's suggestion, Luo Wenzao, who had been ordained in 1656,

was appointed vicar apostolic of Nanking in 1674 to replace Cotelendi. Luo, however, was refused episcopal consecration in Manila, due, presumably, to his lenient views on the rites question. He finally received episcopal ordination in 1685 in Canton, at the hands of the Italian Franciscan, Bernardin della Chiesa. In 1690, Luo was appointed bishop of the newly created diocese of Nanking. He died the following year.

In 1723, some Chinese of the literati class in Fuan denounced the Spanish missionaries because they were building a church there. The scholars complained to the governor, who in turn memorialized the throne, requesting that Christianity be eliminated from the country. In response, the Yong Zheng emperor, in a decree dated January 10, 1724, ordered that all missionaries, except those skilled in astronomy (these were to move to Beijing), be expelled to Macao. Also, church buildings were to be confiscated and Christians forced to renounce their faith. The preaching of Christianity was prohibited throughout the whole empire. Emperor Kangxi had already forbidden the preaching of Christianity in 1707 by any missionaries who refused to take an oath to abide by Matteo Ricci's view of the Chinese Rites.



THE
CATHOLIC
CHURCH OF
FUAN
LOCATED AT
#5 LONG-
JIANG
ROAD

One of the missionaries expelled from Fujian in 1724 was the Spanish Dominican, Petrus Sanz. He lived for a time in Canton, and in 1730 was appointed vicar apostolic of Fujian. Ignoring the 1724 ban on Christianity, Sanz returned to Fujian in 1738. In 1746, while administer-

ing Confirmation in Fuan, Bishop Sanz and four other Spanish Dominicans were accused of crimes by certain citizens and arrested. When news of the priests' arrest reached Peking, Emperor Qian Long ordered a nationwide search for foreign priests and punishment to those officials who allowed them to enter. Missionaries and Christians then experienced a period of persecution. Bishop Sanz was executed in 1747, and the four other Dominicans in the following year.

Christianity did not begin to expand again until after the First Opium War. Two of the five ports declared open by the Treaty of Nanking, the Unequal Treaty which concluded the war, were located in Fujian: Fuzhou and Xiamen. Foreign missionaries began to return to China, but they were not allowed to travel outside the treaty ports to propagate their religion. Permission to do so was contained in the Treaty of Beijing (1860), at the end of the Second Opium War. At any rate, by 1859 the Spanish Dominicans had built 13 churches in Fujian, and in the same year, it was reported, Fuzhou had 3,000 Christians, most of whom were boat people.

In 1883, Fujian was divided into two vicariates apostolic: Fuzhou and Xiamen (廈門). In 1890, Catholics in Fujian numbered 34,250 (out of approximately 500,000 in all of China). 17 foreign and 13 native priests worked in the Province.

In 1913, the Vicariate of Dingzhou (汀州) was separated from Fuzhou and given to the care of the German Dominicans. In the same year, Formosa was divided from Xiamen and became a separate vicariate. In 1918, the Jianou district became a separate mission under the American Dominicans. In 1922, the German Salvatorians took charge of the Shaowu district, and in the following year (1923), Funing (福寧) was cut off from Fuzhou to become a separate vicariate. In 1946, when the Chinese Catholic hierarchy was established, Fuzhou became an archdiocese, Funing, Xiamen and Dingzhou, dioceses, and Jianou and Shaowu, prefectures apostolic.

Thus, in the 350 year history of the Spanish Dominicans' evangelizing work in Fujian, a total of 98 Spanish Dominicans priests of Holy Rosary Province had served there. They were aided in their work by 1,241 lay catechists, and they baptized nearly 100,000 Catholics. They established three middle schools, having (in 1948) 1,767 students and 41 primary schools with 3,212 students. The three middle schools were the College of St. Dominic for Boys (揚光學校) and Holy Rosary College for Girls (懿範女學校) in Fuzhou, and St. Thomas College for Boys (崇正中小學) located at Zhangzhou (漳州) in the Xiamen

diocese. The Dominicans, missionaries of other Orders, and religious Sisters who worked with them, also administered (by 1948) 19 orphanages, 12 hospitals, 26 dispensaries and one home for the aged. There was a major seminary for training Chinese priests located in Fuzhou.

In 1948 (the last year for which there are figures), 61 Chinese and 98 foreign priests worked in Fujian. 49 Chinese and 88 foreign religious Sisters were also listed as serving in the Province. Catholics numbered 91,617. One thousand adult baptisms were recorded in Fujian for the year 1947-48.

From the above brief review, we can see that the Catholic Church has had a remarkable history in Fujian. Likewise, through its educational and social works, the Church can be said to have made some contribution to the development of the province.

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