



The Tercentenary of the Paris Foreign Mission Society in China

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It was in January of 1684 that the first three missionaries of the Paris Foreign Mission Society arrived on mainland China to begin mission work; three others followed close on their heels, thus inaugurating an uninterrupted flow of Society personnel that continued up to the time of the expulsion of all foreign missionaries during the 1950's.

The Jesuits arrived in China in 1581. By 1585, they had obtained a monopoly on Chinese missionary activity. However, by 1633 Dominicans, Franciscans and, somewhat later, Augustinians, had felled in their wake. Fifty years later a third wave of missionary activity began with the institution by Rome of Apostolic Vicars (a move closely connected with the founding of the Paris Foreign Mission Society). This third wave

brought with it ecclesiastical structures of a more regular and definitive nature that were destined to have a lasting effect on the structure of the Church in China.

This article will restrict itself to the initial efforts to open up the mission field, an effort that went on for the better part of a quarter of a century and which was marked by perseverance and often by heroism.

THE BEGINNING

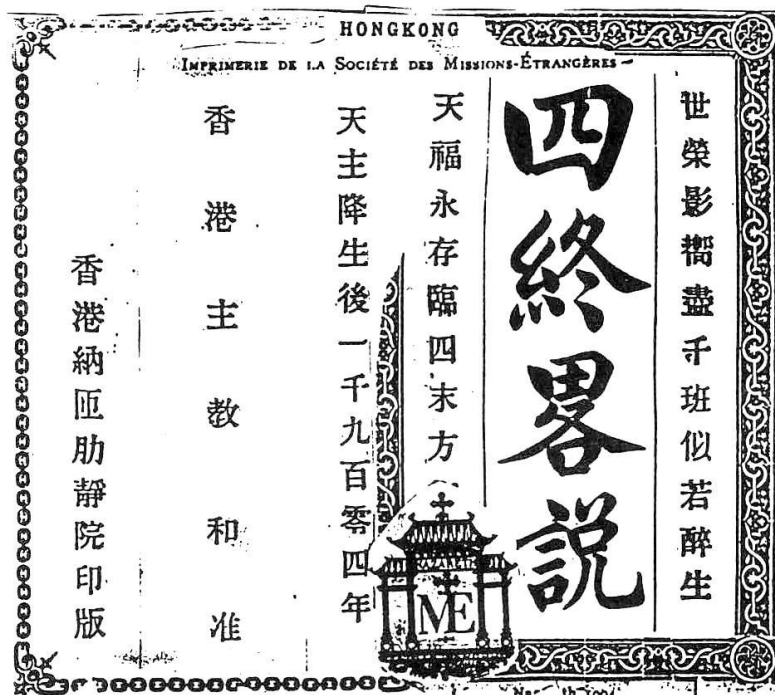
It is not an exaggeration to say that a new missionary era was inaugurated by the establishment of the Society of Foreign Missions near Paris between 1658 and 1663. Innovations were both structural and in emphasis. Bishops were now sent to the missions for the purpose of establishing a local, native clergy. This marked a change in the former emphasis on general evangelization and catechesis. Secular priests (in particular the missionary branch of the French speaking clergy) were to work in collaboration with the missionary bishops. Previous to this, missionaries were members of religious orders (mendicants) or certain congregations (regular) and as such enjoyed various degrees of exemption and independence from the authority of local bishops. Another departure from the past was that whereas missionaries had up to that time been serving under the protection of either Spain or Portugal (and thus were not overly concerned with directives emanating from Rome), the Society of Foreign Missions declared itself from the outset to be totally dependent on the Roman Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

The first Apostolic Vicars of this new era were: Francis Pallu (1626-1684), canon from the College of St. Martin of Tours, Paris. Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624-1679), a former magistrate of the city of Rouen. Ignatius Cotelendi (1630-1662) parish priest from Saint Medeleine in Aix, who died en-route to China.

THE CHINA MISSION

Cotelendi, Apostolic Vicar of Nanjing, was nominated Apostolic Vicar of East China, and Pallu and Lambert de la Motte were named vicars of Tonkin and Cochinchina respectively, which also included ecclesiastical administration over five provinces in China. This is why their mission came to be designated collectively, from the very beginning, as the "China Mission."

The contents of two short treatises published in Paris in 1659 for



Many religious books used by missionaries were printed in Nazareth House, Hong Kong.

only of far greater territorial dimensions and far more heavily populated than Europe, but also as being endowed with cities of which even Paris could be envious.

After his nomination in July 1658, Pallu, then 33 years of age, remained in Rome for five months with the intention of obtaining ecclesiastical powers suitable for carrying out the mission with which he had been entrusted. He requested permission to consecrate local Bishops who were to be selected from among a certain number of catechists in Tonkin, Cochinchina, and then carry out the same procedure in China.

"Your Eminences know all too well how advantageous it would be for the propagation of the faith and its preservation if some natives were consecrated bishops... Thus did the Church expand everywhere and that custom has continued, as innumerable documents testify. Moreover, Your Eminences know perfectly well how prejudicial the absence of native bishops has been for the mission in our day."

However, these simple catechists whom Pallu wanted to consecrate as bishops had no knowledge of the Latin language. In such circumstance, he saw that it was necessary to create a liturgy in Chinese. This some-

the purpose of attracting funds and encouraging vocations, "A Brief Account of the Missions in China" and "The Dispatch of Three Bishops to the New Churches of that Empire", permit one to see just how the promoters of the new Mission viewed China. "This country surpasses all Europe in its immense territorial dimensions, and counts the number of its inhabitants at more than two hundred and fifty million... Just as in ancient times Athens sent us a Saint Denys, now Paris is preparing to send some bishops to other cities which are by no means its inferior, either in nobility or in wealth."

Thus the France of Louis XIV considered China not

what delicate task of convincing the Congregation of the need for a vernacular liturgy for the Chinese was assumed by Monsignor Alberici, the Secretary of Propaganda Fide. On May 29, 1659 Alberici notified Pallu that his efforts had failed. However, on September 29th, the Congregation made it clear to the three vicars that if they desired a liturgy in Chinese, the translation would have to be done in Rome by two competent China missionaries recalled for that purpose and assisted by members of the Chinese literati. Also, in the following month, the vicars were reminded that the Holy See reserved to itself the appointment of bishops, based on individual dossiers filed on each individual.

JOURNEY TO CHINA

In June 1660 Monsignor Lambert de la Motte became the first Vicar Apostolic to set sail for far off Asia. With his two companions he arrived at Ayuthia, then the capital of Siam, on the 22nd of August 1662.

They were well received in that city which was at the time an oasis of peace and a hub of international shipping. Lambert realised immediately that it would be an ideal place to establish a mission outpost. However, he did not have jurisdiction in this territory. For this reason he decided to send Jacques de Bourges back to Europe on a English ship to request from the Holy See, among other things, jurisdiction over Siam. This request was subsequently granted.

In the meantime, Lambert was determined to get on with the task at hand and he set out for more advanced positions. There happened to be a ship, the last one of the season, preparing to leave for Canton. Lambert requested and obtained permission to embark together with Francis Deyier for that great seaport of China. However, the Siamese vessel did not sail until July 17th, much too late. Caught in a typhoon off Cambodia, the ship ran aground on the coast and sank. While the two missionaries lost all their baggage including books, vestments, and sacred vessels, they escaped with their lives. Some considered this a miracle. They returned to Siam on September 13th 1663, not dreaming that another twenty years would pass before one of their confreres would succeed in entering China.

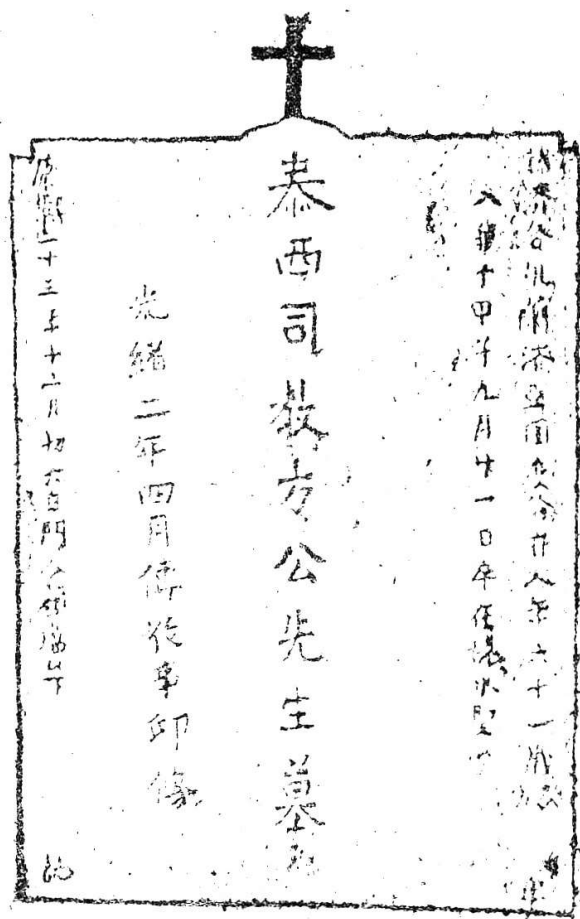
NEW ATTEMPTS

Monsignor Pallu and five new missionaries who had embarked on different ships all arrived in Siam during the month of January, 1664. This chance gathering offered them an opportunity to hold a synod which concerned itself with formulating guidelines for pastoral activities, a

rule of life and other matters. Pallu was designated to go to Rome to submit the synod's proposals in place of Lambert, who had already been formally introduced at the Court of Siam and whose departure would have had a detrimental effect on the work of the new mission. Pallu set out in January 1665. He was not to return to Siam for another eight years.

Lambert, meanwhile, continued to keep China in mind. In June 1665 he sent Pierre Brindeau to Macao. Brindeau was given a warm reception at the residence of the Vicar General of the Augustinian Fathers, who entrusted him with local pastoral responsibilities. He was also on good terms with the Dominicans and Franciscans there. However, a certain Father Antoine Gomez who had gone from Macao to Goa on business matters, denounced the French missionary to the Portugese Vice-governor of the Indies warning that his presence in Macao posed a threat to Portugese rights there. The Vice-governor ordered Brindeau to be brought to Goa under armed escort. The voyage took three months. Upon arrival, Brindeau explained that he was in Macao to study Chinese with the intention of entering China as soon as possible. He was then released, but he was unable to find passage back to Siam. He finally returned in 1669. In the meantime, Lambert had learned that a number of foreign missionaries were in prison in Canton, and had already been there for four years. Consequently, when Brindeau returned to Siam, he was assigned to work in Cochinchina where he died in January 1671, an apparent victim of poisoning.

In 1672, a legation from Formosa (Taiwan) arrived unexpectedly at the court of the King of Siam. It was on this occasion that Lambert became aware that the language of the island was the same as that spoken in other parts of southern China. He immediately appointed Jean de Courtaulin who had just arrived from France, and Gabriel Bouchard who had been waiting for an assignment, to



Mgr Pallu's tomb stone at Moyang.

work in Formosa. The two began their study of the language. Unfortunately, the hope of finding a ship going to Formosa did not materialise. Lambert died in 1679. His dream of establishing a mission in China died with him.

Monsignor Laneau, the first Apostolic Vicar of Siam, took up the same task deputed the same Courtaulin, who could now speak Chinese, to make another try. But this attempt likewise failed.

Pallu also became involved in efforts to establish a China mission. Philibert le Blanc who had come from Europe via Bantam (Java) actually received from Pallu an assignment to China in 1679. But the young missionary could not find a ship which would take him there. (Le Blanc, subsequently, was to become the very first MEP missionary to enter continental China as a forerunner of Monsignor Pallu.)

THE FIRST CHINESE BISHOP

Having terminated the business which had detained him in Rome and in Paris, Pallu re-embarked for his mission in April 1670. During a stop-over in Fort Dauphin, Madagascar from January to August, 1671, Pallu encountered a missionary who had just recently escaped from Guangzhou (Canton), a certain Father Navarette. This Dominican missionary told him that during the imprisonment of missionaries between 1665 and 1671, Father Gregory Lo, a Chinese Dominican priest ordained in 1656, had assumed pastoral responsibility for the Christian communities and his efforts had met with great success.

Pallu concluded that this Chinese priest presented the qualities that the Holy See required in a native bishop. During a stop-over in Surate he dispatched Father Charles Sevin, Canon from Cahors, to Rome to request, among other things, the promotion of Father Gregory Lo to the episcopate. Sevin set sail in January 1672. His mission to Rome was a success; Gregory Lo was named bishop in 1674. Informed of this decision in 1676, Lambert invited Father Lo to come to Siam to receive episcopal ordination. Lo, however, put off accepting the honor until 1685.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATOR OF THE MISSION IN CHINA

The second voyage to China undertaken by Pallu was cut short by a typhoon which blew his ship off course. The ship found refuge in Manila where Pallu was arrested by the Spanish authorities. Then began a tortuous journey under armed escort to Madrid...by ship across the Pacific ocean to Mexico, overland through Mexico, and then by ship across

the Atlantic ocean to Spain. In Madrid, Pallu was able to justify his incursion into Spanish held territory and was released. He went immediately from Spain to Rome, his third trip to that city, where he remained from 1677 until 1680. His long ordeal made it quite evident that the authority of apostolic vicars had to be defined vis-a-vis an "exempt" religious status, i.e. those officially dependent on patrons.

During these negotiations the vicariates apostolic were reorganised. Pallu himself was relieved of Tonkin and placed in charge of Fujian. He was also named General Administrator of the missions in China with authority over the other Apostolic Vicars.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

In March, 1681, Pallu, embarked for yet a third time for China. He was now 55, which in the 17th century was considered to be already an advanced age. He brought ten new missionaries with him to Siam where their future destinations would be decided. This voyage was far more rapid than the previous ones. Pallu arrived in Siam on July 5, 1682 after only 15 months at sea. During his one year stay, he was kept occupied by filling in for the Apostolic Vicar of Siam who had gone to Cochinchina to consecrate a bishop and to preside over a local synod.

In May 1683, Pallu learned that the King of Siam was about to send three ships to Guangzhou with a legation. The Administrator General would have dearly loved to make the journey with two other missionaries, but his request was refused by the Court of Siam. By way of compensation, the Court proposed to recommend him to a Chinese captain who was about to set sail for Macao. It was understood that the three passengers would be put ashore on the island of Lampacao, where fishermen, alerted by the King's ship, would come to take them safely to the Franciscan mission in Canton. Such were the circumstances surrounding Pallu, Le Blanc and Maigrot as they set sail from Bangkok on June 29, 1683 accompanied by an interpreter and a servant.

AN EVENTFUL VOYAGE

Because of civil uprisings the Chinese imperial navy maintained a relentless defense of its coast line. It proved to be impossible to disembark at Lampacao. On the night of August 12-13 the captain transferred his passengers, together with some of their baggage, to a smaller boat which was on its way to a port in Taiwan. There an English businessman welcomed them with kindness, and the governor was also friendly towards them. At that time there were three Christian communities in

Formosa. But soon the imperial troops of emperor Kangxi over-ran the island which up until that time had remained faithful to the fallen Ming dynasty.

This unexpected reversal in the political situation facilitated the entry of the missionaries into continental China. Legally authorised, they landed in Xiamen (Fujian Province) on January 13, 1684. Pallu at first despatched Le Blanc to Canton to take care of the baggage which had been sent ahead on the King of Siam's ships. A short time later he sent Maigrot to Moyang. Informed by Le Blanc, a Dominican missionary from Zhangzhou came to receive the prelate, who on the 27th of January 1684 left the ship and finally set foot on the China mainland.

After remaining in Xiamen for three months, Pallu too set out for Moyang, an eleven days journey from Xiamen. He passed through Fuzhou, the flourishing capital of Fujian Province, where Maigrot came to meet him.

The Bishop remained in Moyang for three months, and guided by a Dominican Father, he visited and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to the Christians in the area. On the September 12, Pallu went to Fogan, the site of the oldest Christian community in Fujian, only three miles from Moyang where he was joyfully welcomed by the Christians. Towards the end of September, feeling rather weak, he called Maigrot and dictated some letters for Rome, Paris and Ayuthia. On October 12th he returned from Fogan to Moyang, exhausted and ill. Nevertheless he still found strength to visit some Christians not too far from Moyang. There his physical condition worsened, as could be seen from a letter he wrote to Maigrot on October 24th which is hardly legible. After receiving the letter, Maigrot rushed to the scene and met the enfeebled Bishop, who was just returning. Maigrot gave him Extreme Unction the next day.

In spite of all care, Bishop Pallu died on October 29th and was buried in Moyang. Two months later, on January 23th, 1685, three new missionaries, Jean Pin, Louis Quemener and Louis Champion de Cice, arrived in Xiamen. All three, as well as Le Blanc and Maigrot were to become vicars apostolic in China. Their task was to build up a native clergy, a task which continues to the present day.