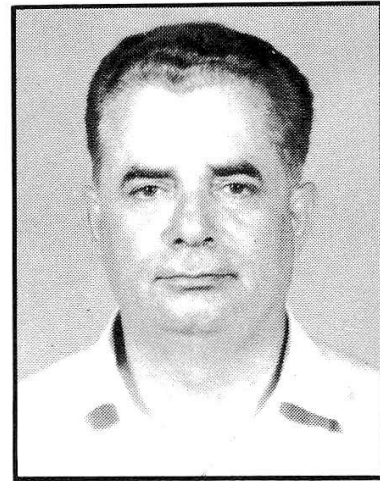


One Hundred and Twenty Martyrs of China Canonized in Rome

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The canonization of 13 French missionaries on October 1, 2000, in Rome calls the Church in France to relive its past contribution to the evangelization of China, and to reflect on what it can still do today. During the past twenty years, China has, to a certain extent, opened itself up to exchanges with foreign countries. The Church, however, must still confront difficulties in communication that are deep rooted and that the blood of martyrs better enables us to understand.



The French martyrs belong to various institutes:

- One bishop and two priests are from the Paris Foreign Mission Society: Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse of Puy-de-Dôme, Father Jean-Pierre Néel from Rhône, and Father Auguste Chapdelaine, from La Manche.
- One Lazarist: Father François-Régis Clet , from Grenoble.
- Two Franciscans: Father Theodore Balat from the Diocese of Albi, and Brother André Bauer , from Guebwiller (Alsace)
- Four Jesuits: Léon Mangin from Verny (Metz), Paul Denn from Lille, Remi Isoré, from Rosheom (Cambrai), and Modeste Andlauer from Alsace.
- Three Franciscan Missionaries of Mary: Irma Grivot from Beaune, Jeanne-Marie Kerguin from Belle-Isle en Terre (Côtes d'Armor), and Anne Moreau from Rouhan near Nantes.

The Franciscans, Jesuits, and Franciscan Missionaries of Mary were the victims of the Boxers in 1900. All of these had consecrated their life to China, and loved China, but they were the victims of hostile forces. In China, as in all other countries, the proclamation of the Gospel comes up against obstacles that are deep-rooted in human nature. The splendor of the Chinese civilization also helps to explain the reluctance of this country to make place for a vision of life that calls into question many of the acquisitions of an ancient wisdom.

Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse Bishop of Chengdu (Tchen-Tou)

Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse was born on December 8, 1750, in Lezoux, Puy-de-Dôme. He first studied at the College of Riom near Clermont-Ferrand, then in Paris at Louis-le-Grand, and then at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice.

In 1774, he entered the seminary of the Paris Foreign Mission Society as a deacon, and in the same year, was ordained a priest on December 17. One year later he left for China's Sichuan Province, where Bishop Pottier, the vicar apostolic, welcomed him. Bishop Pottier had been working in the region for almost 20 years.

Sichuan Province (the name means "the four rivers") is located in southwest China. Leaning against the high peaks of Tibet, the vast Sichuan basin is a fertile area that is today populated by some 120 million people. Chengdu, the provincial capital, is 2000 kilometers southwest of Beijing. Formerly, Sichuan could be reached only by going up the Blue River and its tributaries. At the time, considered far from Peking,¹ the governors of the province could allow themselves a certain margin of freedom in the interpretation of imperial decrees. At the beginning of the 19th century, they nonetheless had to take into account Emperor Jiaqing's tightening of a religious policy hostile to Christianity.

In spite of restrictions and frequent arrests during the 18th century, the number of Christians had grown in the far off province of Sichuan. For 30 years, the foreign missionaries had been completely absent, but the Chinese priests, especially Father Andrew Li, had

¹ For purposes of history, Peking, as the capital was known at the time, will be used instead of Beijing in the remainder of this article.

taken good care of the Christian communities. In 1757, he helped the French missionaries to resume their apostolate in the area.

Bishop François Pottier upon arrival visited the Christian communities scattered throughout the province, and in early 1766 he was rejoined by six confreres from the Paris Foreign Mission Society.

Martin Moyë converts his jailer

One of these priests, Martin Moyë, from the Diocese of Nancy, had a particularly fruitful apostolate for some ten years. He introduced new Chinese prayers in Sichuan, instructed the consecrated virgins to serve as catechists among the women and opened schools for girls. Imprisoned in the neighboring province of Guizhou, he converted his jailer, who eventually became a priest, and martyr, and who now heads the list of Chinese to be canonized. Martin Moyë himself will not be canonized since he is not among the number of martyrs. He returned to Europe during the French Revolution, and died of the plague in Treves in 1793. Thanks to the zeal of the French and Chinese priests, as well as the dynamic ministry of the Chinese catechists, the number of Christians in Sichuan had reached 40,000 by the end of the 18th century. About 15 Chinese priests had been ordained.

Dufresse (Xu Dexin) left for Sichuan at the end of 1775. He spent nine years becoming familiar with the Chinese language and visiting the Christians scattered throughout the northern part of the province.

In 1784, he was arrested, but he managed to escape. The coadjutor bishop, Bishop St. Martin, suggested that he turn himself in to prevent the persecution extending to Chinese Christians. He was imprisoned in Chengdu in February 1785. He was later transferred to Peking with two confreres, then freed in November of the same year. He was, however, given a choice. If he chose to remain in Peking, he would be under constant surveillance or he could leave the country through Macau.

He chose to go to Macau. From there he went to the Philippines. Three years later, he attempted to return to his mission, and reached Chengdu on January 14, 1789. He was given pastoral responsibility over eastern Sichuan and Guizhou Province located to the south. He was named pro-vicar in 1793, coadjutor in 1800, and consecrated bishop on July 25, 1800 in Chengdu.

The First Synod of China (1803)

In spite of insecurity and many difficulties, the Church in Sichuan was relatively prosperous. The pastoral experience gained during the 18th century made it possible to set up a general directory on the situation of the Christian life and the ministry of the sacraments. In 1803, Bishop Dufresse organized the first China Synod in Chongqingzhou, about 40 kilometers west of Chengdu. Thirteen Chinese priests and two French priests participated. The synod dealt mostly with ministry and the sacraments. Chapter Ten of the synod documents speaks of the ministry of priests, exhorting them to fervor in the spiritual life and discretion in temporal affairs.

The results of the Sichuan Synod was to serve as a guide for the apostolate of this province, and for many other regions of China up until the Council of Shanghai in 1924.

The period of calm that followed the synod was short lived. In 1805, Emperor Jiaqing took a harder line and launched a persecution. These Christian persecutions were based on an imperial absolutism, reinforced by a Confucian ideology, and a fear of foreign incursions which were actually taking place in the southern and southeast coasts, and were more and more threatening. Poor administration, extortion on the part of corrupt mandarins resulted in local uprisings that were brutally repressed.

Revolutionary movements, hostile to the reigning Manchu Dynasty, got their inspiration from Taoist and Buddhist traditions and found a specific form within the White Lotus sect (Bai lian jiao). Some converts to Christianity came from these purist and patriotic movements. The situation only worsened during the reign of Jiaqing (1776-1821) and Daoguang (1821-1850). Foreign missionaries were forbidden to remain in China, except in Peking where they could remain in the service of the emperor. Christianity was generally classed among the subversive sects (xie jiao). This situation exposed Christians to frequent reprisals. In the provinces some mandarins were harsh and others less so. Animated by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the vicars-apostolic of the foreign missions sought to set up a Church structure that would assure the continuation of evangelization in the absence of the foreigners expelled from the country. In view of establishing a local church, the missionaries were asked to name a person or a catechist responsible for each Christian community. Among those named, the best ones were selected as candidates for the priesthood. These included Benoit

Sun, Jean Baptiste Jiang, and Augustin Zhao, who accompanied Father Jean Martin Moyë on his pastoral visits. Jean-Baptiste and Augustin were ordained in 1781, after barely one year in the new seminary of Longki. Augustin Zhao Rong (Tchao) showed such courage that Bishop Pottier sent him to clear up a difficult situation among the Lolo minority in Yunnan. During Emperor Jiaqing's violent persecution, he was denounced as a malefactor, arrested, beaten, and slapped in the face. He died in prison on January 27, 1815.

In spite of the persecutions that had gone on since 1805, the vicariate under Bishop Dufresse counted some 2000 adult baptisms yearly. From 1810 on, the bishop himself directly administered the Chongqingzhou community near Chengdu. This became the center of a flourishing Christian community. (The large church that can still be seen today, though damaged during that Cultural Revolution, is still an imposing structure.) The governor of Sichuan ordered more and more repressive measures against Christianity. Bishop Dufresse was constantly on the move. The Christians did not want him to give himself up. However, a newly baptized youth of the Qionglai region, unable to bear the pain of the beatings, agreed to hand over the bishop. The bishop was arrested on May 18, and brought to Xinjin, then to Chengdu where he was decapitated on September 14, 1815 on the square of the North Gate. The 33 Christians who were to be executed with him were condemned to exile.

The Opium War

Gabriel-Tauren Dufresse made the sacrifice of his life at the service of the Gospel at the time when France, torn apart by Napoleonic Wars, needed to take care of its own wounds. French missionaries received no external support. Furthermore, England was trying to set up treaties with China. But Macartney's mission in Peking (1793-1795) had ended in failure, revealing nothing more than the clash between two empires each jealous of its sovereignty. Little by little the English nibbled at the Chinese continent in the south in Canton. Masters of the seas, after their victory over Napoleon, the British in 1819 had set up Singapore as a free port. They had at their command the bases desired to send the opium produced in India on to China. They exchanged it for tea, but they also demanded payment in money. This continual expansion of the opium trade was detrimental to the health of the Chinese opium users

as well as to the public treasury. The emperor charged the courageous and honest governor, Lin Zexu, to put an end to the importation of opium.

The opium shipments were thrown into the Pearl River in Canton, and the warehouses were burnt down. The British reacted swiftly by bombing the South China ports. The 1840 Opium War marked the beginning of colonial aggression and the forced opening of a few Chinese ports for commerce with foreign powers. Aware of being behind the English in this economic enterprise, the French



government also entered the fray. In the unequal treaties that foreign powers imposed on China, France justified its move in making itself protector of the Catholic missions that were always being threatened. This protection perhaps permitted the missions to develop their education and social works. On the other hand, the foreign missions became associated with the humiliations imposed on China. In fact, they benefited very little from the French protection since, for the most part, they were isolated among the broad mass of the people where the local mandarins were able to pursue them with impunity.

Caught in a political situation

The two priests of the Paris Foreign Mission Society who are about to be canonized as martyrs were caught in this political context. The martyr, Father Auguste Chapdelaine, even suggested to Napoleon III that he join the English troops in the new war of 1857. This war was followed by the Treaty of Tien-Tsin in 1858 and a resumption of hostilities that ended in 1860 in Peking in the looting and burning of the Summer Palace, the empire's jewel. The marines went to sing a Te Deum for the victory in Peking's South Church. The affront inflicted on China has remained deeply engrained in the country's memory. Whatever might be the present judgment on this era, the personalities of these two martyrs are not in question. What seems to us with the passage of time like a political exploitation of the Catholic missions was seen at the time, as a legitimate support when faced with the cruel and irrational forces of repression. These French priests were ready to die for their faith in union with the crucified Christ.

Auguste Chapdelaine**Missionary in Guangxi (Kouangsi)**

Auguste Chapdelaine (Ma Zinong) was born on January 6, 1814, in the hamlet of Metairie, in the commune of La Rochelle (Manche). He worked in the fields in Normandy until he was 20 years old. He then studied in the Abbey Blanche de Mortain, then in the major seminary of Coutances. He was ordained a priest on June 10, 1843, and thought of entering the Paris Foreign Mission Society, but he was named vicar in Boucey where he remained for seven years. His martyrdom is represented on one of the windows of the village church. He entered the seminary of the Foreign Missions on March 16, 1851, and left for the missions in the two large provinces of South China: Guangdong (Big East) and Guangxi (Big West). He left Canton for Guangxi, and was robbed by bandits, while going up the West River on April 29, 1852. He had to turn back. He succeeded in his second attempt to arrive in Guiyang, the capital of the Province of Guizhou (Precious Land), in the spring of 1854. He studied the language there for a few months and then went to Guangxi in the month of December of the same year. There he came into contact with a few new Christians in the village of Yaoshan in the Xilin region (Silin Hsien).

A lay pioneer of the Gospel

Lu Tingmei (Lou Tin Mey), a Miao from Maokou (Mao-Keou), was introducing the Gospel in the Guizhou region. The Chinese often call the people who do not belong to the Han majority, Miao. In fact most of the people in Maokou were Puyi, according to the testimony of Father Duris, MEP, one of the last missionaries in this region in 1850.

Lu Tingmei came from an educated and cultured family. He was brilliant in his studies and familiar with the “Four Books” and the “Five Classics”, and steeped in traditional culture. At the age of 38, he had joined the Pure Water Sect (Qingshui jiao), a secret branch of the famous White Lotus Sect, pursued by the Manchu authorities with the same ardor that the government today is pursuing the Falungong. The adherents practiced abstinence, honored the Buddha and recited Buddhist sutras.

These formal practices did not satisfy Lu Tingmei’s spiritual quest. In 1852, thanks to three Christians from Zhenning who had come to settle in Maokou, Lu Tingmei discovered the Christian teachings. After reading two catechetical books, he renounced the Pure Water Sect to join the Christian faith. He took advantage of the visit of Thomas Luo, a Chinese priest, to get further instruction for himself and his family. He then destroyed all signs and symbols of his former belief including a manual of the Pure Water Sect he still had. He took the name Jerome at his baptism. His life was transformed. Violent by nature, he became gentle and lovable. He stopped drinking and became attentive to the needs of the poor. He was imprisoned, then released. He was a witness of the martyrdom of Father Chapdelaine, and wrote an account of it. He himself was decapitated shortly after in 1858, in Maokou along with the virgin, Agatha Lin Zhao, an experienced catechist, and Laurence Wangbing (Ouang), the father of five sons.

Auguste Chapdelaine exercised his ministry for a few months only. On March 19, 1855, on the feast of St. Joseph, in Yaoshan, he baptized eight or nine persons. Among them was the former devout Buddhist, the laborer, Bai Man (Laurent Pe-man). On January 19, 1856, two Christians who had gotten wind of an imminent persecution came to plead with Father Chapdelaine to return quickly to Guizhou. On the following day, the magistrate of Xilin (His-Lin) learned where Bai Man, Father Chapdelaine’s companion, was hiding. He dispatched an armed group that arrested

Father Chapdelaine, Bai Man, and four other Christians. They were brought to court. Urged to abjure their faith, whipped with 300 lashes, Bai Man remained faithful in spite of everything, refusing to deny his faith and to leave Father Chapdelaine. He exhorted his wife and his daughter to remain faithful. Bai Man and Auguste Chapdelaine were then condemned, put on the rack and then beheaded. Their bodies were given to the dogs.

Jean-Pierre Néel, Missionary in Guizhou (Kouy-tcheou)

The third martyr from the Paris Foreign Mission Society on the list of the canonized is Father Jean-Pierre Néel. Jean Pierre Néel was born in 1832, in the hamlet of Soleymieux in the commune of Saint Catherine on Mount Lyonnais. A barn serves as a sanctuary to the memory of the Blessed martyr, Jean Vuillat, the pastor of Saint Catherine, whose biography was published in 1981. From his youth, Jean-Pierre heard his parents talk about the dark hours of the French Revolution when non-juring priests were hunted down like wild beasts. His family had sheltered several of them. He made his studies at the minor seminary of Monbrison. He entered the Paris Foreign Mission Seminary in 1855, and was ordained a priest on May 29, 1858. Three months later, on August 29, he sailed on the *Singapore* from Gironde a Pauillac, for the Chinese province of Guizhou (Kouy-tcheou). The difficult voyage took eight months. Father Chicard, on his way to Yunnan, and a confrere of Jean-Pierre, has left us an epical account.

On April 26, 1859, he landed in Hong Kong where Father Perny, the superior of the Guizhou mission, also arrived. The four young missionaries assigned to this province were able to leave the following month with their superior to travel the 900 kilometers of a perilous journey through Hunan Province. They finally reach Guiyang (Kouei Yang) on December 2, 1859. He was given the Chinese name, Wen Nai'er.

Guizhou, the poor and mountainous province

At the time Guizhou Province had some 15 million inhabitants belonging to various ethnic minorities. The region was poor and mountainous, although cultivated in all available spaces between its sugar-loaf summits. This new independent mission, separated from Sichuan in 1846, had barely 4000 Catholics scattered

throughout 95 mission stations. Up until his death in 1852, Bishop Albrand, with some ten missionaries, two Chinese priests and ten virgin catechists had done all the work of evangelization in the area. When Jean-Pierre Néel arrived, M. Paul Perny was the vicariate administrator, but the new bishop, Bishop Faurie, from the diocese of Bordeaux, immediately undertook the direction and formation of the new missionaries. He was happy with the rapid progress Jean-Pierre made in the language and soon sent him on mission.

It was a difficult and thankless task since the civil war divided the country between the “imperials,” loyal to the Manchu government and the “rebels,” who were more or less linked to the Taiping revolutionary movement. In a letter written to a confrere, Jean-Pierre describes the situation: “For at least a year, Kouy-cheou (Guizhou) Province has been badly disrupted. In addition to the scourge of civil war, there is a famine in some places obliging a certain number of destitute people to feed on human flesh. Isn’t this horrible? The plague is also rampant in a large part of my district. The surroundings of the capital are filled with destitute families who have emigrated because of the rebels.”

In these circumstances, the Peking Convention, signed on October 1860, shed a ray of hope on the missionaries. This should have facilitated the task of evangelization in the interior of the country. This did not, however, take into account the troubles generated by the civil war, or the threat of the young prefect-general of Guiyang, Tian Daren (great personage). After having vanquished the rebels, he became a dangerous tyrant. His soldiers set about harassing the Christians who had no idea where to flee. Néel himself no longer knew how “to dodge the issue,” according to his favorite expression, whether to visit the communities or to rejoin his confreres.

On November 3, 1861, Néel wrote to his sisters: “The Christians are very timid: the pagans profit from this by inflicting all kinds of insults. But the hatred of the pagans is displayed especially towards the European devils. This is what they call us, and since they don’t dare attack us directly, they attack our Christians instead. Recently four were martyred within a day’s journey of the capital of the province. Among these four martyrs were two theology students, one novice vowed to the service of the mission, and a local Christian.”

The four martyrs are also among those to be canonized: the seminarians Zhang Wenlan (Joseph Tchang) and Chen Changpin (Paul Tchen), the farmer Luo Tingyin (Jean-Baptiste Lo), and Wang Luoshi (Martha Wang), the cook for the community.

Bishop Faurie had built the seminary only recently in 1859, at Qingyan (Tsin-Gay). The four martyrs were decapitated on July 29, 1861. The seminary was destroyed.

The birth of a new community

Towards the end of 1861, the bishop informed Father Néel of the presence of a few catechumens in Jiashanlong (Ka-chia-long), a village in his district that he had not yet visited. Néel managed to get there on January 5, 1862, with his catechist, Jean Tchen, an educated man and recent Guiyang convert. He was welcomed with joy by a poor carpenter who had for some time been acquainted with Christianity. He was a devout Buddhist, who at first had been affiliated with the Fasters Sect, and then he had met a “baptizer” named Tang in Kaizhou (Kai-tcheou). “Baptizers” were responsible for baptizing babies in danger of death. They also engaged in a little catechesis. Zhang had decided to become a Christian, and had gone to the missionaries in Guiyang for instructions. The missionaries counseled him to join a group so as not to be baptized alone. His wife and three sons were with him. Soon a few people from the village joined them for instructions. From being four at the beginning, the catechumens soon numbered about 50. Jean Pierre Néel was very happy with this group of people so well disposed. Since the women also wanted to be instructed in the faith, he sent for the virgin Yi Zhenmei (Lucy Yi), a catechist from Sichuan, who had even feigned insanity to escape a marriage, arranged for her by her family. Wu Xuesheng (Martin Wu), a catechist who was in the region, also came to help him out.

Five heads hung on the city’s ramparts

The hopes fostered by this small community were brutally dashed when on February 18 about 100 soldiers led by some mandarins on horseback surrounded Zhang’s house. This detachment was sent by the sub-prefect of Kaizhou under orders of Tian Daren, the prefect of Guiyang. Jean Zhang along with Pierre Néel and two catechists were arrested. The house was ransacked. They also sent

for Lucy Yi who was in a neighboring hamlet. They tied the French missionary's pigtail to the tail of the horse. He was made to walk or run according to the whim of the horseman to the great joy of the troop. At the court, the process was quick since the prisoners were already condemned. They forced the Frenchman to his knees. He tried to show his passport. Tai Lou Tche, the mandarin, laughed at him, "That's an old story! An old story!" he shouted, "Your government gave you this passport, not ours. It proves nothing to us..." The mandarin then asked the four men to renounce their religion. With their determined refusal, he took his brush and wrote down their death sentence. "Punished by death for conspiracy." They were executed as rebels and not as Christians. Such was Prefect Tian's report. They were humiliated by making them walk completely naked on the road, which led outside the West Gate.

The calm demeanor of the condemned men astonished the mob. They prayed and mutually encouraged one another. They came across a retinue of soldiers who were bringing back the Virgin, Lucy Yi, into the city. She had been arrested in the village of Heou-pa. We can only surmise the pain of this faithful catechist. At 7:00 p.m. in the cold fog and to the light of torches, the four men were decapitated above the city ramparts before a crowd who enjoyed the spectacle. According to rumors, a celestial sphere appeared above the body of Jean-Pierre Néel at the moment he was decapitated. The sub-prefect, Tai Lou Tche is said to have declared, "This man was under a star, I was wrong to kill him."

Early in the morning Tchang's oldest daughter went to the execution site with friends. She came upon a horrendous sight: some ten wolves were devouring the bodies of the victims. Their heads were hung on the ramparts. During the night the Virgin Lucy Yi had been confided to a go-between who was supposed to convince her to marry. It was a futile attempt. Lucy was taken to the court in the morning, reviled, condemned and decapitated. Her head was also hung on the rampart above that of the priest.

Bishop Faurie, worried about recovering the remains of these witnesses of the faith, organized a squad of five courageous young men who, during the night, went and cut the rope that held the five heads. They succeeded in fleeing with their precious relics and finally brought them to the Luchongguan seminary. On March 6, the Christian community, with a great deal of emotion, paid them tribute. Later in 1868, Bishop Faurie had Father Néel's pigtail taken away.

Today, it can be seen in the Hall of the Martyrs of the Paris Foreign Mission Society. His chalice and breviary saved from looting by the women of the Zhang family are also there.

The memory of the martyrs

Today, the recounting of these painful events can perhaps evoke distaste and indignation. The Christians of Guizhou, however, remember their martyrs with great admiration and fervor, knowing that through their martyrdom, they have entered into the life promised by Christ. A large church has recently been constructed in their honor in Guiyang near the South Gate. This church replaces an older church also dedicated to the martyrs that the Communist police had been using for a prison for decades.

Today Guiyang has 7000 Christians and there are 60,000 in Guizhou Province. Every year around September 8, large crowds make their way to Luchongguan, in pilgrimage to Our Lady of Liesse. This is where, in the darkest hours of the persecution, M. Perny had opened a seminary where Jean-Pierre Néel resided when he arrived in China. Above the seminary there is a tall peak that formerly bore the name of Guanyin, the merciful saint of Buddhist tradition. The missionaries had hidden a small statue of Our Lady of Laus there and “rebaptized” the mountain Shengmushan, (Mountain of the Holy Mother.) When in trouble the Christians had the habit of climbing the mountain and ending their prayer by repeating the invocation, “Mary, cause of our joy.” The place was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and it was forbidden to go there until 1987. Today, the pilgrimages there are sizeable. In September 1999, a group of French people went there and gave Bishop Wang a small statue of the Virgin seated with the Infant Jesus from the French sanctuary of Our Lady of Liesse near Laon.

Formerly, a delegation from the Bordeaux Diocese had offered the sanctuary a gold-gilded statue of Our Lady of Liesse. The small basilica on the top of the mountain was, however, burnt down to make room for a television antenna. The present pilgrimage takes place at the foot of the mountain, in the large courtyard of the former seminary now in disuse but returned to the Church in 1987.

The holy martyrs of Guizhou (Kouey-Tcheou) are undoubtedly the most honored in China, and their devotion has extended to Taiwan where there is a church in Banchiao, a suburb of Taipei, dedicated to them. Their blood shed at the same time as that

of the French messengers of the gospel has created a powerful link between the Church in France and the Church in China.

The martyrs of 1900: victims of the Boxers

At the end of the 19th century, the sacrifices of Chinese and their missionaries took on dramatic proportions. The Catholic missions supported by the French Protectorate, built churches in all the provinces, built schools for boys and girls, opened hospitals and orphanages. The Protestants, for their part, sought to make an educational contribution and to diffuse scientific knowledge from which Chinese intellectuals and reformers greatly benefited. Conservative and xenophobic groups, however, influenced the popular masses. They circulated the most horrendous rumors about Christian practices. The Yihetuan movement, “Justice and Harmony,” that emerged from very ancient secret societies, originally bore the name, Yihequan, “Fists of justice and harmony” from which they got the name of Boxers. Contrary to other peasant uprisings, generally repressed by authorities as “heretical,” the Boxers obtained the support of some Manchu officials. This is how Yuxian, the governor of Shandong, attempted to rally them to the national cause, especially the bands that had “Fu Qing mie yang” (support the Manchus, exterminate the Westerners) for their slogan. These organized bands agitated the people in North China against the foreigners and their work of modernization. Chinese Christians, labeled as traitors, were pursued from village to village. During the summer of 1900, 30,000 Christians were massacred. Many missions were destroyed. In Shenyang (Moukden) in the north of the country, Bishop Guillon was massacred in his cathedral with the priests, women religious and Christians who had come to assist at Mass. The big church was burnt down. Of all these victims, only a tiny minority has been listed among the blessed. The martyrs, canonized on October 1, 2000, were bishops, priests, women religious, mothers and fathers of families, young and old people and children. They were representative of all the Christians of China. Among them nine were French.

The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary fell under the Boxers in Taiyuan, in Shanxi Province. Their international community made up of seven Sisters had just arrived in China at the request of the Franciscan bishop, Bishop Francisco Fogolla, Bishop Grassi’s co-

adjutor. They immediately began to care for 200 little orphan girls or other little girls brought to them by their families. Dedicated lay people worked with them. In July, Taiyuan inherited a new governor, the infamous Yuxian, that the government had had to remove from Shandong on account of complaints by foreigners. Feeling freer to act in this province far from Shandong, he himself began to organize the suppression. The bishop urged the Sisters to leave the city out of prudence, but they decided to remain. The slaughter occurred on July 9. There were 33 victims. These included two bishops, three Franciscan men, five seminarians, six little girls, a Chinese widow, and nine persons in service to the mission. The seven Franciscan Missionaries of Mary were the last to fall. Three of them were French citizens.

The celebrations in France and Rome

The region of Dijon has already honored one of these, Sister Marie Hermine de Jesus (Irma Grivot), who came from Beaume, with a celebration. A day was also dedicated to the memory of Sister Marie Natalie (Jeanne-Marie Kerguin) on July 2, 2000 in Pluzunet in the Côtes d'Armor. Sister Marie de Saint Just (Anne Moreau) was honored on July 9 in Rouans near Nantes, on the exact day of the centenary of the martyrs.

Two years ago, the Lazarists celebrated the canonization of Gabriel Perboyre, martyred in Wuchang in 1840. This year they will celebrate the martyrdom of his confrere, François Regis Clet, also executed in Wuchang, 20 years before in 1820.

The shrine of these two saints is in the chapel at 95 Rue de Sèvres, Paris. The Franciscans and Jesuits will no doubt also have celebrations for their martyred saints.

The big celebration will no doubt take place in Rome with many Chinese coming from Hong Kong, Taiwan and from the China Mainland if any are authorized to attend. The celebrations are of special interest to many regions in France. The dioceses where these martyrs were born and grew up, the schools and seminaries they attended will make use of the occasion to inform Catholics on the situation of the Church in China today. They will also remind them of the role that French Christians can still play by their Christian life witness and the hospitable reception that can extend to the Chinese that come to study and work in France.

How do the Chinese see the situation today?

What do the Chinese today think of these martyrs of their country? Beginning in the 4th century in Europe, martyrs of the Roman Empire could be solemnly honored. Shrines were built in their name and their relics were jealously preserved. Europe at the time was becoming Christian. This is not the case in China where Christians, Catholics and Protestants together, hardly make up two percent of the population. Furthermore, the remembrance of these martyrs gets entangled with humiliations inflicted on the Chinese sovereignty. During these last decades, the Boxer Rebellion, examined within Mao's revolutionary view, has been considered a glorious peasant uprising. The rebels are seen as forerunners of the Communist guerillas who delivered the country from all foreign oppression. Today when the political line encourages exchanges with foreign countries and with the country's radical modernization, will we see a revision of the official history? And if China has really set itself free from the ancient society's feudal order, can it still stand beside the corrupt and cruel mandarins of the past under the pretext that they were Chinese? It is also true that many errors were committed by the foreign powers eager to develop their trade. The collisions of the past should serve as a lesson to build a more equitable future. Within this viewpoint, the victims of past conflicts bear a witness that preserves all its value. Their blood can be a promise of peace.