

An account of the introduction of Christianity into the kingdom of Korea, written in Latin by Mgr. De Gouvea, Bishop of Peking and addressed on August 15, 1797, to Mgr. De St Martin, Bishop of Caradre and Vicar Apostolic of the province of Sichuan in China. Translation [into French] of a copy received in London on July 12, 1798.

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Introduction

Mgr. De Gouvea, [*Alexandre de Gouvea or Gouveia. Born in Evora in 1731, ordained priest in the Third Order of Saint Francis of Penance in 1775; appointed Bishop of Peking in July 1782, consecrated bishop February 1783, died July 1808] named Bishop of Peking by the Queen of Portugal, arrived in that capital city at the end of 1784 or early in 1785, with the permission of the Emperor, who had accepted him as one of his astronomers. At that time there was in China a violent persecution against the Christian religion. Three bishops and twenty-three missionaries, both European and Chinese, from the different provinces of the Empire, had been imprisoned in Peking. Those of the capital, who enjoy complete freedom because they are there as artists, astronomers, etc. of the Emperor, no sooner learned of this than they did all that lay in their power to bring help to them in the prisons. They had the grief of seeing two of the bishops and several missionaries die of want, or as a result of the fatigue and bad treatment they had undergone before being brought to Peking, because they had not been told of their detention in time; but they had the consolation of saving by their care Mgr. de St. Martin, [*Jean Didier de St. Martin 1743-1801] Bishop of Caradre, Apostolic Vicar of the province of Sichuan, as well as several priests. Later, thanks to the credit they enjoyed at court, they obtained the liberation of these witnesses to Jesus Christ. The Emperor, in granting them their freedom, gave them the choice of remaining in the churches in Peking or returning to Macao. Most of them, including the Bishop of Caradre and M. Dufresse, [*Blessed Gabriel Taurin Dufresse, born 1750; beheaded Tschantu, China, 1815] asked to return to Macao, hoping to find there a means of returning to their mission. They were allowed to remain for some time in the churches of Peking. The Bishop of that capital, being newly arrived, did not as yet know the manners and customs of the country. He felt that Divine Providence was offering him a favorable occasion to quickly be able to govern his diocese fruitfully, by making his the experience of so many servants of the Gospel who had been exercising the sacred ministry in China for a number of years. He had frequent conversations with them, but he grew especially close to the Bishop of Caradre, either because of his dignity or because of his personal merit. This prelate was then sent to Canton from where he was supposed to go to Europe but he avoided the vigilance of the mandarins and went to Manila in order to be closer to go back to his mission. In fact, he had the consolation of returning there in 1787. Since that time, these two bishops have maintained an uninterrupted correspondence, edifying each other and telling one another about the successes of their apostolic labors and the progress of the Gospel in their churches.

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Most illustrious and reverend Monseigneur,

Animated with an ardent zeal for the holy missions, you have asked me for a fuller account of the state of the Christianity established in such an admirable manner a few years ago in the kingdom of Korea, located on the frontier of my diocese, the first-fruits of which I had commended to your prayers and those of your Church. To satisfy your request, I will briefly trace the establishment and progress of the Gospel according to the information I was given by the Korean neophytes and according to the information contained in the most recent letters received this year from the

missionary in Korea.

The new Church in Korea owes its origin to the conversion of a young man, son of an ambassador of the King of Korea, called Ly [**Yi Seung-hun* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yi_Seung-hun], who came to Peking in 1784. [The Kingdom of Korea (a large peninsula to the east of China) is a tributation of this Empire. The King sends ambassadors each year to greet the Emperor and offer the customary tribute.] This young man, a great lover of mathematics, approached the Europeans to ask for books dealing with that science, and to receive lessons. The missionaries took advantage of the occasion to give him books about the Christian religion together with those about mathematics, and gradually taught him the principles of Christianity. With grace acting on the heart of young Ly, reading the books about religion, together with the conversations he had through writing with the Europeans, [the characters or letters of the Koreans are the same as those of the Chinese, but the pronunciation is different thus the missionaries and all the Chinese who know the Chinese characters can communicate by writing with the Koreans, who use the same characters; the Koreans are also able to read and understand the books about religion written in Chinese letters by the missionaries.] made a deep impression on him; he converted to the faith and then, after being instructed on the articles it is necessary to know, he was baptized with the name Peter.

[Editorial note: We hope that pious persons will be edified by a more detailed description of the conversion of this young man; therefore we will add here an extract from a letter written by M. de Ventavon, missionary at Peking, dated November 25, 1784: "You will no doubt learn with gratitude of the conversion of a person whom God will perhaps use to bring the light of the Gospel to a kingdom where so far as is known no missionary has ever penetrated; that is Korea, a peninsula located to the east of China. The king of this country sends ambassadors each year to the Emperor of China, whose vassal he considers himself. He loses nothing, for if he sends gifts to the Emperor, the Emperor gives him gifts of yet greater value. Those Korean ambassadors came, almost one year ago, with their suite, to visit our church; we gave them books about religion; the son of one of the lords, aged 27 and a very fine scholar, read them avidly. He saw the truth in them, and with grace acting on his heart he resolved to embrace the faith after being thoroughly instructed. Before admitting him to baptism, we asked him several questions, and he satisfied us completely. Among other things, we asked him what he was resolved to do if the King disapproved his action and tried to force him to renounce the faith. He replied without hesitating that he would accept every torment and death itself rather than renounce a religion the truth of which he clearly recognized. We did not fail to warn him that the purity of the Gospel law forbids a plurality of wives. He replied: I have only my legal wife and will never have any other. Finally, before his departure for Korea, he received baptism, with his father's consent, administered by M. de Grammont. He received the name Peter; his family name is Ly, he is said to be allied to the royal family. He declared that on his return he intended to renounce human ambitions, retire with his family to the countryside, and devote himself solely to his salvation. He promised to send us news of himself each year. The ambassadors also promised they would suggest to their sovereign to call Europeans into his state."] He returned to his country that same year, provided with a good number of books about the Christian Religion.

This new disciple of Jesus Christ informed his relatives and friends [**notably Yi Byeok* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yi_Byeok and the Jeong brothers http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeong_Yak-yong] about the principles of the true faith that he had learned from the missionaries of Peking, as well as the monuments of the faith he had seen in their churches. He distributed the books he had brought. The reading of these books and the lively preaching of the neophyte soon brought several Koreans to a knowledge of the true God; in a short time many came to believe in Jesus Christ. Some even became more learned, more zealous preachers and promoters of the Christian faith than Peter Ly. He baptized many and many others were baptized by new Christians whom he had established as catechists; in the space of five years the number of Christians rose to about four thousand.

The propagation of the new faith could not long remain hidden from the ministers of the King of Korea; several people, nobles and commoners, were preaching it with the same sincerity as they had embraced it, and God gave effect to their words. In 1788, the governor of the royal city had Thomas King [**Kim Beom-u*], a zealous Christian, arrested on the grounds that he was teaching a foreign religion and doctrine to which he was attracting his fellow-citizens. Hearing this, several neophytes presented themselves before the governor, declaring that they were Christians and preachers of Christianity, at the same time announcing Jesus Christ with zeal and fervor. Amazed at the great number of Christians, and knowing nothing of the intentions of the King toward the partisans of the new religion, the governor dared do nothing against the multitude; he ordered the Christians to return to their homes and exiled Thomas King alone, as a disturber of the public peace and a teacher of foreign doctrines. This preacher of Jesus Christ died gloriously in his exile

the same year. The other Christians only grew bolder, they announced Christianity very successfully in the royal city and in the provinces. They brought to Peter Ly and the other catechists those whom they considered worthy of baptism. Realizing, however, from reading the books that there were a number of things in the Christian religion that they could not understand and others that seemed impossible for them to practice, they together decided to send someone bearing letters to ask the church in Peking for instruction and other means of maintaining and increasing the faith among them.

In the year 1790, Paul Yn [Yun Yu-II] came to Peking accompanying the Korean ambassadors and brought letters from the Korean neophytes. They described the state of the propagation of the Gospel there, requested to be sent sacred objects, books about the religion, and asked for instructions on several points. The arrival of Paul Yn, which was not expected, was a most delightful sight for the Church in Peking. It was filled with extreme joy on learning of the wonderful spread of the Christian religion in a country where no missionary had ever set foot, where the name of Jesus had never been preached. For my part, after reading the letters from this newly-born Church and hearing the stories of the neophyte, I replied by a pastoral letter in which I exhorted these new Christians to give eternal thanks to the almighty and infinitely good God for the ineffable benefits of their vocation to the faith, to persevere in that same faith, and to employ every necessary means in order to preserve the grace of the Gospel they had received. Since I could see from the questions they asked in their letter that there was ignorance among them even on essential questions, I taught them briefly what they ought to believe and practice to be truly Christian and deserve to be regarded as such. Paul Yn, after receiving the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist, left full of joy in February to return home. The letter I gave him was written on silk so that he could hide it more easily and safely. [The Chinese write with a brush on silk almost as easily as on paper. The silk letter can then be more easily hidden in one's clothing.] Once he was back in Korea, Paul Yn told of the churches he had seen in Peking, the European missionaries come from the extremities of the earth to spread the Gospel, the conversations he had had with them, the sacraments he had received, etc. etc. Inflamed by these tales with a new love for the faith, instructed on various points concerning them, the neophytes laid aside all fear, despised all danger. They agreed unanimously to send a messenger to Peking with a letter asking me for missionaries to instruct them, fortifying them by their preaching and the administration of the sacraments. That same year 1790 they sent that same Paul Yn I have just mentioned as well as a catechumen named U. These two deputies came in the suite of the special ambassadors sent to the Emperor of China by the King of Korea in September. [It is customary to celebrate a birthday specially every tenth year. The Emperor of China celebrated in September 1790 his eightieth birthday. Ambassadors of almost every neighboring prince, including those from Korea, came for this celebration.] The catechumen U was an officer of the King, who had charged him to make certain purchases.

Arriving in Peking, they gave me the letters from their Church. The Christians begged me earnestly to send missionaries to care for their souls; they also asked me several questions about contracts, the superstitions of their nation, etc. Once I had consulted, regarding such important matters of great consequence, the opinion of learned, zealous missionaries, I replied to the questions they had asked, promising to send a priest after agreeing on the time, the manner and means suitable to ensure the success of the journey.

The catechumen U was baptized and received the name John-Baptist; I gave him a chalice, a missal, a sacred altar-stone, ornaments and other things needed to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass. I also taught him how to make wine from grapes so that all would be ready for the arrival of the missionary. The two envoys left Peking in October and returned safely to their country where they delivered the letters and objects I had given them. This newly-born Church received much joy and consolation from them. John A *remediis* [*Wu Jo-Han, 1764-1793] a diocesan priest from Macao I had designated as missionary to Korea, set out from Peking in February 1791. After 20 days of walking he arrived at the frontier of that kingdom just at the time agreed. The devoted missionary stayed in the agreed place for ten days, against his expectations, without being able to find any Korean Christian. We had decided to use the time of the fair that is held on the frontier of China and

Korea, to which many merchants from both countries come. Korean Christians that the missionary and his Chinese guides would have recognized by certain signs were supposed to be there to welcome him and lead him into their country. The time of the embassy and the fair passed without anyone appearing. The missionary and his Chinese companions felt great pain at this and returned to Peking. The following year, 1792, we received neither letters nor news from Korea, since no Christian came with the regular embassy. However, certain reports spread by pagans from that Kingdom gave us to understand there had been a persecution of the Christians and that some had been executed for their religion. It was only at the end of 1793 that we were able to confirm that report. At that time, among the suite of the ambassadors, came Sabas Chi, a Christian, and John Po, a catechumen, with letters from the Church in Korea. There the Christians gave an account of the cruel persecution of 1792 and 1793 which had made it impossible for them to go to welcome the missionary.

Here is the cause of the persecution. Two brothers [*in fact cousins], Paul Yn [*Yun Ji-chung] and James Kuan [*Gwon Sang-yeon] had refused to conduct their Christian mother's funerals according to the rituals of paganism. They were from a noble family, of exemplary piety and full of zeal, following the example of their mother who had instructed them on her deathbed that they should not permit superstitious and pagan ceremonies to be performed during her funeral rites. According to the custom established by Korean laws, on the death of their parents, children are obliged by the public authorities to erect tablets on which the names of the dead are written, which are placed and kept very religiously in a decent house called for that reason *the temple of the ancestors*. All the descendants of a single family are obliged, at certain times of the year, to go there, burn incense, offer prepared food, and perform several other superstitious ceremonies. That constitutes the main element of what Koreans consider filial piety toward their deceased ancestors.

Among other doubts and questions that the Church of Korea had submitted to me in 1790, I had been asked *if it was permitted to erect ancestral tablets or to preserve those that already existed*. I replied, following the very formal decisions of the Holy See in the Bull of Benedict XIV *ex quo* and that of Clement IX *ex illa die* that it was not permitted. That reply was a stumbling-block for several noble Koreans. Taught by my Pastoral Letter that ancestral tablets and other ceremonies had been condemned as superstitious by the Holy See, they preferred to renounce a religion whose truth they had recognized, rather than the evil customs of their country. Paul Yn and James Kuan were not of that number; as soon as they learned that it was not permitted to erect nor preserve ancestral tablets, they burned those that they had in their home. When their mother died, their relatives and associates, almost all pagans, came to assist at the funeral following the custom of the country. Not finding the tablets of their ancestors in the place where they were normally kept, they grew furious and began to insult the Christian religion and the two neophytes, demanding with threats that they bring out and put in their place the tablets, which they believed they had simply hidden somewhere. The two brothers did not allow themselves to be intimidated: "We are Christians," they replied frankly, "our mother was too, we are not allowed to combine the worship of the true God with the falsely religious cult of the dead. Our mother forbade that we should make during her funeral any ceremony that was superstitious and contrary to the law of God; the tablets are not hidden; following her advice, we threw them in the fire. Convinced as we are of the truth of the Christian religion, of the uselessness and absurdity of a cult offered to planks and corpses, we are ready to suffer all sorts of torment and death itself, rather than violate the law of God by erecting and keeping tablets, which he detests." These words and more, pronounced forcibly by Paul Yn, who was regarded in his family as a celebrated scholar, made his pagan relatives furious. United in a common mind, they went and denounced Paul Yn and James Kuan to the governor of the town as being guilty of filial impiety and professing a foreign religion.

The two brothers, summoned to judgment and interrogated by the governor, confessed Jesus Christ with a noble sincerity. Paul Yn demonstrated the truth of his religion; he did not deny having burned the tablets; he proved how useless and unjust was the superstitious cult rendered to the dead etc. The governor, an enemy of the Christian religion and of the family of Paul Yn, took this occasion to suppress them. He wrote to the ministers of the King to inform them of the

accusations made against the two brothers; he exaggerated the danger he claimed this European religion represented to the King and the Kingdom; he claimed that it turned people away from the cult of the spirits protecting the nation, from venerating of ancestors, and obeying the laws of the state.

The ministers informed the King of the two brothers' crime, and the dangers threatening the state if this religion was not completely rooted out. This Prince, essentially a friend of peace, was filled with fear and established one of the great lords of the kingdom as Inquisitor against those confessing the Christian religion. He commanded him to employ all the diligence and care possible to prevent the spread of this religion and to oblige children to render the regular cult to their ancestors.

In order to fulfill the functions of his charge, this grand inquisitor launched a major persecution of the Christian religion. He commanded all the subordinate governors in charge of towns to imprison all the Christians they might discover and not set them free until they had denied the faith aloud and in writing. He summoned the two brothers in chains to receive their judgment. To the various questions posed they replied: "We profess the Christian religion because we have recognized its truth; we threw the ancestral tablets into the fire because we consider them useless and detestable before God; we wish to live and die as Christians, according to God's good pleasure. For the rest, we are ready to obey the King and the laws of the state in all that is not contrary to the law of God." This reply, brief but full of power, displeased the inquisitor. He ordered that torture should be applied to them until they renounced Jesus Christ. The two athletes of Christianity only grew firmer in the faith under the torments. After the torture they tried caresses with an equal lack of success. Then the angry inquisitor pronounced the death sentence, condemning them as members of a foreign religion, scorners of that of their land, and guilty of impiety toward their ancestors. Following the custom of the country, the sentence was presented to the King for confirmation. The Prince was sad, he had recognized the genius and fine qualities of Paul Yn and loved his family. He sent some people to the prison to exhort the brothers to renounce Christianity and set up the tablets in honor of their mother and their ancestors. They were authorized, if the brothers agreed to this, to commute their death sentences. It was pointless. The two athletes of Jesus Christ expressed their deepest gratitude for the King's goodness and clemency toward them, but they replied that they could not renounce a religion they had recognized as being the only true one, nor agree to set up tablets that they knew to be an impious act toward God. Irritated by this reply, the King ordered the execution of the sentence. These generous athletes were at once transported from the prison to the execution ground, followed by a great crowd of pagans and Christians. James Kuan, half dead from the torments he had undergone, could scarcely pronounce occasionally the sacred names of Jesus and Mary, but Paul Yn advanced cheerfully toward the execution ground as toward a heavenly banquet. He announced Jesus Christ with so much dignity that both Christians and Pagans were seized with admiration.

Once at the place of execution, the presiding officer asked them if they would obey the King, celebrate the usual cult offered to the tablets of ancestors and renounce the foreign religion. On their negative reply, the officer ordered Paul Yn to read the death sentence confirmed by the King and written on a piece of wood according to the custom in the Kingdom. Paul Yn takes it, reads it aloud in a voice full of joy, and after having read it lays his head on a great block of wood then, having pronounced the holy names of Jesus and Mary several times, he very calmly gives a sign to the executioner to do his duty. The executioner cuts off his head, then that of James Kuan who, although half dead, was still pronouncing the holy names of Jesus and Mary. This happened on December 7, 1791, at 3 in the afternoon. Paul Yn was aged 33, James Kuan 41.

The King repented having confirmed the death sentence and sent an order condemning them to exile in the hope that they would change their minds, but when the message arrived the sentence has already been carried out. The bodies of the two martyrs remained unburied for nine days. To intimidate the Christians guards had been stationed there. On the ninth day the relatives who had obtained the King's permission to bury them and the friends who came for the funeral were amazed to see the two bodies without any sign of corruption, pink and flexible as if they had been beheaded

the same day. Their surprise grew greater still when they saw the block on which they had had their heads cut off and the piece of wood on which the sentence was written, sprinkled with blood still liquid and fresh as if they had been executed a moment before. These circumstances seemed the more remarkable because in December the cold was so intense that all the liquids had frozen, according to the Koreans, even enclosed in containers. The pagans, full of amazement, denounced the injustice of the judges, proclaiming the innocence of the two brothers; a few, touched by the miracle that they examined carefully, were converted to the faith. The Christians, no less amazed, praised and invoked God, lifting to heaven eyes wet with tears of joy. They dipped several cloths in the blood of the martyrs and sent several pieces to me together with a detailed account of the martyrdom which I am writing an abbreviation of here in order not to be over-long.

In their account the neophytes write that a man given up by doctors and about to die was cured in a moment after drinking water in which the plank sprinkled with the blood of the martyrs had been dipped; they also report that several people on the point of death who touched a cloth dipped in the same blood were cured at once. These events strengthened the shaken faith of several neophytes and led a good number of pagans to embrace Christianity, so that we can say that the blood of these two martyrs was a seedbed of Christians.

As for the other Christians, the grand inquisitor recommended the governors of the towns to use exhortations and threats rather than torture and the death sentence. He said: "It is certain that the Christians like to die for their faith, after which people offer them glory and honor as saints. We read in their books that the more we kill the more people embrace their religion." The inquisitor himself, following this principle, employed in the capital exhortations, caresses, promises of wealth and honors, and succeeded in making several apostatize, especially among the nobles. But he also sometimes had recourse to cruel tortures. In the provinces, the governors of the towns persecuted Christians severely or mildly, depending on their attitude toward the faith. Still, generally speaking, the neophytes were treated more severely in the provinces than in the capital. While we have to lament the apostasy of several, especially among the nobles, who renounced Jesus Christ in speaking and writing, we have above all to rejoice at the perseverance of a far larger number who sacrificed to the faith honors, wealth and peace in this world. It is certain that a large number resisted torture to their last breath, while others fled into the deserts and mountains in order not to expose their faith, that virgins and pious widows gave up advantageous marriages in order to serve Jesus Christ more surely and easily; some, exiled for the Gospel, preached faith in Jesus in their place of exile with the same fervor as before. On learning that the people were complaining since so many persons were being imprisoned and tortured on account of the Christian religion, the King ordered the grand inquisitor in the second year of the persecution to set free the imprisoned Christians, exhorting them to give up the European religion and observe the customs and religion of their country. At the same time he commanded that great care should be taken to prevent the Christians going to China, from where the religion had come. This royal decree put an end to the first general persecution of Korean Christians. The faithful returned to their homes and the governors of the towns stopped troubling them.

Once the persecution had ended, the most fervent Christians sent to Peking Sabbas Chi [*Ji Hwang] and John Po, whom I mentioned before, with letters giving an account of events and asking for missionaries. I discussed with the two neophytes how to send a priest to Korea. The priest John A *remediis* whom I had initially chosen for the task was dead, so I chose James *Vellozo* [*Zhou Wenmo, Chu Mun-mo in Korean pronunciation], a Chinese priest, the first pupil of the episcopal seminary of Peking, aged 24, who as well as piety and a sufficient knowledge of ecclesiastical matters, has a deep knowledge of Chinese letters and sciences, and whose face is quite similar to those of Koreans. This missionary left Peking in February 1794, furnished with all the ordinary and extraordinary powers needed to exercise the apostolic ministry. After 20 days' walking he arrived at the frontier between the two countries and found Korean Christians with whom he deliberated on the best time, manner and route to enter their country. Since the governors of Korea were particularly vigilant at the frontier on account of some local persecutions, they agreed that it would be difficult to enter before December. While he was waiting, he visited some of the missions we

have in Tartary close to Korea, as I had charged him to do if the entry in Korea proved difficult. In the month of December that same year, the missionary returned to the Korean frontier, where he found Sabbas Chi and other Christians prepared to bring him into their country. He took off his Chinese dress, put on Korean clothes, and entered the Kingdom around midnight on December 23; he arrived safely after 12 days walking at the capital city called *Kim-Ki-tao*.

His arrival brought inexpressible joy and consolation to the newly-born Church; he was received and welcomed as an angel from heaven. Without delay he prepared all that was needed for the celebration of the holy sacrifice and devoted himself entirely to the study of the Korean language, in order to be able to begin to exercise the sacred ministry as soon as possible. On Holy Saturday 1795 he administered baptism to several adults, completed the ceremonies for this sacrament for some others, and received several written confessions. On the holy day of Easter he celebrated the Holy Mass and gave communion to those who were prepared. Until then the sacrifice of the evangelical law had never been celebrated in that realm. The missionary was not troubled until the month of June; he took advantage of the calm to administer baptism to a number of people and complete the ceremonies for a large number who had been baptized by other Christians.

A woman who had just received the sacraments, on returning home, told her brother who was a catechumen of the arrival and preaching of the missionary. This man, who had renounced Jesus Christ in the previous persecution, feigned an ardent desire to make penitence and receive baptism and ran to the house of the priest; he asked him and his guide many questions about the faith and about his arrival in the country. On leaving the house after a lengthy conversation, he goes straight to the royal palace, and informs the ministers of the arrival of a foreigner, where he is living, those who brought him etc. It was June 27, 1795. A military governor was present at this denunciation who was an apostate Christian who sincerely repented of his crime and longed ardently for a priest to whom he might confess, but the other Christians had not informed him of the arrival of the missionary, fearing he might betray them. Informed by the denunciation of the other apostate, who was also a military officer, of where the priest was staying, he ran there, warned him of the accusation laid against him, of the danger facing him and the faith, advised him to leave there at once and offered to take him elsewhere. The missionary took his advice, and he brought him that very instant to the home of a rich Christian widow who took him in and protected him until the storm was past. The missionary was safe there; following the customs of the kingdom, nobody was permitted to enter the house since there were no men living there. That same day, the ministers of the King after taking counsel together, sent two bands of soldiers, one to the house of Matthias Xu[*Choe In-gil], where the missionary had stayed, and one to pursue those who had guided him, with orders to bring them all to the high court. Obeying these orders, the soldiers impetuously entered the home of Matthias Xu, arrested him and brought him before the tribunal. At about the same time they arrested the two main guides of the missionary, Sabbas Chi and Paul Yn, and five other Christians they thought had also acted as guides. These five insisted that they knew nothing of the entry of a foreigner into the country. For about 15 days beatings and tortures were employed to make them renounce Jesus Christ, but they suffered without being shaken. At the end of that time they were sent home, and they set off praising and blessing the God they had generously confessed.

As for the three other Christians, Matthias Xu, the missionary's host, Sabbas Chi and Paul Yn, who had brought him in, they were brought before the tribunal the night they were arrested. By their patience, their silence and their constancy, they wearied and disconcerted the wickedness, the cruelty, and the ruses of the judges. Questioned whether they professed the Christian religion, and if they worshiped a crucified man, they bravely replied that they professed the Christian religion and worshiped the Man-God crucified for the salvation of humanity. Ordered to curse and blaspheme against Jesus Christ, they replied that they could not and affirmed that they were ready to die a thousand times rather than proffer insults and blasphemy against Jesus Christ, true God and true Redeemer. The president of the tribunal ordered them to be struck, beaten, and have their knees crushed. This was to no avail, the three continued unanimous in professing the faith, without hesitating or showing any weakening. Then they were questioned about the foreigner they had brought from China, their accomplices in the so-called crime, the route they had taken to reach the

capital, the houses where they had received hospitality along the way, the name, quality and place of origin of the foreigner they had brought in; they asked many other questions about their journey. Their only reply was to profess their faith and regarding all the questions just mentioned they kept totally silent as though they were deaf and dumb. The judges and the president employed caresses and threats to urge them to answer their questions; it was in vain. After spending a good part of the night with no result, the president ordered the use of even crueler torments to force them to answer. All the methods used in Korea were employed, blows, beatings, hand crushing, foot crushing, knee crushing. In the midst of such horrible torments, the courageous athletes of Jesus Christ spoke nothing but the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. Finally, deciding that the three were mocking them, despairing of obtaining a single word about the arrival of the foreigner, the judges grew furious and ordered that every kind of torture should be applied until they died. The order was executed and the three confessors of Jesus Christ expired at about the same moment. They invoked Jesus Christ to the last moment, their faces were serene, a sign of the spiritual sweetness they were enjoying in the midst of their torments that they were enduring for the love of Jesus Christ and for the preservation of the Christian religion. This martyrdom occurred on June 25, 1795. Sabbas Chi was 29, Paul Yn was 36 and Matthias Xu was 31.

These three martyrs had distinguished themselves by fine acts ever since their baptism, the Church in Korea is full of praises of them. It is sure that they were zealous evangelists, and worked ardently for the glory of God. One clear proof of that is seen in the courage with which they braved the great dangers involved in bringing the missionary into the Kingdom, entry into which is strictly forbidden to any foreigner. With no other goal than the glory of God and the salvation of their compatriots, they brought the first missionary of the Christian religion to the capital safe and sound, despite the dangers, the fears, the difficulties inseparable from such an action. It seems that we may rightly consider the martyrdom they suffered so gloriously as a reward for the pains they had taken and the dangers they had faced for the glory of Jesus Christ. This grace of martyrdom is also an unequivocal proof that they now enjoy the celestial bliss to which who die for Jesus Christ are called.

Moreover, the Church in Peking and I myself witnessed the piety and devotion of Paul Yn during the two visits he made to Peking in 1790. He received the sacraments of Confirmation, Penance, and the Eucharist, with such striking fervor that several Christians were unable to keep back tears of joy and admiration on finding in this neophyte the external appearance, the discourse and the exemplary virtues of an ancient disciple of Jesus Christ, a master in the practice of Evangelical maxims.

Then in 1793 we were witnesses of the piety of Sabbas Chi during the 40 days he spent in Peking. The faithful of our city were edified by the evident devotion, the great fervor and the tears he shed on receiving the sacraments of Confirmation, Penance and the Eucharist. As for Matthias Xu, we were not eye-witnesses since he never came to Peking, but I learned by the missionary sent to Korea that he was one of the first Christians chosen by Peter Ly for the propagation of the faith and that he distinguished himself by his fervor and piety, his zeal in extending the glory of God.

After the death of the three martyrs, people urged the King several times to order by public decree searches against the Christian religion. This Prince, peace-loving by nature, and not strongly opposed to the Christian religion, fearing too a popular uprising, refused to provoke by a public decree a general persecution of Christianity; but he removed their positions from several civilian and military officials and partially demoted several others because they were Christians. Paul Ly was sent into exile after being stripped of his position. After that, the King ordered all the governors in the Kingdom to be extremely careful not to allow the European religion to spread, exhorting the people not to give up the religion of the country to embrace one from abroad. If people do not obey, they should inform the supreme criminal tribunal so that it can take effective precautions, after asking the King for particular instructions. The King particularly instructed the governors in the frontier area and the ambassadors to be sent to Peking in future to take special care that no Christian should leave the realm and no Chinese enter it.

Although this royal command prevented a general persecution of the faith, it allowed the

governors of the towns to vex Christians by rigorous searches. The only perceptible difference between this inquisition and open persecution is that most governors did not kill Christians, or subject them to the cruelest tortures. Yet there were some who, under the pretext of the vigilance commanded by the King, did torture people to death. A large number of neophytes abandoned their homes and took refuge in the deserts and mountains in order to escape their tyranny; many other died of hunger and deprivation in prison; there were also many who, weak in the faith, preferred the perishable goods of this world to the treasures of heaven and compromised, instead of confessing their faith clearly and openly. Yet, thanks to divine providence, the missionary was kept safe, in the midst of such great dangers, for the salvation of many. Once the vexations had diminished somewhat, and the young Church began to breathe a little, a great number of apostates came thronging to him, to lay at his feet the crime of apostasy that fear or weakness had made them commit, and seek absolution. Those who had not bowed the knee before Baal found strength and consolation in receiving the sacraments.

The death of the three martyrs we have just mentioned, and the searches that the governors undertook after that were the reason why I only received news and letters from the missionary two years after he entered Korea. We had agreed that in the spring after he entered Korea he would send a Korean courier to the frontier to give letters to a Chinese messenger I would send, so that I could know his situation and the state of the mission entrusted to him. Contrary to my expectation, the messenger I sent saw no Korean Christian throughout the duration of the fair. His return to Peking without letters cast us into great anxiety concerning the state and the fate of the missionary and the mission in Korea. This grew even worse when a courier I sent early the following year told me on his return that he had seen no Korean neophyte and that on sounding out a pagan merchant of the country, he learned from him that people had been killed on account of the Christian religion. This report was confirmed by several pagans from Korea during the annual embassy. Combining these different reports, there were reasons for fearing that the missionary had been caught and put to death.

Once the searches by the governors along the frontier had slackened a little, the missionary was at last at the end of two years able to send to Peking a Christian bearing his letters to give details of the new Church. This pious and fervent Christian was called Thomas Vam. Although he was of noble family, he pretended to be a man of the people in order to come to Peking as a servant of the ambassador. He had paid money to purchase the position from a true servant of the ambassadors. His arrival in Peking on January 29 of this current year of 1797 filled us with a joy that was the greater for no longer being hoped for. The letters from the missionary that he brought me were in Latin and dated September 14 of the previous year, those from the Christians were in Chinese characters and of more or less the same date. They were written on silk and the messenger had hidden them in his clothing to escape the vigilance and searches of the officials. By them I learned everything about the state of the faith in Korea, I could verify the details learned in previous years of the origin and progress of the preaching of the Gospel, the persecutions and the obstacles erected by the pagans; I learned that in 1795 the missionary had been in the greatest danger, from which he had barely escaped. He notes, as I had charged him, the dangers he is surrounded by in the exercise of his apostolic ministry on account of the constant searches by the governors; he informs me that the superstitious cult that the Koreans offer the dead and the tablets is a great obstacle to the progress of the Gospel, and that forbidding that cult in my pastoral letter made a great number of noble Christians and catechumens turn back. He speaks of the King as a naturally good, peace-loving prince who only persecutes those who follow the Christian religion because he is forced to by his ministers and he fears some kind of revolution in his kingdom. Finally he enters into various details about the country [The Koreans have the same morals and customs as the Chinese, from whom they descend and to whom they belonged in the past. They adore the same false divinities, they follow the same masters, Confucius and the other Chinese doctors. The form of their government is substantially the same; the only difference lies in a small number of objects introduced by the modern Chinese under the currently ruling Tartaro-Chinese dynasty.], its morals, customs, laws, temporal government, religion, and other such things the knowledge of which might prove useful to those charged with the care of the Church in Korea, to govern it well. Among the means which the missionary and the Christians of Korea propose in order to preserve

and promote the Christian religion, here is what seems best and preferable to all others: to beg the Queen of Portugal to send an ambassador to the King of Korea, accompanied by missionaries learned in mathematics and medicine, to greet that prince and propose a treaty of alliance. The Koreans say that the King of Korea, naturally good, passionate about mathematics and medicine, by no means hostile to Christianity, flattered and grateful at the arrival of a great European ambassador, would honor that ambassador's religion, allow it in his kingdom, treat the missionaries favorably and allow them near him, to the greater profit and safety of the Christian religion.

There, Monseigneur, you have the abridged history of the newly-born Church in Korea, on which the infinitely good God has recently deigned to look with mercy, sending light to people sitting in darkness and leading them in the way of peace and salvation, by means that are the more admirable for seeming ineffective in human eyes.

When I think of the extraordinary conversion of part of this nation, the means by which some 4,000 men have come to a knowledge of the truth, when I think of the courageous virtue, the heroic constancy with which they have embraced and kept their faith in the midst of so many violent upsets and contrarities, I recall these words from Exodus, "The finger of God is here," and those of the Apostle, "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom of the knowledge of God." What but the Spirit of God can operate a so sudden change in hearts, that men so long seated in darkness and the shadow of death should suddenly stand up at the sight of the light and follow it? What but the Spirit of God can work such great wonders of omnipotence with such weak instruments, that a young man barely instructed of the things needed for Baptism should become the preacher and the apostle of his compatriots and have the strength to draw to the faith such a large number? And what, finally, but the Spirit of God, can fortify by his grace the hearts of the weak that they resist the attractions of the world and allow themselves to be put to death amidst horrible torments, rather than abandon the God they have begun to worship? The propagation of the Gospel and its progress in the kingdom of Korea is therefore a truly divine work. It can be compared to the primitive Church, this Church from its beginning exposed to storms of persecution, sprinkled with the blood of five martyrs, strengthened by the virtues of a great number of confessors! May the all-good and almighty God enable the Church in Korea, like the primitive Church, to see the number of its children grow day by day, and grow in virtue, so receiving the fruits of heavenly blessings! The Sovereign Pontiff, the Pastor of the universal Church, has entrusted to me the care of this new Church, daughter of that of Peking. [His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli, in a letter he wrote to me in 1792, informed me of the joy and pleasure that the Sovereign Pontiff Paul IV experienced on learning that Christianity had recently been established in Korea. He wrote: "Our excellent Sovereign Pontiff has read with the greatest eagerness the account you wrote of this wonderful event. He shed tears of joy at it, and felt an ineffable pleasure in being able to offer to God these first-fruits in lands so far away." A little later the same Cardinal adds: "Therefore His Holiness loves with a very paternal tenderness these illustrious athletes of Jesus Christ. He longs to give them all sorts of spiritual good things. Though absent in body, he sees them with the eyes of the spirit, embraces them cordially and wholeheartedly bestows his apostolic blessing."]

I recommend the Church in Korea to your prayers to your holy sacrifices, your fervent prayers and those of your Church, in which I have the greatest trust. I hope they will be of the greatest help to me. Farewell, illustrious Prelate. Continue to love me as ever and to pray for me.

Monseigneur,
Your very devoted friend and affectionate servant,
signed, F.R. Bishop of Peking.
Peking, August 15, 1797.

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