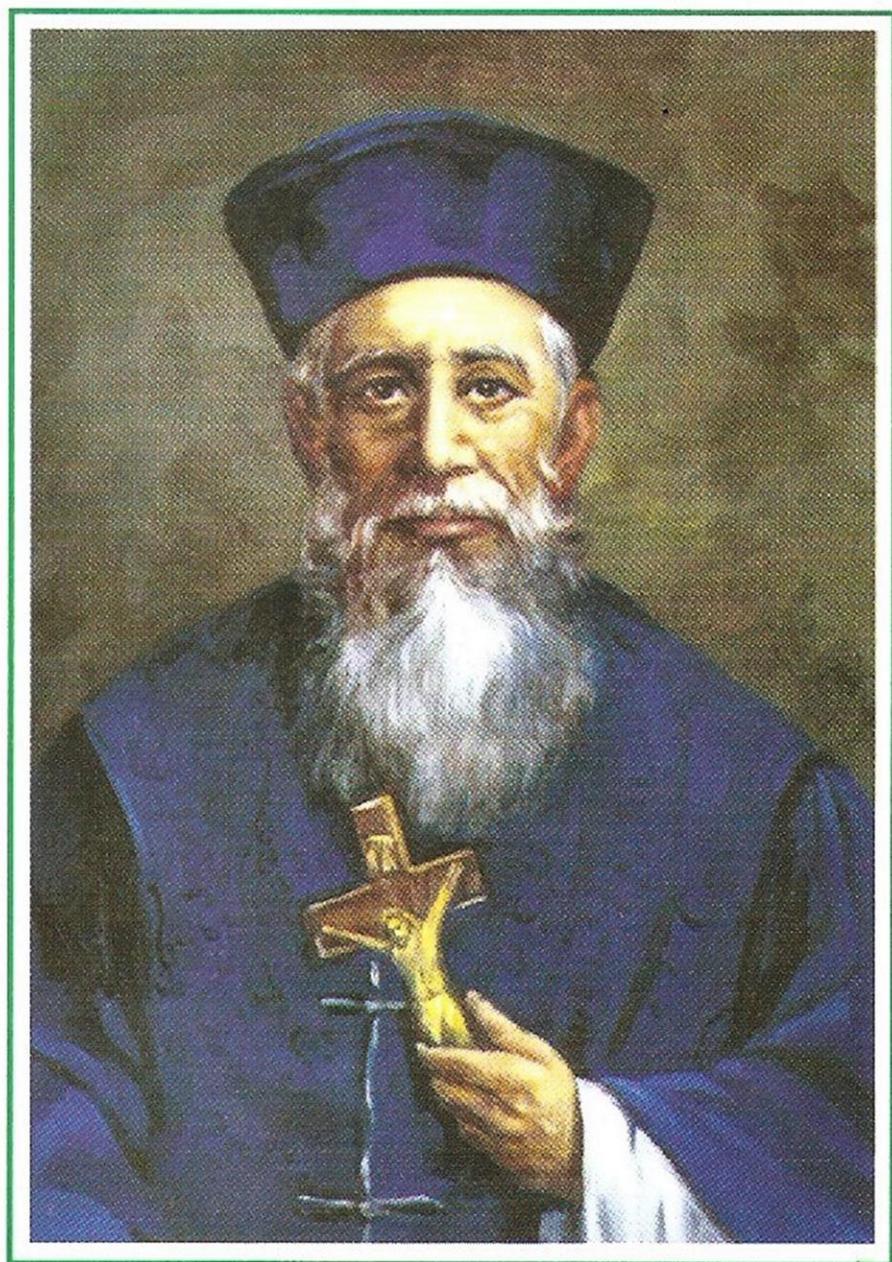


# VINCENTIANA

45<sup>th</sup> YEAR - N. 1

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2001



聖劉格來·方濟各，遣使會士  
*Saint Francis Regis Clet*  
(1748-1820)

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

GENERAL CURIA

## *Santa Sede*

On Wednesday, February 21, 2001, His Holiness Pope John Paul II held, in St. Peter's Square, an Ordinary Public Consistory for the creation of new cardinals. The Holy Father arrived at the portico of the basilica, where the cardinals were already gathered, at 10:30 a.m. and immediately took his seat. After the liturgical greeting, the Holy Father read the formula for the creation of the cardinals and proclaimed their names, among which was that of **Stéphanos II Ghattas, C.M.**, Patriarch of Alexandria for Copts (Egypt). Then, the first of the cardinals, Giovanni Battista Re, gave a warm greeting of gratitude. After the homily, the Pope conferred the biretta on the new cardinals and assigned to each one his own Title or Deaconry. The ceremony concluded with the apostolic blessing.

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Cardinal **Stéphanos II Ghattas, C.M.**, Patriarch of Alexandria for Copts (Egypt), was born on January 16, 1920 in Sheikh Zein-el-Dine, eparchy of Sohag of the Copts (Egypt). He entered the minor seminary in Cairo in August 1929 and did his classical studies at the Jesuits' Holy Family High School. In September 1938, he was sent to the Pontifical Athenaeum "de Propaganda Fide" in Rome where he obtained a doctorate in philosophy and theology. He was ordained to the priesthood in Rome on March 25, 1944.

He began his pastoral ministry as a philosophy and dogmatic theology professor at the major seminary in Tahta (Egypt). On October 2, 1952, he entered the Congregation of the Mission and made his novitiate in Paris. After working for six years in Lebanon, he was named econome and then superior of our community in Alexandria.

The Coptic Catholic Synod elected him Bishop of Thebes-Luxor on May 8, 1967. He was ordained to the episcopate on June 9 of that year. He remained in this see until February 24, 1984, completing the construction of the bishop's residence.

On that date he was named Apostolic Administrator of the Patriarchate to substitute for the ailing Patriarch Stéphanos I Sidarous, C.M., Patriarch of Alexandria for Copts. After the latter resigned, the Coptic Catholic Synod unanimously elected the former as Patriarch of Alexandria for Copts on June 9, 1986. John Paul II granted him "ecclesiastical communion" on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same month. He then changed his name from Andraos to Stéphanos II, as a gesture of affection for his predecessor.

At present, he governs the eparchy of Alexandria for the Copts, depending on the patriarchate. He is President of the Synod of the Coptic Catholic Church and of the Assembly of the Egyptian Catholic Hierarchy and, in the Roman Curia, member of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.

In February 2000, he welcomed the Holy Father during his Jubilee pilgrimage to Mount Sinai.

(Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*,

February 22, 2001)

## **Vincentian Chinese Pilgrimage to Rome**

*By Thomas Sendlein, C.M.  
Province of China*

The journey of Francis Regis Clet was long and exhausting – six long months. In his day, there were no airplanes, just a boat. The way was roundabout. The exact destination was unsure. The terrain was difficult. The political situation was hostile. The language was a mystery. It was a journey from France to the so-called “Middle Kingdom,” which seemed to the French the far side of the world and from which Francis Regis Clet realized that he would never return. Only his remains made the journey back to France.

Two hundred and nine years later, the journey or “pilgrimage” was the same distance, but only took an exhausting day. The means of transport was not a ship, but a crowded uncomfortable airplane. The way was not as roundabout as before, just stops in Bangkok and in the Netherlands. The destinations were Paris and Rome. The political situation was again hostile. A fresh controversy, precisely because of the canonizations, was erupting between the Vatican and the People’s Republic of China. The languages of French and Italian seemed mysterious to the Chinese pilgrims from Taiwan. We were on a pilgrimage to Paris to pay respects to Clet where his remains are entombed at the Chapel of St. Vincent de Paul and a pilgrimage to Rome to share in the ceremony, which publicly elevated Francis Regis Clet to the ranks of the saints.

### **Visiting the tomb of Francis Regis Clet**

In planning the pilgrimage, we felt that the first stop should be Paris. Although the Vincentian priests, seminarian and Vincentian parishioners were exhausted after the long journey, we immediately celebrated the Eucharist at rue de Bac, asking the assistance of Mary to accompany us on our spiritual journey and on the constant journey of the Chinese people in history. The next day was September 27<sup>th</sup>, St. Vincent de Paul’s feast day. We celebrated the Mass with St. Vincent looking down upon us and St. John Gabriel Perboyre and St. Francis Regis Clet on each side looking up to us. We were surrounded by our Vincentian roots, from where many missionaries left for China. From Appiani and Muellner (1699) to the present, Vincentian missionaries have shared in the evangelization of China. Throughout our 300-year history in China and with well over 1,000 Vincentians, both Chinese and foreign, the Congregation has influenced the history of the Catholic Church in China.

As we, the Vincentian Chinese pilgrim group, made our prayerful way from St. Vincent de Paul to St. John Gabriel Perboyre and then to St. Francis

Regis Clet, we reflected on their lives and sufferings and even more, prayed to them to intercede for the Chinese people. From the church we moved to the relic room at the Maison-Mère. There we saw instruments used in the martyrdom of our saints and the clothes worn by them. Our understanding was widened when we realized that many more Vincentians and Daughters of Charity had died violent deaths as they served God's people in China. One particular section was dedicated to Bishop Schraven and his companions (a total of 3 Dutch, 2 French, 1 Polish and 1 Austrian confreres), who were killed by the Japanese in 1937 in Zhengding (Chengtingfu). The sole survivor of the massacre, Fr. Joseph Chow (Zhou), lives in Taiwan and just celebrated his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### **Prayer Vigil in Preparation for the Canonization of Francis Regis Clet**

In Rome the Chinese group could feel the spirit of the canonization rising as we entered the Church of San Gioacchino, where the Vincentian prayer vigil was just about to start. From the side altar right next to the sanctuary, we could hear and see the ceremony and enter into prayer with the other members of our Vincentian family. As we sang, prayed and listened to God's word together, one had a deep sense that the Vincentian Family was bigger than just one parish or just one part of the world. We were united in true family spirit both with those present at the prayer vigil and with those who could not be there. The ceremony brought together both the present and the past. The Vincentian heritage was being celebrated and being continued at the same time. This became more real as we gazed on the pictures of our various saints and blessed, which were being elevated in the sanctuary by various members of the Vincentian Family.

Rev. Robert Maloney, C.M., Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity, gave his personal testimony of visiting the place of Francis Regis Clet's execution. He summed up the reasons why Clet was such an extraordinary person:

Clet was a whole person, genuinely integrated;  
Clet trusted deeply in God's providence, where he found meaning in life;  
Clet shows an astounding peacefulness about dying.

Father Maloney concludes: "My brothers and sisters, the saints make holiness real to us. They make it concrete. In them holiness comes alive. Their lives are not books of abstract theology, nor manuals of dry spirituality. They are the real thing. I encourage you today to rejoice in, and of course learn from, this wonderful man. He was a whole person, filled with tenderness and compassion. He trusted deeply in God's providence in his life and, with God leading the way, he walked peacefully to his death. Is there much more that we need to learn about

living than that? If Francis Regis Clet can teach us these lessons, then his martyrdom was surely not in vain.”

### **The Canonization of 120 Martyr Saints of China**

The morning was overcast. A light drizzle could be felt now and then. As we arrived at St. Peter’s Square, we were all praying for a miracle – that it would not rain! A strong sun or a heavy rain would make the ceremony really miserable. The Vincentian Chinese delegation made its way up front toward the center where we had tickets for prearranged seats. We met another delegation from Taiwan and a Chinese delegation from Canada. We were all armed with our umbrellas and properly dressed for the occasion – in plastic raincoats.

Throughout the waiting and the ceremony, thousands of people worked in unison as all opened their umbrellas as it began to rain and closed them when it stopped. This happened innumerable times and it became so natural that no one seemed to mind. As I reflected during those moments, I thought of Francis Regis Clet who was dragged from place to place and from prison to prison – 33 in all. It must have been raining on some of those occasions and with what great physical suffering!

In the biographical profile for the canonization, we read:

*“Blessed Francis Regis Clet of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians). After obtaining permission to go to the Missions in China, he embarked for the Orient in 1791. Having reached there, for thirty years he spent a life of missionary sacrifice. Upheld by an untiring zeal, he evangelized three immense provinces of the Chinese Empire: Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan. Betrayed by a Christian, he was arrested and thrown into prison where he underwent atrocious tortures. Following sentence by the Emperor he was killed by strangling on 17 February 1820.”*

Eighty-seven of those newly canonized were Chinese and Pope John Paul II said in his homily that with this solemn proclamation of holiness, the Church intends “to recognize that those martyrs are an example of courage and consistency to us all, and that they honor the noble Chinese people.” Referring to the 33 foreign missionaries, His Holiness said, “Resplendent in this host of martyrs are also the 33 missionaries who left their land and sought to immerse themselves in the Chinese world, lovingly assimilating its features in the desire to proclaim Christ and to serve those people.”

As the formula of canonization was read we sang in unison: “Amen. Alleluia,” as we gave praise to the Lord for the example of our brothers and sisters who gave their lives for the faith and the Chinese people.

At the “*Angelus*” that day, Pope John Paul II greeted the faithful assembled for the canonization: “With affection, I greet all the faithful gathered here to honor the Chinese Martyrs, especially those of you of Chinese origin, who are seeing for the first time the canonization of martyrs belonging to your own people. Likewise, my thoughts reach out to all the Catholic faithful in China. I know that you are spiritually united with us, and I am certain that you understand that this is a special moment of grace for the whole Church and for the entire Catholic community in China. I wish to assure you once more that I pray for you every day. May the Holy Martyrs comfort you and sustain you as, like them, you bravely and generously bear witness both to your fidelity to Jesus Christ and to your genuine love of your people. [Then in Chinese he said] I wish you peace.”

### **The Banquet after the Canonization**

Several members of the Vincentian Chinese delegation were invited immediately after the canonization to a banquet. Both for me and for them the highlight of the meal was the possibility of meeting personally many relatives of Francis Regis Clet. The connection with Clet continued to become real.

### **The Get-together of the confreres in the evening**

As evening came, so did a great number of confreres who joined together for a buffet meal at Via Pompeo Magno. Old acquaintances, distant friends, classmates dispersed on mission around the world had come to Rome for the canonization of our confrere. After lively conversations, everyone enjoyed a great meal and the Polish confreres belted out songs to enrich the already pleasant atmosphere.

### **The Mass of Thanksgiving on October 2, 2000**

Cardinal Shan from Kaohsiung, Taiwan celebrated the Mass of Thanksgiving for the canonization of the Chinese martyr saints. Many of the confreres concelebrated this outdoor Mass in St. Peter’s Square. Once again, we had the orchestra of the opening and closing of the umbrellas as the rains came and left at various moments during the Mass. Once again, we did not mind as we concentrated on giving thanks to the Lord for these great Christian examples.

## **The Continuation of the Jubilee Pilgrimage**

The Vincentian Chinese Pilgrimage continued as we visited the remaining three Basilicas of St. Paul, St. John Lateran and St. Maria Major. At each, we gave thanks to the Lord for the opportunity to participate at the canonization and the Jubilee Year 2000 and we prayed for our brothers and sisters in China.

## **Meanwhile in Mainland China**

Before October 1<sup>st</sup>, a vigorous anti-canonization campaign was launched through state media, press and television. All sorts of accusations were broadcast against the foreign missionaries and their “infamous Chinese henchmen.” Interference in China’s internal religious affairs was again brought up. The government pressured the official bishops and priests to avoid speaking publicly about the canonization during the Masses on Sunday, October 1<sup>st</sup>. Many analysts see the intensity of the campaign as the government’s concern more about the official Church than about the unofficial one because more and more bishops and young priests are moving towards Rome.

Despite the ban on even mentioning the word “canonization,” on October 1<sup>st</sup> fresh flowers appeared on two side altars in a church, a silent, but *simple and profound proclamation* of the deep appreciation of our brothers and sisters in China toward St. John Gabriel Perboyre and St. Francis Regis Clet.

## **Explanation of the Calligraphy given to the Pope by the Chinese Pilgrims**

This Chinese calligraphy/painting, which was presented to the Pope, was done by Huang Chung Jen of Taiwan. The Chinese character is “hú,” a single character which conveys many thoughts. This “hú” is a teapot. It is a gift from the community in Taiwan and China.

Chinese culture, Chinese hospitality and family custom can be defined by the teapot. It is a symbol of ceremony. It is a tradition of hospitality. This central theme to the culture of life can be seen in a teapot. At a gathering of friends, a family meal or reunion, a holiday or a celebration, the teapot is the vessel which carries the comfort, pleasure, warmth, health and healing of the tea liquid.

It can bring cheer, consolation, calm and peacefulness to those who share its content. It serves the rich and poor alike.

The martyrs being canonized could be easily seen as the teapots of Christianity in the Chinese culture.

## Cappella Papale for the Canonization of 123 new Saints

### **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

*Sunday 1 October 2000*

1. "Your word is truth; sanctify us in your love" (*Gospel Acclamation*, Italian Lectionary; cf. *Jn 17: 17*). This invocation, an echo of Christ's prayer to the Father after the Last Supper, *seems to rise from the host of saints and blesses* whom the Spirit of God continues to raise up in his Church from generation to generation.

Today, 2,000 years since the beginning of Redemption, we make these words our own, while we have before us as models of holiness *Augustine Zhao Rong* and his 119 companions, martyrs in China, *María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus Sancho de Guerra*, *Katharine Mary Drexel* and *Josephine Bakhita*. God the Father "sanctified them in his love", granting the request of the Son, who opened his arms on the Cross, put an end to death and revealed the resurrection, in order to win for the Father a holy people (cf. *Eucharistic Prayer II, Preface*).

I extend my cordial greeting to you all, dear brothers and sisters, gathered here in great numbers to express your devotion to these shining witnesses of the Gospel.

2. "The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart" (*Responsorial Psalm*). These words of the Responsorial Psalm clearly reflect the experience of *Augustine Zhao Rong* and his 119 companions, martyrs in China. The testimonies which have come down to us allow us to glimpse in them a state of mind marked by deep serenity and joy.

*Today the Church is grateful to her Lord*, who blesses her and bathes her in light with the radiant holiness of these sons and daughters of China. Is not the Holy Year the most appropriate moment to make their heroic witness shine resplendently? *Young Ann Wang*, a 14-year-old, withstood the threats of the torturers who invited her to apostatize. Ready for her beheading, she declared with a radiant face: "The door of heaven is open to all", three times murmuring: "Jesus". And 18-year-old *Chi Zhuzi*, cried out fearlessly to those who had just cut off his right arm and were preparing to flay him alive: "Every piece of my flesh, every drop of my blood will tell you that I am Christian".

The other 85 Chinese men and women of every age and state, priests, religious and lay people, showed the same conviction and joy, sealing their unflinching fidelity to Christ and the Church with the gift of their lives. This occurred over the course of several centuries and in a complex and difficult era of China's history. Today's celebration is not the appropriate time to pass judgement on those historical periods: this can and should be done elsewhere. Today, with this solemn proclamation of holiness, the Church intends merely to recognize that those martyrs are an example of courage and consistency to us all, and that they honour the noble Chinese people.

Resplendent in this host of martyrs are also the 33 missionaries who left their land and sought to immerse themselves in the Chinese world, lovingly assimilating its features in the desire to proclaim Christ and to serve those people. Their tombs are there as if to signify their definitive belonging to China, which they deeply loved, although with their human limitations, and for which they spent all their energies. "We never wronged anyone", Bishop Francis Fogolla replied to the governor who was preparing to strike him with his sword. "On the contrary, we have done good to many". (In Chinese) God sends down happiness.

3. Both the first reading and the Gospel of today's liturgy show us that the Spirit blows where he wills, and that God, in every age, chooses individuals to show his love to mankind and raises up institutions called to be privileged instruments of his action. So it was with *St María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus Sancho de Guerra*, foundress of the Servants of Jesus of Charity.

In the life of the new saint, the first Basque to be canonized, the Spirit's action is remarkably visible. He led her to the service of the sick and prepared her to be the Mother of a new religious family.

St María Josefa lived her vocation as an authentic apostle in the field of health, since her style of care sought to combine motherly and spiritual attention, using every means to achieve the salvation of souls. Although she was ill for the last 12 years of her life, she spared no effort or suffering and was unstinting in her charitable service to the sick in a contemplative atmosphere, recalling that "care does not only consist in giving the sick medicine and food; there is another kind of care ... and it is that of the heart, which tries to adapt itself to the suffering person".

May María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus help the Basque people to banish violence for ever, and may Euskadi be a blessed land and a place of peaceful and fraternal coexistence, where the rights of every person are respected and innocent blood is no longer shed.

4. "*See what you have stored up for yourselves against the last days!*" (Jas 5: 3).

In the second reading of today's liturgy, the Apostle James rebukes the rich who trust in their wealth and treat the poor unjustly. Mother *Katharine Drexel* was born into wealth in Philadelphia in the United States. But from her parents she learned that her family's possessions were not for them alone but were meant to be shared with the less fortunate. As a young woman, she was deeply distressed by the poverty and hopeless conditions endured by many Native Americans and Afro-Americans. She began to devote her fortune to missionary and educational work among the poorest members of society. Later, she understood that more was needed. With great courage and confidence in God's grace, she chose to give not just her fortune but her whole life totally to the Lord.

To her religious community, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, she taught a spirituality based on prayerful union with the Eucharistic Lord and zealous service of the poor and the victims of racial discrimination. Her apostolate helped to bring about a growing awareness of the need to combat all forms of racism through education and social services. Katharine

Drexel is an excellent example of that practical charity and generous solidarity with the less fortunate which has long been the distinguishing mark of American Catholics.

May her example help young people in particular to appreciate that no greater treasure can be found in this world than in following Christ with an undivided heart and in using generously the gifts we have received for the service of others and for the building of a more just and fraternal world.

5. *"The law of the Lord is perfect, ... it gives wisdom to the simple" (Ps 19: 8).*

These words from today's Responsorial Psalm resound powerfully in the life of *Sr Josephine Bakhita*. Abducted and sold into slavery at the tender age of seven, she suffered much at the hands of cruel masters. But she came to understand the profound truth that God, and not man, is the true Master of every human being, of every human life. This experience became a source of great wisdom for this humble daughter of Africa.

In today's world, countless women continue to be victimized, even in developed modern societies. In St Josephine Bakhita we find *a shining advocate of genuine emancipation*. The history of her life inspires not passive acceptance but the firm resolve to work effectively to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights.

My thoughts turn to the new saint's country, which has been torn by a cruel war for the past 17 years, with little sign of a solution in sight. In the name of suffering humanity I appeal once more to those with responsibility: *open your hearts to the cries of millions of innocent victims and embrace the path of negotiation*. I plead with the international community: do not continue to ignore this immense human tragedy. I invite the whole Church to invoke the intercession of St Bakhita upon all our persecuted and enslaved brothers and sisters, especially in Africa and in her native Sudan, that they may know reconciliation and peace.

Lastly, I address an affectionate greeting to the Canossian Daughters of Charity, who are rejoicing today because their sister has been raised to the glory of the altars. From the example of *St Josephine Bakhita* may they be able to draw renewed encouragement for generous dedication in the service of God and neighbour.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, encouraged by this time of Jubilee grace, let us renew our willingness to be deeply purified and sanctified by the Spirit. We are also drawn to this path by the saint whose memorial we celebrate today: Theresa of the Child Jesus. To her, patroness of the missions, and to the new saints we entrust the mission of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium.

May Mary, Queen of All Saints, support the steps of Christians and of all who are docile to the Spirit of God, so that the light of Christ the Saviour will spread to every part of the world.

**Address of John Paul II to  
the Pilgrims who have come to Rome  
for the Canonizations  
Monday, 2 October 2000**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. Yesterday we experienced an extraordinary moment of joy in St Peter's Square, as we celebrated the canonization of a number of saints. Today Providence has granted us the opportunity to meet, in order to prolong our thanksgiving to God, who gives the Church ever new models of Gospel life, and to contemplate together the exemplary figures of the *Martyrs in China*, of *María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus Sancho de Guerra*, of *Katharine Drexel* and of *Josephine Bakhita*.

I greet you all again, pilgrims from various countries, and express my heartfelt appreciation for the moving scene you have created around this ecclesial event by your presence.

2. I now turn in a special way to the pilgrims who have come for the canonization of the 120 Martyrs in China. First of all you, faithful of Chinese origin, with whom I would like to share my deep joy over these sons and daughters of the Chinese people who are presented to the whole Church and to the entire world for the first time, with their heroic fidelity to Christ the Lord and the greatness of their souls. Yes, they are a true honour for the noble people of China!

My joy increases with the thought that closely united with us are all the faithful of Mainland China, who know - as you do - that in the martyrs they have not only an example to follow, but also intercessors with the Father. We need their help, in fact, because we are called to face daily life with the same dedication and fidelity that the martyrs showed in their time.

You all know that the majority of the 120 Martyrs shed their blood in historical periods which rightly have a special meaning for your people. In reality, they were tragic situations marked by violent social disturbances. With yesterday's canonization, the Church certainly does not wish to make a historical judgement on those periods, much less to justify certain actions taken by governments of the time which weighed heavily on the history of the Chinese people. She wishes, instead, to highlight the heroic fidelity of these worthy children of China, who did not let themselves be intimidated by the threats of a ferocious persecution.

I am also grateful for the presence of many pilgrims from the various countries of origin of the 33 missionaries who died as martyrs in China, together with those Chinese faithful to whom they had proclaimed the Gospel. Some people, through a partial and non-objective reading of history, see only limitations and errors in their missionary activity. If there were any - is man ever free of faults? - we ask forgiveness. But today we contemplate them in

glory and give thanks to God, who makes use of poor instruments for his great works of salvation. By the gift of their lives they proclaimed the saving Word and undertook important projects for human advancement. Be proud of them, you pilgrims who are their fellow citizens and brothers and sisters in faith! By their witness they show us that man is the true way for the Church: a way interwoven with profound and respectful intercultural dialogue, as Fr Matteo Ricci wisely and skilfully taught, a way consisting in the daily offering of one's life.

3. I affectionately greet the many pilgrims who have come to take part in the canonization of *St María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus Sancho de Guerra*, those from the Basque country, where the new saint was born and died, as well as those from other parts of Spain and various countries of Europe, America and the Philippines where the Servants of Jesus of Charity live and work, spreading the charism and teaching of this illustrious daughter of the Church. I offer you all my most cordial welcome.

You have a great love and devotion for St María Josefa. Her spiritual traits, in fact, reveal her generosity and self-giving in accepting the Lord's words: "I was sick and you visited me" (Mt 25: 36). Demanding with herself, she spared no effort or toil to serve the sick, founding the Servants of Jesus of Charity for them. She entrusted them with the mission of showing the merciful face of God to the suffering by helping to alleviate their pain with generous care for them at home and in hospitals. Her eloquent witness should help everyone to discover the beauty of a life consecrated totally to the Lord and the importance of service dedicated to wiping the tears of those who are suffering under the burden of illness.

4. It is a special joy for me to greet *Cardinal Bevilacqua* and the many pilgrims who have come to Rome for the canonization of *Mother Katharine Drexel*, especially her spiritual daughters, the *Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament*. St Katharine Drexel took to heart the words of Jesus to the young man in the Gospel: "If you seek perfection, go and sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven" (Mt 19: 21).

Devoting her family fortune to missionary and educational work among the poorest members of society, Mother Drexel made a trip to Rome, during which she asked Pope Leo XIII to send missionaries to help with the various projects she was funding. The Pontiff responded by inviting her to become a missionary herself. That was certainly a turning-point in St Katharine's life, and with great courage she placed her confidence in the Lord and gave her life and wealth totally to his service. Her apostolate bore fruit in the establishment of numerous schools for Native Americans and blacks, and served to raise awareness of the continuing need, even in our own day, to fight racism in all its manifestations. May the example of St Katharine Drexel be a beacon of light and hope inspiring all of us to make an ever greater gift of our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of those most in need.

5. I am pleased to greet as well the Sudanese Bishops and faithful who have journeyed to Rome for the canonization of *Sr Josephine Bakhita*. In a special way, I also greet the Daughters of Charity, the great Canossian family to which St Josephine Bakhita belonged. This holy daughter of Africa showed herself truly to be a child of God: the love and forgiveness of God were tangible realities that transformed her life in an extraordinary way. She even came to feel gratitude to the slave-traders who captured her and to those who

mistreated her: for, as she herself would later say, if these things had not happened, she would not have become a Christian or a professed sister in the Canossian community.

Through the intercession of St Bakhita let us pray that all men and women will come to know the saving presence of the Lord Jesus and thus be freed from slavery to sin and death. And in particular, let us be mindful of her homeland, Sudan, where war and violence continue to sow destruction and despair: may the Lord's healing hand touch the hearts of those responsible for this suffering and open the way to reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.

6. Dear friends, before saying goodbye, I would like to tell you of a burden that at the moment weighs heavily on my heart. For several days the Holy City of Jerusalem has been the scene of violent clashes, in which many have been killed or injured, including several children. Spiritually close to the families of those who have lost their lives, I make a heartfelt appeal to everyone responsible: may weapons be silenced, provocations be avoided and the way of dialogue be resumed. The Holy Land must be the land of peace and brotherhood. That is what God wants!

I ask the new saints to intercede, so that the hearts of all will turn to thoughts of mutual understanding and peace. With this wish I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to your loved ones.

**HOMILY — PRAYER VIGIL in PREPARATION  
for the CANONIZATION of FRANCIS REGIS CLET  
Rome, Italy, Church of San Gioacchino, September 30, 2000**

Last year I visited Wuhan, the city where Francis Regis Clet was killed. I walked down to the river to a place where I was reasonably sure that his execution had taken place. I moved about very cautiously because I was concerned about surveillance. It is still hard for us, who have so much liberty, to believe that millions of Catholics continue to live underground and suffer for their faith in continental China. I was deeply moved as I thought of Francis Regis Clet, a 72-year old man, walking calmly to his death. There, at the side of the river, he was tied to a cross, strangled three times, and died.

Clet was an extraordinary man. Let me try to tell you why.

1. First, he was a whole person, genuinely integrated. His friends described him as filled with tenderness and compassion. He lived a long, full life. Can you imagine: he was right there at the beginning of the French Revolution. An angry mob invaded the Motherhouse where he was living and destroyed everything. He was the Director of Novices in Paris at the time, a talented, intelligent, friendly man. Sensing that the Congregation was about to be suppressed in France, he offered to go to China and within a few weeks was on his way, knowing that he would never return to see those whom he loved.

His letters from China are wonderful. They show good humor, his love for his family, his deep concern for the poverty and the faith of the Chinese people he served. They also show a million other little preoccupations that all of us can understand. He hated being superior. He needed oil for anointing the sick, candles and wine for Mass. He asked for a watch that would keep good time. At times he had no money. He complains that his letters and those of others got lost. He laments about the ongoing violent revolution in France.

His confreres and the Chinese people liked Francis Regis Clet very much. It is evident too that the mandarin who presided at his final trial admired him greatly. In fact, he recommended that Clet would not be executed. But the emperor decided otherwise.

2. He trusted deeply in God's providence. As he arrived in China he wrote: "I believe that I am following the will of providence." All through his years there he tells his friends, "We must adore providence in good times and in bad." Even in prison, he sees God's hand in everything. And, writing to his confreres, he reminds them of how important trust in God's providence was for St. Vincent. We must follow it in everything, he states. It seems to me that this was the secret of his holiness: Clet found meaning in life because he was

able to find God in all life's events. Trust in providence is precisely that. It is the virtue of meaning. It finds meaning in abundance and poverty, light and darkness, love and hate, grace and sin, plan and disruption, peace and violence, health and sickness, life and death.

3. Clet shows an astounding peacefulness about dying. Months before the end, he realized that a great hurricane was engulfing him and that it would soon lead him to death. After his capture he passed through 27 different prisons. He was beaten and made to kneel for hours on chains. He was dirty, hungry, dressed in rags, and covered with fleas when he arrived in Wuhan. But here too, he said, providence intervened. He was so poor and dirty that the jailors in one place refused to receive him and he was sent to another where he found priest friends and a group of Christians. He told everyone that his final months in jail were relatively pleasant — much better, he states, than in French jails — and there he peacefully awaited death. He wrote to friends during this period: “For me, to live means Christ and to die is a gain.” In the final letter he wrote, addressed to his superior, he concludes simply: “This is probably the last sign of life that you will see from me.” Then he walked to his execution.

My brothers and sisters, the saints make holiness real for us. They make it concrete. In them holiness comes alive. Their lives are not books of abstract theology, nor manuals of dry spirituality. They are the real thing. I encourage you today to rejoice in, and of course learn from, this wonderful man. He was a whole person, filled with tenderness and compassion. He trusted deeply in God's providence in his life and, with God leading the way, he walked peacefully to his death. Is there much more that we need to learn about living than that? If Francis Regis Clet can teach us these lessons, then his martyrdom was surely not in vain.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

**“To the extremes of Love”**  
**FRANCIS REGIS CLET (1748-1820)**  
**Priest of the Congregation of the Mission, Martyr in China**

*By Jean-Yves Ducourneau, C.M.*  
*Province of Toulouse*

## **Discovering love**

### *1) His childhood*

Grenoble, called “the rebellious,”<sup>1</sup> numbered about 30,000 inhabitants in 1748. The Clet family lived at 14, rue Porte Traine,<sup>2</sup> near the workshop of a cloth merchant who employed the father. Césaire Clet had married Claudine Bourquy, his employer’s daughter. They had fifteen children,<sup>3</sup> of whom Francis Regis was the tenth, born 19 August 1748.

In his time, the people of the region still recalled the apostolic zeal of St. Francis Regis in the struggle against Protestantism. He died at his post and, by a charming coincidence, was canonized at the same time as Vincent de Paul, in 1737. The Clet family, all convinced Catholics, honored this missionary by bestowing his name on their son. As we know, he remained faithful to his patron’s name and zeal until his martyrdom. Young Francis Regis was baptized soon after his birth, at the church of St. Louis in Grenoble.

The boy’s childhood developed peacefully in Grenoble. He studied at the Royal College (run by diocesan clergy). He was then educated by the Oratorians (certainly at the minor seminary of St. Martin of Miséré, near Grenoble.) During these years, he was a brilliant student, all of whose good qualities would also be recognized in later years.

### *2) The yearnings of his heart*

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<sup>1</sup> Grenoble, in the Dauphiné, was one of the first French cities to light the fires of the French Revolution, beginning in July 1788, when it called for the convocation of the Estates General. In addition, Grenoble would be the first large city to open its gates to Napoleon I after his return from the island of Elba for his Hundred Days. For this, it would be severely punished during the restoration of the Bourbon monarchs.

<sup>2</sup> Today, Grande Rue.

<sup>3</sup> See the appendix for the list of the brothers and sisters of Francis Regis

God knocked at the heart of the young man. His family was already accustomed to such calls, since one of the boys (Francis) was a Carthusian, and one of the daughters (Anne Constance) was a Carmelite. Francis Regis experienced a call to the priestly vocation. In the dioceses of France, it was customary to come to listen to missionaries and to erect “Calvaries,” crosses set up as a memorial of the mission and as Stations of the Cross. And so, with his family, Francis Regis listened to the long sermons of these men inflamed with the Gospel who were speaking long and loud about God’s goodness and mercy, as well as about the distant missions that were attracting young men. The Vincentians had already made inroads into the Grenoble region and were not unknown. Francis Regis was attracted by this congregation founded by St. Vincent de Paul. Besides, he had already had some experience of diocesan and Oratorian clergy. He might have entered the Augustinians, as his cousin did. Instead, he chose to knock at the door of the Congregation of the Mission.

On 6 March 1769, Francis Regis entered the novitiate of the Congregation at Lyons. The Vincentian house there, founded in 1669, was in Fourvière, a district shared by several other communities. On 18 March 1771, in this same house, he was admitted to profess simple vows in the presence of the local superior, Fr. Audiffred. The following year, he received minor orders (4 April), subdiaconate (13 June), and finally the diaconate (19 December). The 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1773 was a great day for Francis Regis. He received from the hands of Bishop Bron, Auxiliary and Vicar General of the Archbishop of Lyons, his priestly ordination in the chapel of the seminary of St. Charles. Some days later, he joyfully celebrated one of his first masses in the Marian shrine of Our Lady of Valfleury, near the city of Saint Etienne.<sup>4</sup>

On his return to Lyons, he learned that he had been appointed professor of Moral Theology at the major seminary of Annecy.<sup>5</sup> This man, respectfully known in the diocese as a “walking library,” was henceforth to dedicate himself fully to this mission of priestly formation, despite his youth.

### *3) A well-deserved reputation*

In the Diocese of Annecy, the young professor performed marvels. Bishop Biord appreciated him greatly. For this reason, he was chosen as the new superior of the seminary. With competence and self-denial, he settled into this

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<sup>4</sup> The Vincentians were present here beginning in 1687, and it is, in fact their oldest continuing house in France. A royal ordinance of 1711 confirmed their presence in this shrine, which they conduct even today.

<sup>5</sup> The Vincentians were called to this “diocese of saints,” as Saint Vincent called it, beginning in 1638. After giving several missions, they established a place here for the retreats for ordinands. Afterwards, in 1642, this would become the major seminary. This seminary was the first established outside of Paris. In the time of Francis Regis, the theology studies lasted three years. The seminary no longer exists, but the building now houses the city library.

heavy responsibility. This was mixed with sorrows, since his father died on 15 July 1783 and four years later, he lost his mother. Between these two deaths, Bishop Biord returned to the Father, on 14 March 1785 and the diocesan clergy invited Francis Regis to pronounce the funeral discourse. The new ordinary, Bishop Paget, would show this Vincentian priest the same confidence that his predecessor had.

A great loss struck the Congregation of the Mission, too. Its Superior General, Fr. Jacquier,<sup>6</sup> died in 1787 and a general assembly was convoked in Paris for the month of May to elect a successor. Each province of the Congregation had to elect delegates during a provincial assembly that brought together the superiors of each house. The house of Annecy was part of the Province of Lyons. Although not a delegate to the Provincial Assembly, Francis Regis was chosen to represent the province in Paris. At age 40, he was its youngest member. Fr. Cayla de la Garde was elected Superior General in June 1788.

As many of his confreres did, the new Superior General recognized the value of the superior of the Annecy seminary. Consequently, he named Francis Regis director of the internal seminary (novitiate) of the Congregation. He had already been fifteen years in the diocese whose bishop had been St. Francis de Sales, and now he found himself in the very heart of the Congregation of the Mission, which owed much to the spirituality of this saint from Savoy.

A short while after his appointment, the climate in Paris grew worse. The harvests were bad and prices were rising. Great poverty appeared and people began to cry out. The revolt even reached the provinces. In Paris, the events of 1789 shook the established powers. Everything that they touched, near and far, particularly the Church, would suffer during this difficult period that history calls the French Revolution. And so, on 13 July 1789, the gates of the Motherhouse, St. Lazare, were breached, and the house fell victim to bands of looters. For 15 long hours they destroyed everything in their terrible path, including the venerable room of St. Vincent. The priests and brothers had to flee, some half naked, to avoid the pillage. Practically nothing was left after the destruction — not books (some 50,000 volumes), not furniture, not even the garden and the sheep. The next day and in the days to follow, the confreres returned to put things in order, and Francis Regis unhesitatingly began again the formation of the young novices. The Superior General, too, returned to those terrible walls. As a deputy of the clergy of Paris in the National Assembly, he was in no doubt about the future of the Church in France. On the other hand, he was happy to read news about his confreres that came from far-off China.<sup>7</sup> He wanted to send some other missionaries there, and Francis Regis presented himself as a volunteer.

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<sup>6</sup> During his generalate, a decree from the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith (1783) substituted the Vincentians for the French Jesuits in the China missions. In 1784, three Vincentians were sent there on mission.

<sup>7</sup> After this first departure, three other Vincentians left in 1788, and in 1791 there was a third departure.

## Treading the paths of love

### *1) The call from afar*

In February of 1791, three missionaries were supposed to leave for China. They were Frs. Lamiot and Pesné<sup>8</sup>, accompanied by another priest, but he was momentarily kept behind in the country. No one thought about Fr. Clet. But the time was approaching, and they had to do something since the ship could not wait beyond 15 March. Francis Regis insisted on replacing the absent priest and the Superior General agreed. Since it was then impossible to bid farewell to his family, he wrote a long letter to his eldest sister, Marie-Thérèse: *“At last my prayers have been answered.... Providence has destined me to work for the salvation of the infidels.... You will realize that I appreciate so greatly the merit of this favor from God that I can only agree with it perfectly. In a word, I am leaving shortly for China with two of my confreres, who are also as delighted as I am with our fortunate destination.”*<sup>9</sup> His family kept hoping that he would change his mind, but just before leaving for the town of Lorient where he had to board ship, Francis Regis answered unflinchingly: *“I had already made my choice before writing you, and I was prepared for the assaults that your tenderness and sympathy would bring against me.... I am not sorry in the least for having acted in this way ... but I believe that in this way I am following the path that Providence has laid out before me.”*

At the beginning of April 1791, the ship weighed anchor. On 2 July it rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Three months later it arrived at Macao, on 15 October. To enter China he had to pass by this rocky peninsula, a Portuguese possession.<sup>10</sup> For three months, the three Vincentians set to the task of studying Chinese and preparing for their mission. Father Lamiot was appointed to join the team in Beijing, and Father Pesné was to join Father Aubin (who had arrived the year before) in the province of Huguang.<sup>11</sup> Francis Regis was appointed to the province of Kiangsi (Jiangxi), east of Huguang. Each of them then, with the help of a Christian guide, had to reach his mission as discreetly as possible, since an imperial edict repeated the prohibition for foreigners to penetrate Chinese territory without permission, and to preach their religion there.

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<sup>8</sup> Louis Lamiot and Augustine Pesné would be ordained priests when they arrived in Macao in 1791. Lamiot would, in 1812, become superior of the French Vincentians and of the French mission. He died in Macao in 1831. Pesné would die shortly, in July 1795, in the province of Hubei, assisted by Francis Regis.

<sup>9</sup> We have 72 letters from Father Clet, edited for the first time in Beijing in 1944 by Brother Van Den Brandt.

<sup>10</sup> The territory of Macao depended on the Portuguese viceroy of Goa, India.

<sup>11</sup> Its capital was Wu-chang-fu, now Wuhan. This province is currently divided into two parts: Hubei and Hunan. It is in the southeast of the country.

## 2) *Putting down roots*

Kiangsi is one of the richest provinces in China. Its soil is very fertile. The famous Chinese porcelain is made in this province. Because of all this, its population is large, but its Christian inhabitants were poor and isolated. This is where Francis Regis worked. He dressed like a Chinese, but that did not help him to learn the language.<sup>12</sup> During the trip from Macao to Kiangsi, his guide presented him as a person in mourning, since local custom approved silence during mourning. After a long trip of some 800 kilometers, the two men arrived at Nanchang, the provincial capital. The home of the missionaries was another hundred kilometers farther, at Gucheng. The local Christians built the priest's house about 1700. Francis Regis described it as "vast but dilapidated." Also, he began to become aware of his new mission: "*A new career is opening up for me. It is a matter of renewing the spirit of religion among the former Christians who have been left to themselves for several years, and of converting the infidels. So, this is my vocation, I hope, until my death.*"<sup>13</sup>

The Kiangsi mission would last only a year, however, just time for him to put down roots. He was alone in the entire region. He was promised a confrere whom he already knew, Fr. Hurel, and he hastened to write him: "*it will be pleasant for me to embrace you, and to talk with you, after having thought that I would be separated from you for ever, and that I would never see you except in eternity.*" Unfortunately, this did not happen, and he remained alone. Nevertheless, he gave himself body and soul to his mission. He taught catechism, baptized more than one hundred adults, despite his continuing difficulty speaking Chinese. He thought: "*nonetheless, it is better that asses cultivate the ground than to leave it without any cultivation.*"<sup>14</sup> He also realized that baptism administered too quickly in a pagan country is not without risk, and so he wrote: "*I would have been able to baptize a larger number. They were pressing me to grant them this grace, but they did not seem to me to be well instructed, and we noted that catechumens baptized quickly also apostatized quickly.*"<sup>15</sup> At the end of a year of solitude, Fr. Raux, superior of the Vincentians in China, summoned him to leave Kiangsi for the neighboring province of Huguang where he found his two confreres, Fr. Pesné, whom he knew well, but who was sadly quite ill with a fatal disease, and Fr. Aubin, who was said to be quite worn out at the time.

## 3) *An exacting mission*

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<sup>12</sup> He wrote to his Carthusian brother that this language is "unlearnable, and the characters that make it up are not for expressing sounds by ideas.... I was too old when I came to China to have a good grasp of it."

<sup>13</sup> Letter 5, to his sister Marie Thérèse on his arrival at the house.

<sup>14</sup> Letter 12, 1802, to his brother.

<sup>15</sup> Letter 12.

The province of Huguang was so large that it was split in two in 1818: Hubei in the north, and Hunan in the south. Because of its fertile lands people described it as the breadbasket of the Empire.

Francis Regis wrote to his brother: *“I came to the northern part of Huguang, a mountainous region where I have near me more than 2000 Christians. Conversions of pagans here are rare, a testimony to the scandal given by some bad Christians. They refuse to be instructed in a religion which is so badly practiced.”*<sup>16</sup>

Bad luck then fell upon the missionaries’ community. While traveling to meet the Bishop of Shaanxi, Fr. Aubin was arrested and imprisoned. He died there from poisoning. Fr. Pesné died at age 29 of extreme exhaustion. This was in 1795 and once again, Francis Regis found himself alone in this huge mission territory, where he found *“more than 2000 Christians, living in more than 20 districts.... Further, there is a large number of Christians living at 20, 40 or 50 leagues whom I should visit.... Alone as I am ... I still have to travel across some 200 leagues where there are only 10,000 Christians.”*<sup>17</sup> Besides, the political situation did not help matters. There was talk in the province about rebellion. For three years, Francis Regis did not receive even one confrere to help him in his mission, aside from Fr. Joseph Ly, sent to Kiangsi. Then, in 1799 young Fr. John Chang arrived. Beginning in 1807, he would also have to go to Kiangsi. In 1800, Fr. Juventin Chang arrived, but he died three years later. Paul Song<sup>18</sup> succeeded him in 1804. He would work with Francis Regis until his martyrdom. In 1808, it was the turn of Fr. Ignatius Ho<sup>19</sup> to come and join Fr. Clet, who appreciated him highly. That same year, Fr. Francis Chen<sup>20</sup> arrived, the one who would be the prison companion of Francis Regis. One year after, Fr. Anthony Cheng came to reinforce the team, but he would be soon sent to help in the Kiangsi mission. A final Chinese confrere, Fr. Ai,<sup>21</sup> joined the mission in 1817. Francis Regis would also receive help from Brother Paul Wang<sup>22</sup> beginning in

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<sup>16</sup> Letter 12.

<sup>17</sup> Letter 12.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Song was born in Hunan in 1774. He entered the Congregation in Beijing in 1801. After his ordination in 1803, he was sent one year later on mission with Fr. Clet. He helped him, but also sometimes tried his patience. After Francis Regis’s death, he continued his ministry in the same place until 1839, when he moved to Hunan. He was imprisoned in 1852, and died in 1854.

<sup>19</sup> Ignatius Ho was 27 years old when he joined Francis Regis’s mission. In 1819, when Fr. Clet was arrested, he was able to escape, but had to change his name to Tong. Nevertheless, he was arrested and exiled to Tartary (Chinese Turkestan), near the Russian frontier. His catechist accompanied him. He died in exile in 1846.

<sup>20</sup> Born in 1780 and ordained in 1808, he gave the final absolution to Fr. Clet. He was also exiled to Tartary, where he died after a massacre at the hands of Moslem rebels in 1825.

<sup>21</sup> Fr. Stanislaus Ai was born in Hubei. When Francis Regis died, he succeeded him as administrator of the mission. He died in 1849.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Wang, born in 1751, made his vows in 1790 in the C.M. He was a courier between Beijing and Macao before being sent to Hubei. He died in 1827.

1809. Francis Regis was also waiting for a French confrere, Fr. Dumazel.<sup>23</sup> After several adventures that would make this missionary a real hero, he finally arrived at the doors of Fr. Clet's mission, ten years after leaving France.

Life was hard for Francis Regis. He fell ill with pleurisy, and it made him fear the worse. He even thought about receiving the last sacraments. However, he improved and wrote to the Vincentian superior in China:<sup>24</sup> *"from this illness I have only some weakness and swelling of my legs.... I can now only go some 20 to 30 lis."*<sup>25</sup> As for Fr. Dumazel, a very scrupulous man and chronically unable to calm himself down in his mission rounds, he always concerned his superior. Francis Regis dared to write: *"Fr. Dumazel, this one man alone, gives me more trouble in directing him than the entire province of Hubei together."*<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, this young confrere contracted typhoid fever, and died from it in December 1818 at age 49.

Francis Regis realized better than anyone that the China mission was not without danger. In 1799, when the emperor died, there was a half-religious, half-political custom to prostrate oneself before the body of the departed and make libations. The missionaries were strictly ordered not to attend these ceremonies lasting several days. At the time, they feared persecution for this refusal, but the wisdom of the authorities prevailed and they were left in peace. Nonetheless, with the arrival of the new emperor, Jiajing, a civil war broke out in Francis Regis's province. The rebels were assembled according to their sects, and they killed all those who did not wish to join them on their way. As it happened, they did not come to the house of the Congregation of the Mission.

There were troubles not only in China. Fr. Clet received letters from France describing the explosive situation there. His Carthusian brother,<sup>27</sup> in exile in Rome, did not know what had become of their Carmelite sister.<sup>28</sup> The news about Rome was no better. The pope had been led away under escort from his palace to exile, while enemies of the Church proclaimed the Roman republic.<sup>29</sup> The missionary wrote from China: *"In view of the disastrous state of Europe, I can only bless Providence for having removed me from so much evil."* And, comparing the state of Europe with that of the regions where he was living, he

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<sup>23</sup> He left England in 1800, but was blocked for five years in Canton while trying to get the passport he needed for going to Beijing. He arrived near Beijing in 1806, but was ordered to return to Canton to leave from there to help Fr. Clet. Because of an internal rebellion, he returned to Macao to embark for Cochinchina (part of southern Vietnam). He fell ill while staying with the priests of the Paris Foreign Missions and they cared for him for an entire year. He then was able to start out again, turning east to reach Kiangsi, where Francis Regis was waiting.

<sup>24</sup> Fr. Ghislain who replaced Fr. Raux at his death in 1801.

<sup>25</sup> Letter 47. The *li* equals about 600 meters; and 20 to 30 *lis* equal 12 to 18 km.

<sup>26</sup> Letter 62.

<sup>27</sup> He would return to France and die at Grenoble in the Carthusian habit, 8 March 1812 at age 66.

<sup>28</sup> He would later learn that she had had to leave her convent and return to secular life.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Pius VII would return to Rome in 1800 and resume possession of the Vatican.

wrote to his brother: *“It is better to be in China than in France. Our infidels are far from practicing the atrocities that your impious people do. Those people justify the proverb: There is nothing worse than good when it is corrupted.”* He also said that no matter the situation of one country, *“all countries are good, provided that one can serve God ... our home is Heaven, which we can reach from every country in the world.”*<sup>30</sup>

His life in the mission was marked by poverty. Francis Regis did not complain but was sorry that he could not help his confreres. He related his difficulties in his correspondence with the superior in Beijing: *“Our present famine has impoverished us tremendously. You did not ask me for money, and that was right, since I have nothing to send you. I have only about 18 taëls<sup>31</sup>.... Looking ahead two weeks, I will have no money at all in the house.”* Likewise, he wrote: *“because of the drought this year, there is no rice. We have to buy nearly everything, and it is expensive. See if you are rich enough to help us in our poverty.”*<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, Francis Regis shared what he had with the less fortunate, recalling in this way what he had read in the New Testament: *“it is better to give than to receive.”*

The mission house was not palatial, and the missionaries joked in calling it their “straw castle,” a clear testimony to their poverty. The floor was beaten earth, and the roof was straw. The mission church was built in the same way. This house was used by all the missionaries who came to rest there and to regain their strength after long months of a painful and exhausting apostolate. They profited from this time to recover their spiritual and moral strength. The superior, Francis Regis, tried to recommend certain Gospel principles to his team: *“Let us put on tenderness and mercy, goodness, humility and patience, since we have to be stronger to support the weakness of the sick and not be satisfied with ourselves.”*<sup>33</sup> Francis Regis asked them to be united in their missionary work, so that *“our sheep might form only one flock, since there is only one shepherd, Our Lord Jesus Christ;”* and later on he wrote: *“we should urge our Christians to learn ... the catechism concerning the sacraments, but we cannot oblige them or force them to learn it. We should demand only that they know what is strictly required to receive the sacraments.”*<sup>34</sup> His confreres listened to Francis Regis, especially Fr. Song, who would develop a deep veneration for him.<sup>35</sup> Yet some found the work too hard, and vicious rumors began to reach Beijing. Francis Regis reacted: *“it seems to me that I never had the intention of ruining the health of my confreres through a work beyond their strength.”* On the contrary, he never stopped telling them to *“take care of their health ... in China especially*

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<sup>30</sup> Letter 16, 1802.

<sup>31</sup> The taël was worth 7 to 8 gold francs, or 38 grams of standard silver.

<sup>32</sup> Letter 50, 1810, to Fr. Ghislain in Beijing.

<sup>33</sup> Letter 53, 1811, circular letter to the missionaries.

<sup>34</sup> Letter 59, 1813, circular letter to the missionaries.

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to him, we have 37 letters from Francis Regis.

*where priests are rare, it is better to live than to die for the glory of God.”* Providence, however, would prepare another path for Fr. Clet.

## **The fulfillment of love**

### *1) The shadow of the Cross*

The majority of the missionaries had entered China illegally.<sup>36</sup> The Vincentians sent to the 200,000 Christians in the Empire were spread around in several provinces, helped by Chinese priests whom they had formed.<sup>37</sup> The situation was always problematic for those missionaries since they had to avoid being openly recognized and arrested, either by the authority of the mandarins or by the rebels. For this reason, beginning in 1799, Francis Regis began to worry about the demands made by the rebels who were devastating the missions, since they were burning the houses and slaughtering those unable to flee. Their troops advanced to the gates of Beijing but were finally rebuffed by the central government. The Christians were even accused of flying the flag of this rebellion. The mandarins acknowledged this calumny and punished the guilty.

In 1805, while looking for a thief, the police arrested a Chinese Christian carrying a letter sent to the missionaries from the province of Jiangnan. A plot was suspected, and the mandarins seized the opportunity to embitter the emperor against foreigners. The missionaries in the capital were put under observation while others were exiled. The Christians were obliged to deny their faith under threat and torture. For the moment, Francis Regis's province was spared.

In 1811, a Chinese missionary was arrested as he was carrying some documents containing the spiritual powers granted him by the bishop. They included a list of the various mission districts. The mandarins saw in this an attempt by the foreigners to substitute for the governors of the cities some civil servants whom they, the Christians, would choose. A persecution against the Christians broke out in Beijing, and all foreigners were ordered out of the country.<sup>38</sup> The Vincentians protested and continued their evangelization. The same year, the emperor received a report that on the feast of the Assumption some Christians were planning to revolt. An imperial edict then ordered all Christians to renounce their religion before the end of the year, under pain of persecution. Francis Regis, the missionaries and the Christians were thus obliged to go into hiding. The persecution reached the provinces. His “straw castle” was destroyed, and the school and church were torn down. The mission was a pile of ruins.

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<sup>36</sup> According to Fr. Richenet, procurator of the missions in Macao from 1801 to 1815, “the missionaries were permitted in ... only for the service of the emperor, and consequently only as artists, painters, clockmakers ... astronomers to draw up the lunar calendar ” (Letter to the French government, 1817).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the letter of Fr. Richenet mentioned above.

<sup>38</sup> With the exception of the members of the mathematics tribunal, who were three Portuguese missionaries.

An unwitting internal persecution broke out against the superior of the Kiangsi mission. Fr. Clet had received all the extraordinary [ecclesiastical] powers that could be granted to a priest, even the favor of administering Confirmation. Unfortunately, since the new vicar apostolic of the province had no confidence in Francis Regis and accused him of double-crossing him, all those powers were suddenly taken away. When the vicar later realized his error, he granted them again.

In 1818, another persecution loomed on the horizon. It began as a natural weather phenomenon that plunged Beijing and the imperial court into darkness and terrible rains. The emperor consulted his oracles, and they accused the Christians of these “threats from heaven.” The emperor’s advisers urged him to renew the persecution against the believers in this religion. Arrests of Chinese priests and missionaries were not long in coming, with some imprisoned and others exiled. Francis Regis reported the arrest of Fr. Chen, his Chinese confrere: “*Our ... cross is the capture of Fr. Chen. A new Judas sold him for 20,000 pieces ... He was then ... sent to Wuhan with 15 or 18 Christians arrested at the same time.*”<sup>39</sup> Francis Regis and his companions were once again forced to live as proscribed criminals. “*Fr. Ho and I have passed through I do not know how many holes and caves.*” For four months, he wandered from hiding place to hiding place before deciding to move from one province to another, where he thought he would have more security and would be able to help the mission. He was 71 years old.

## 2) *The long march*

Now a refugee in Hunan, he found hospitality with a Christian family for about six months. His final Calvary began there. An apostate whom Francis Regis had rebuked for his evil life found him and sought to have him arrested. A price of 1000 taëls was put on the missionary’s head. After a premonition awoke him, Fr. Clet left the house disguised as a merchant, but found himself facing a troop of soldiers who soon surrounded him. In the tense silence, he was arrested. We have a report of a conversation between the missionary and the traitor who had brought the soldiers: “*Friend, why have you come here? Oh, I pity you!*” The apostate answered: “*Why do you complain to me and pardon me; I do not need that.*” Then speaking to the soldiers, the apostate said: “*That is he. Take him away!*” Francis Regis was then loaded with chains on his wrists, neck and ankles. The inhabitants of the house were arrested in their turn, and the houses of the neighboring Christians were brutally pillaged. The arrest took place in the small village of Jinjiagang some four kilometers from the city of Nanyang. This sad parade moved on amid the howls of the bystanders aroused for the occasion.

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<sup>39</sup> Letter 63, to Lamiot, successor of Fr. Ghislain.

While the missionary was forced to kneel on iron chains, the mandarin had him beaten on his face with 30 blows of a leather strap, and this caused blood to flow. *“My brother, you are judging me now, but in a short time, my Lord will be judging you.”* The mandarin responded quickly by giving him another 30 blows to his face.

Ten days later the prisoner was led in chains to the provincial capital, Kaifeng, some 200 kilometers away. He was tortured there as well for not having answered the questions that the mandarin asked him. For an entire month he was imprisoned in the city jail, spending the better part of his time in prayer and meditation, something that at times drew the admiration of his guards. He found the means to write: *“When night falls ... we have to lie down and put one of our legs into the fetters. These fetters are formed of two boards ... that the jailer joins and locks.... Besides, an iron chain binds us to our cot and keeps us from raising our head. It is very difficult to turn on our side or on our back.”*

When the mandarins learned that Fr. Clet’s mission had its headquarters in the province of Huguang, they sent him to Wuhan, the capital of that province. Five hundred kilometers separated the two cities. This very difficult trip lasted 20 days. The prisoners were secured in a wooden cage and held by heavy chains. In the evening, the group would halt at a prison. Francis Regis wrote: *“My stays in the prisons of Hunan and my long trip have gravely damaged my health .... I was already in a poor state, very thin, with a long beard crawling with fleas.”* When he arrived at his destination, he met Fr. Chen in the same prison, along with ten other Christians. They prayed together. They were able to walk somewhat at liberty during the day. They went to confession and even received communion from a missionary who continued his evangelization in secret. He described his captivity: *“The mandarins here are very mild.... Twelve taëls were enough to have them remove from our neck, hands and feet the handcuffs and fetters.... Each one can have his rice cooked.... As to us, we live in common. The Christians often bring us enough meat, fish and fruit.... In this way, you can tell that we do not have much to complain about. However ... once night falls, we have to lie down and put our legs into the fetters until the next day.”*<sup>40</sup> He also wrote: *“Admire divine Providence in this, since, against the basic intention of the mandarin, it has placed two priests in the same prison together with ten good Christians. I have heard their confessions many times, and they joined us in receiving Holy Communion from the hands of one of our confreres. This is probably unheard of in Chinese prisons.”*<sup>41</sup>

Some bad news reached the ears of Francis Regis: Fr. Lamiot had been arrested, since three letters written by the superior in Beijing were found in Fr.

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<sup>40</sup> Letter 65, to Fr. Richenet.

<sup>41</sup> Letter 67, 14 January 1820, to Fr. Marchini, procurator of Propaganda Fide at Macao.

Clet's mission house. Francis Regis thought he had caused this unfortunate arrest, but Fr. Lamiot believed it was due to the traitor who had had Francis Regis and Fr. Chen arrested. Fr. Lamiot was then brought to lodgings in Wuhan, but it was impossible for him to see Fr. Clet before his trial and confrontation demanded by the mandarin. Nonetheless, Francis Regis wrote to Lamiot to grant him pardon for having compromised him. He also said that he would assume all blame in his place since the Beijing mission had, above all, to be saved.<sup>42</sup> The day after the arrival of the superior of the Beijing Vincentians, the tribunal was assembled. Francis Regis, Frs. Chen and Lamiot were kneeling. Fr. Lamiot was questioned about his knowledge of Fr. Clet. He wrote later: "*I said that I knew him, although his appearance had changed so thoroughly that I hardly recognized any of his traits.... I was struck by his wise responses. When they had me kneel at his side, he started to weep.... When they wanted to beat Fr. Chen, he cried: Why beat him? I alone am guilty. The mandarin replied: You old nothing! You have corrupted too many of our people, and the emperor demands your life!*" He then answered: "*Willingly.*" "*I admired his extreme sensitivity for Fr. Chen and myself, his fearlessness concerning martyrdom and his strength of character. This made a strong impression on me that will never be erased from my soul.*"<sup>43</sup>

### 3) *Death for the sake of Love*

On 1 January 1820 all Christians had to appear before the tribunal. After several questions, Fr. Lamiot was acquitted but banished from China. He left for Macao. Francis Chen was condemned to exile in the west of China, in Tartary where he died. Francis Regis, for whom the governor had written a favorable report, waited peacefully but without many illusions: "*I am not counting on clemency from the emperor, and I am preparing to die. Thanks be to God, I am waiting with patience and tranquility.*"<sup>44</sup> Although his days seemed numbered, Francis Regis's faith was unshakable. He celebrated the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, the anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, and could receive communion in prison. For Fr. Clet, this was his farewell meal, as Fr. Lamiot reported so well. On 17 February, the imperial decision arrived in

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<sup>42</sup> Following Fr. Lamiot's summary of the letter.

<sup>43</sup> Lamiot to Verbert, Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission.

<sup>44</sup> Letter 72, to the Portuguese Vincentians in Beijing, in some conflict with their French confreres concerning their installation in the North Church in Beijing (church of Petang) after the exile of Fr. Lamiot. In the name of charity and because Fr. Lamiot had asked, Fr. Clet tried to resolve the problem: "*I thought it would be good to use my last breath of life to restore ... peace among you. Since it is charity alone, that is, love of God and love of neighbor, that moves me to write you, please read this letter with the same charity. Since I am about to appear before the fearsome judge, how could I obey any other spirit than the spirit of charity?*" The conflict lasted, however, and the Chinese government seized the house and razed the church. It was then recalled that Fr. Clet had written: "*If you do not hear my request, our houses ... will fall down on top of one other, and both will be destroyed to the great detriment of our holy religion*" (Letter 73, to the Portuguese).

Wuhan: Liu<sup>45</sup> Francis, secretly entered into China, has deceived many by preaching his doctrine. There is reason enough to strangle him. As was the custom, this had to be done immediately.<sup>46</sup>

Then, soldiers were swiftly dispatched to the prison to announce to the condemned man the imperial sentence. Fr. Chen, perceiving the difficulty the officer had in announcing the news, told him that Christians and especially priests do not fear death. Francis Regis then tearfully asked absolution of Fr. Chen. He spoke a few words to the Christians gathered around him: “*Always be fervent servants of God and never give up the faith.*” Then he blessed them for the last time. Cold had invaded the deserted streets of the city, and night enveloped the prison. During the night of 17 and 18 February 1820 the sad cortege crossed through the city walls to accomplish its sad duty.

The group stopped near a post some two meters high solidly stuck into the ground. It looked a little like a cross, with its crossbar nailed to the top. Francis Regis was allowed to pray one last time. “*Tie me,*” he then said to the soldiers, who then tied his hands and his trunk behind the crosspiece. His feet were tied together to the upright post. Around his neck they passed a cord knotted over a length of bamboo. This was twisted three different times<sup>47</sup> until the martyr gave up his last breath. Francis Regis had spent 28 years in China. He was martyred at age 72. His body was first buried in the cemetery for the condemned before the Christians recovered it. They then interred it in the Christian cemetery of the Red Mountain, where other missionaries already rested. The inscription read: “*Here lie the bones of the venerable servant of God, Francis Clet, of the Congregation of the Mission, a Priest, full of merits, of the Church in Hebei. He accomplished great deeds in the Lord’s vineyard. Marked with old age, he merited the martyr’s crown in the year of the Lord 1820, the 14<sup>th</sup> of the Calends of March.*”

The remains of the martyr repose today in the chapel of the Motherhouse of the Congregation in Paris. Francis Regis Clet was beatified in 1900, and canonized a century later, in 2000.

## **Appendix 1: Brothers and Sisters of Francis Regis Clet**

Marie Thérèse, b. 11 February 1733, d. 1821

Anne Constance, b. 11 August 1734, (Carmelite)

Dorothee Euphr. , b. 4 January 1736, d. 1749

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<sup>45</sup> Chinese name of Francis Regis Clet.

<sup>46</sup> According to *La Congrégation de la Mission en Chine*, vol. II, p. 578.

<sup>47</sup> They needed two cords, since the first was worn out and snapped easily.

Françoise Julie, b. 28 February 1737, d. 1802  
 Jeanne Marie, b. 11 May 1738  
 Joseph (godfather), b. 19 January 1741, d. 1748  
 Jacques, b. 3 August 1742  
 François (Carthusian), b. 14 March 1744, d. 1812  
 Césaire, b. 18 January 1747  
 Francis Regis, b. 19 August 1748, d. 1820  
 Euphr. Dorothee, b. 13 April 1751  
 Hyacinthe Joseph, b. 22 October 1752  
 Jeanne Marie, b. 12 May 1754, d. 1777  
 Joseph Stanislas, b. 2 October 1755  
 Anne Marie, b. 29 May 1757, d. 1757.

## **Appendix 2: principal dates in the life of Francis Regis Clet**

19 August 1748: birth in Grenoble (baptism 23 August).  
 6 March 1769: entry in the Congregation of the Mission in Lyons.  
 18 March 1771: vows.  
 27 March 1773: priesthood ordination, then departure for the seminary at Annecy.  
 1788: General Assembly in Paris, appointment as novice director.  
 13 July 1789: sack of St. Lazare.  
 10 April 1791: departure for China from Lorient with Frs. Lamiot and Pesné.  
 1792: departure for Kiangsi.  
 1793: departure for Huguang.  
 1804: arrival of Fr. Song at the mission.  
 1810: arrival of Fr. Dumazel at the mission.  
 1812: Fr. Lamiot succeeds Fr. Ghislain as superior of the Vincentians in China.  
 1818: beginning of the great persecution against the Christians.  
 1819: death of Fr. Dumazel, arrest of Frs. Chen, Francis Regis (16 June), and Lamiot.  
 End 1819: meeting at the tribunal between Frs. Lamiot and Clet.  
 1 January 1820: general appearance, and acquittal of Fr. Lamiot.  
 16 February 1820: last letter to Fr. Lamiot.  
 17 February 1820: Announcement of the death sentence.  
 18 February 1820: Martyrdom of Francis Regis.  
 1843: introduction of the cause of beatification.  
 1859: transfer of his relics to the Vincentian Motherhouse in Paris.  
 27 May 1900: beatification in Rome  
 1 October 2000: canonization in Rome (with other Chinese martyrs).

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[Translator's note: Where possible, Chinese place names follow Romanization standards in use in China.]

(JOHN RYBOLT, C.M., translator)

## *Francis clet as seen in his letters*

*by Thomas Davitt CM*

When we wish to get to know John Gabriel Perboyre we are fortunate in being able to read 102 of his letters which have survived. They throw light on every stage of his life from his first letter written when he was fourteen years old to his last written shortly before his execution.

We are less fortunate in the case of Francis Clet. Seventy-five of his letters are still extant, but the earliest of these was written when he was forty-two years old <sup>(1)</sup>. We have no letters from his childhood, from his student days or from his time as a seminary professor in France.

He was born in Grenoble on 19 August 1748, the tenth of the fifteen children born to his parents <sup>(2)</sup>. He was christened François-Régis after St Jean-François Régis who was canonised only nine years previously and to whom there was great devotion in the district. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in Lyons in 1769 and was ordained priest in 1772. These dates indicate that he had done most of his seminary studies before entering the Congregation. After his ordination he was appointed to the major seminary in Annecy as professor of moral theology. In his last years there he was also superior. In 1788 he was elected a delegate of the Province of Lyons to go to the sixteenth General Assembly of the Congregation in Paris; he was the youngest delegate present. The newly-elected Superior General, Jean-Félix Cayla de la Garde, asked Francis to remain in Paris as director of the internal seminary. In 1789 the Revolution began. In 1791 the Superior General decided to send three priests to China. One of them was unable to be ready in time for the departure and Francis volunteered to go in his place and was accepted.

His earliest surviving letter was written to his sister Marie-Thérèse, the eldest of the family, on 10 March 1791. It is quite a long letter, beginning as follows:

*My very dear sister,*

*At last my wishes have been granted and I am at the peak of happiness. Providence wants me to go to work for the salvation of the heathens. The opportunity has just cropped up and I eagerly grabbed it; I've just had a chat with the Superior General about it, and he is quite willing to go along with my wishes. Various circumstances*

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<sup>(1)</sup> Van den Brandt, CM, Joseph (Ed.): *Lettres du Bienheureux François-Régis Clet*, Pékin, 1944.

<sup>(2)</sup> His parents were well-off business people who lived in No. 14, Grande Rue, Grenoble.

*involved in this opportunity indicate that it is God's will, and you know that I value this divine favour too much not to accept it completely. In a word, I'm off to China, with two confreres, in the immediate future.*

Further down he deals with practical matters:

*I've about ten days left to get to Lorient where I'm to board ship; it's doubtful if I'll be able to get an answer from you before I leave Paris, so waste no time about answering. As I'll be running a great many risks, and since I probably won't have the pleasure of seeing you, I think I should put my affairs in order in case my life should outlast yours; if you outlive me there's no problem as I've made my will. But it's important to fix things up for any eventuality. I'm not handing over to you complete control of all my property because, absolutely speaking, I could come back, and then, if you were dead, I'd have no claim (Letter 1).*

It is interesting that he had to pay for his journey to China out of his own pocket. He tells his sister that the bursar in St Lazare, Jean-François Daudet, is willing to lend him 1,000 francs on condition that she repay them from Francis' funds.

His sister received his letter in Grenoble, answered it, and he was able to send another to her on 20 March, the eve of his departure from Paris. The postal service in revolutionary France was obviously quite efficient. She had tried, naturally enough, to dissuade him from what he planned. In his reply he said:

*I could, of course, be making a mistake, but at least I'm in good faith. If God doesn't bless my attempt I'll cut my losses, admit I was wrong, and in future be more on my guard against the illusions of my imagination or vanity; the experience will teach me a bit of sense (Letter 2).*

He wrote to her again from Lorient on 2 April, the day he was due to set sail:

*I won't tell you again that I'm very pleased with my appointment. Not, of course, that nature does not put in its many claims on me, nor that my expatriation does not leave me unaffected, but I believe Providence has spoken, I believe I must obey its orders. "God wills it", that's my motto; you never had any other (Letter 3).*

Around the time of his departure the bursar in St Lazare, Jean-François Daudet, already referred to, wrote to an Irish confrere, Robert Hanna, who was in Macao waiting for the chance to get to Peking:

*Father Clet, who had been teaching theology with success for fourteen years, arrived here for the General Assembly; they got to know him well enough to appreciate his worth and made him director of the internal seminary, and I think that in spite of the General's affection for you he would not let him go if there was any future for the*

*Congregation here; he's got everything you could ask for, holiness, learning, health and charm. To sum him up briefly, he's very gifted* <sup>(3)</sup>.

He wrote to his sister from the Cape of Good Hope on 2 July:

*The sea had only the usual effect on me. While almost all the first-time sailors paid their tax to the sea by wearying vomiting, I myself felt merely a sort of interior lassitude* (Letter 4).

He arrived in the Portuguese colony of Macao on 15 October 1791 and exactly a year later he wrote to his sister from his final destination in the interior of China, in the province of Kiang-si. After reporting persistent constipation he continues:

*At the moment I'm living in a house which is rather large but totally dilapidated. They're going to start fixing it immediately, and as it's wooden it will not be unhealthy in the winter, which isn't very bad in these parts anyway.*

*A new life is beginning for me. I have to revive religious feeling in former Christians who have been left on their own for many years, and to convert heathens. That, I hope, is my work up till my death* (Letter 5).

Francis was forty-four at this time, and learning Chinese was a big problem. Nearly fifty years later John Gabriel Perboyre wrote that he had heard that Francis spoke Chinese only with great difficulty <sup>(4)</sup>. On 29 August 1798, six years after arriving at his mission station, he wrote to one of his older brothers François, who was a Carthusian in Rome. (Our man was François-Régis, his brother just François):

*The Chinese language is hopeless. The characters which make it up don't represent sounds but ideas; this means that there is a huge number of them. I was too old on coming to China to get a good working knowledge of them... I know barely enough for daily living, for hearing confessions and for giving some advice to Christians...* (Letter 12).

Earlier in the same long letter he had written:

*My being transplanted to a country and climate so different from ours hasn't affected my health in any way; I've been seriously ill twice, but God did not want to take me from this world so as to leave me more time to do penance. Our food is almost the same as in Europe, apart from wine which is too scarce to drink; the little we have is kept for mass. We eat wheaten bread unless we go for rice which is the staple food of the*

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<sup>(3)</sup> Quoted in Demimuid: *Vie du Vénérable François-Régis Clet*, Paris, 1893, p. 64. For Robert Hanna see my article in *Colloque* 25, Spring 1992, pp. 40-54.

<sup>(4)</sup> Van den Brandt CM, Joseph (Ed.): *Lettres du Bienheureux Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, Pékin 1940, p. 119.

*Chinese; we have fowl, pork and plants from which to make soup to give taste to our bread. Conversions of heathens are rare here; they see the scandal of some bad Christians and they refuse to be instructed in a religion so badly lived up to by those who profess it; they see only the bad and shut their eyes to the vast majority who live lives in keeping with the gospel... (Letter 12).*

In a letter of 6 November 1799, to the same brother, he made another comparison with France:

*We have some lax Christians but, thank God, we've neither philosophers nor female theologians... Our ears are never assaulted with blasphemies nor the word "liberty". Proportionately, there are more Christians in China than in France... My health is keeping up; since I got here I've been sick several times, but only once really seriously. I'm slim now instead of fat, so I can cross mountains more easily. I make all my trips on foot as I find it less tiring than on horseback. I am often offered the latter but always refuse. (Letter 15).*

He also mentions that letters from France are not reaching him.

The latest surviving letter to his Carthusian brother is undated, but appears to be from 1801-02. He had received a letter from his brother in which there was reference to other letters which never reached him:

*... your letter was extremely welcome as it let me know that in the midst of that universal upheaval none of the family had met a violent death, something I had been very much afraid of...*

*For more than fifteen years there has been no religious persecution of any sort, although we can't preach publicly because the Emperor allows missionaries only in his capital and not in the interior of the provinces; we slip secretly into such areas. Our ministry has to be secret and undercover as a result; if we were to decide to preach openly we'd probably be arrested and deported back to our own country...*

*I see no gleam of hope for martyrdom; anyway I've no problem in convincing myself that I don't deserve it. All the same, our life is not without danger as, over the past six years, large numbers of Chinese have rebelled against the government (Letter 16).*

The majority of the remainder of the surviving letters were written to a Chinese confrere Paul Song. He was born in 1774 and ordained in 1803, and appointed to work with Francis. For eight years there was much misunderstanding and tension between them, though Song kept all the letters he received from Francis. In 1811 there came a change and Song's attitude changed into one of admiration. At the start he was scrupulous, did not take good care of his health and was not good at being present at community functions.

Francis was Song's superior, an office which he did not want and which he asked to be

relieved of many times (*Letters 23, 33, 47, 50*). But as his superior he had to deal with Song's problems, and sometimes the tone of the former teacher of moral theology can be detected in his letters. In one, dealing with Song's worries about distractions while praying his office, he explains the various grades of attention, and concludes:

*Therefore I order you to say your breviary and other prayers in a common-sense way, never going back over them, provided you prepared yourself for these actions by a moment of recollection in the presence of God (Letter 29).*

Song appears to have also been unduly sensitive, to accusations of laziness, for example, sometimes seeing references to himself which were not there. Francis' mild sense of humour was probably lost on Song:

*Your letter gave me both joy and sorrow; joy that your health is good, sorrow that your return is further delayed till the sixth moon. Actually eight months have passed since you set out for Ho-nan where you were to hear four hundred confessions; now obviously eight months are not needed for four hundred confessions, so seeing that you were slow about coming back I was afraid that you had caught some illness. Now be quite sure I am not accusing you of laziness... (Letter 19).*

That last sentence clearly did not have a lasting effect:

*It's important, and justice demands it, that I quickly put you right about a wrong meaning you took from a sentence in a letter from Father [Louis] Lamiot [CM] which you did not understand. Read over again carefully the bit in question and you'll see that it does not refer to Paul Song but to a young man from Han-keou called François Lieou... He was dismissed for laziness, lack of application and want of steadiness... How could you have thought I'd be so stupid as to give you a letter to read which contained complaints about yourself? (Letter 34).*

Song wrote later to Jean-Joseph Ghislain in Peking, complaining about Francis. Francis replied, again with a touch of humour:

*Father Ghislain complains very strongly in a letter he wrote to me that I give my confreres more work than they can handle, so much in fact that even the strongest constitutions are ruined, and that I never allow them to have a break. I'm not annoyed that people complain about me to major superiors; I only wish they'd make such strong complaints that my superiors would be forced to relieve me of a weight or load which I cannot carry. Anyway, making an examination of conscience I find that I've never had the intention of ruining confreres' health by work beyond their capacities. Therefore I urge you to take care of your health because I have always said that it is better to live for the glory of God than to die for it, especially in China where priests are scarce... (Letter 55).*

That letter was written in December 1811. From then until his execution in 1820 there are fewer surviving letters than from the earlier period. In 1818 he wrote to Louis Lamiot, his superior in Peking:

*Our first cross is the death of Father [Lazare] Dumazel [CM] in Chang-tsin-hien; in his last moments he was assisted by Father Song... Our second cross is the capture of Father [François] Chen [CM]. He was sold by a new Judas for 20,000 deniers to some civil guards and other wretches, of which China is so full, called Houo-hoei. He was taken to Kou-tching and sent from there to Ou-tchang-fou with fifteen or eighteen Christians who were arrested at more or less the same time; his fate has not yet been decided. This persecution we are experiencing started in the first few days of the first moon this year in this way: A heathen, known everywhere as a bad lot, laid a charge against me eight years ago, and all he achieved was to get himself twenty lashes. This year he had a more successful idea. He set fire to his house and blamed two families for it, alleging that I had put them up to it. He even accused Fathers [Nicolas] Ho and [Stanislas] Ngay [CM]; the latter, without saying a word, took off for Chang-tsin-hien. This ridiculous slander was believed in court. The capture of Father Chen a few days later made things worse...*

*While waiting for a chance to get back to our Cou-tching mountains I'll look after the administration of Ho-nan. My health is keeping up in spite of our set-backs and my seventy-plus years. I want none of this world's goods, apart from a decent watch; only one of the ones you sent two years ago was any good. The others started by gaining an hour every day, and later two hours; then they all contracted a recurrent fever which led to their deaths; so, if you have anything in the line of a decent watch I'd like you to send it along, and some money after it, and some red pills... (Letter 63).*

He was captured on Trinity Sunday, June 16, 1819, betrayed by the school teacher who had betrayed François Chen the previous year, a Catholic whose scandalous life had led to bad feeling between himself and priests. Six months later he wrote to Jean-François Richenet CM in Paris:

*The Mandarin's idea was to send me to a jail where I'd be the sole Christian and where perhaps I'd die through lack of help; I was very weak after my stay in Ho-nan jails and my long journey, and a kind Providence arranged it that my jailers would not accept me. I was in a very bad way, very thin, with a long beard crawling with lice, a rather dirty shirt over a similar pair of pants, all of which indicated a man without money. Because of their refusal I had to be brought to another jail nearby where I had the pleasure of meeting Father Chen and ten good Christians, all in the same room. We have morning and evening prayer in common, and can even celebrate feastdays. No one bothers us, neither the jailers nor the crowd of heathen prisoners who occupy other rooms around a large open yard, where we are free to roam around from morning till evening. When I saw all this I must admit that I couldn't help weeping with joy, consoled by the fatherly care God has for his undeserving servant and his faithful children; if it were not for me they could not receive absolution. We all went to confession, and Father [Antoine]*

*Tcheng [CM], who maintains an underground ministry to the Christian communities around this town, celebrated mass in a nearby house and brought Communion to us all without our fellow-prisoners noticing...*

*My case is almost over; I've just been told I'll be executed shortly, perhaps tomorrow. Make sure you don't think of me as a martyr; my imprudence jeopardised both our house in P[e]K[ing] and three Christian communities who are now being persecuted, so I can be thought of only as someone who murdered several souls, who is guilty of want of respect to God, and who is getting only what he deserves (Letter 65).*

He wrote that on 28 December 1819. On 1 January 1820 he was found guilty of deceiving and corrupting Chinese people by preaching Christianity to them, and was sentenced to be strangled on a gibbet; the sentence had to be confirmed by the Emperor.

On 26 January he added a postscript to this letter:

*Today, 26 January, I am still alive. Yesterday, the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, a day to be remembered for the foundation of our Congregation, Father Chen and I received communion from Father Tcheng, and we had a feastday dinner at midday with three priests and six laymen, two of whom were prisoners and four visitors. The only one missing was Father Lamiot, who paid for the meal.*

These things were possible because they were in a detention prison, not a punishment one, and this fact led him to enclose with the above-quoted letter a letter for publication in French newspapers. It would be interesting to know if it was ever published:

*As I often heard in France of dungeons and gloomy cells where prisoners are locked up till the end of their trial, I feel obliged to give you a brief description of Chinese prisons, if only to make Christians blush at being less human than the Chinese towards the unfortunate victims of human vengeance, sad prelude to the divine vengeance from which so little is done to save them. I can speak from experience, since in being transferred from Ho-nan to Ou-tchang-seng I passed through twenty-seven jails. Now, nowhere are there dungeons or gloomy cells. In the jail I am in at the moment there are murderers, robbers, thieves. From dawn till dusk they all enjoy the freedom to walk about, to play in a huge yard, and breathe fresh air so necessary for health. I saw a man who had poisoned his mother. What a terrible crime! He had the freedom of that yard till the day of his execution... This yard is swept every day and kept very clean ... The inside of the building is like a long hall. This huge room is lit by a big door with a window each side; the door is locked only at night. The prisoners sleep side by side on planks, which are raised a foot above the floor to avoid the damp. When it starts to get cold in winter each prisoner is given a straw mat to keep out the cold, and when it gets hotter in summer they are given fans to counteract the heat...*

*I must not forget to mention that Chinese kindness goes so far as to give the prisoners lots of tea or cool drinks in hot weather, and in winter padded clothing for the worst off. In France they preach about kindness to prisoners. The so-called philosophers,*

*motivated rather by the chance of insulting our holy religion than by charity, raise their voices to rant against the severity, not to say the inhumanity, shown to prisoners. I raise my dying voice to praise the heathens above the Christians. Preachers in Christian pulpits ask the faithful to show charity to prisoners. I ask Christianity, the goodness of our rulers, the care of our judges, to look at the huge number of wretches who die thousands and thousands of times before they actually give up their lives in their final suffering. The help which good people give to prisoners is only for a moment; it is up to the civil authorities, who have a duty in the matter, to better their lot so that with patience and resignation they can face their approaching execution. This is a punishment which gives them an opportunity of satisfying divine justice and gives them the right to the eternal happiness promised to repentant sinners... (Letter 65).*

This fact also permitted him to take on a role which was rather unusual for someone in his position. A disagreement had arisen between the French and Portuguese confreres in Peking and Louis Lamiot asked Francis to act as mediator. Several letters were exchanged between Francis and the Portuguese, and it emerged that Lamiot was really the person at fault; he was being too French and was trying to rush things. Francis reminded Lamiot that Adrien Bourdoise was too impetuous while Vincent de Paul was more cautious. Bourdoise called Vincent a wet hen, but Vincent's methods were the better (*Letter 74*).

His last letter, to Lamiot, was un-dated:

*Rightly or wrongly I consider that I have done the job you gave me; all that's now left is to prepare for dying, which attracts me more than living on. I must admit I think I am better off than you. Here I am not far from harbour, I hope, while you are still out on the open sea. But have confidence; the storms which will toss you about will drive you towards the harbour while they send lots of others to the bottom of the sea. Anyway, alive or dead, you can be sure I'll never forget you, do the same for me.*

*One thing that still bothers me is the business about the three Christian communities in Ho-nan province whom I injured both spiritually and temporally by my imprudent admissions before the Mandarin. To ease my conscience I'm very anxious that they should be helped spiritually and temporally in the future. The three areas are Sze-tchoang, Kio-chan and Lou-y-hien.*

This is perhaps my last sign of life to you.

Clet

P.S. Should I burn all the notes you sent me, or return them to you? (*Letter 75*).

On the morning of 18 February 1820 he was executed.

## **Our Vincentian Mission in China — Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow —**

*By Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General*

St. Vincent had wonderful breadth of vision. In an age when transportation was difficult, when communication was slow, when most people lived and died within five miles of their birthplace, he founded a Congregation that became international even in his lifetime. With a courage that some skeptics regarded as reckless, he sent missionaries to Algeria, Madagascar, Poland, Italy, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys, and he dreamed of Canada and the Indies.

### **The Prelude**

It is clear too that Vincent dreamed of China, even though the mission there began 39 years after his death. On January 15, 1664, Nicolas Etienne, a missionary in Madagascar, wrote to Vincent's successor René Alméras, asking for a mandate to preach the gospel everywhere in the world and he reminded Alméras: "It was the plan of the deceased Monsieur Vincent, our blessed father, that I should go even to China."

Nicolas Etienne did not get beyond Madagascar; he died as a martyr there shortly after he wrote to Fr. Alméras. But it was he, in fact, who financed the first journey of the missionaries to China. He was a handicapped young man who was told that he could never be a priest, but his goodness and zeal so impressed St. Vincent that he sought a dispensation from the Holy See so that Nicolas could be ordained. On September 20, 1659, he offered the Congregation a foundation out of his own family patrimony that would produce a significant annual interest for the support of the mission in Madagascar. When he first suggested this foundation, he was still a seminarian, and St. Vincent wrote to him words that later became familiar to generations of Vincentians.

*I thank you most affectionately, dear brother, for your heartfelt, effective love for your poor mother (the Congregation); you are like a well-born child who never ceases to love tenderly the one who gave him birth, however poor and unattractive she may be.<sup>1</sup> May God be pleased to grant the Company to which you belong the*

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<sup>1</sup>St. Vincent used this same comparison in the *Common Rules* of the Congregation, Chapter XII, Article 10.

*grace of raising you by its example and practices, to a great love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our father, our mother, and our all.*<sup>2</sup>

But being a farsighted man, Nicolas put a clause in the contract saying that if the mission in Madagascar should cease, the annual revenues should be employed for other missions outside France. The mission in Madagascar closed in 1674 and the foundation went unused for two decades. But 1692, Monsieur Jolly, the third Superior General of the Congregation, resolved to use the money for China.

### **The First Phase (1699-1767)**

Five years later, Propaganda Fide called us to go to China, and the first missionary, Luigi Antonio Appiani set off on February 10, 1697, accompanied by John Muellener, a diocesan priest who entered the Congregation during the journey.

Right from the beginning, the mission to China captured the imagination of Vincentians. Fr. Appiani and Fr. Muellener wrote long, fascinating accounts about their journey and their early ministries in China. Their journey lasted two years and eight months (while my flight here took 12 hours!). Their basic mission was to establish a seminary where young Chinese men could be formed for the priesthood. Fr. Appiani spent many of his years in China in prison, but Fr. Muellener, who became the first Vincentian bishop on the mainland, was able to begin the work of priestly formation. The first two Chinese Vincentians, Fr. Stephen Siu and Fr. Paul Sou, were ordained from the seminary he established in Chongqing.

The early Vincentians also sang and played for their living. The talented, but fiery, Théodoric Pedrini won his entry into the emperor's court at Beijing because of his musical talents and spent 35 years there (1711-1746).

Unfortunately, the first missionaries fell prey to the controversy over Chinese rites and fell out of favor with the imperial court. The first group died out by the 1760s.

### **The Second Phase (1784-1820)**

The Vincentian mission in China began anew in 1784. Two fundamental reasons motivated our return. First, in 1783 the new Bishop of Beijing,

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<sup>2</sup>SV V, 534.

Alessandro de Gouvei, impressed by the work of the Vincentians at the seminary in Goa, invited them to come to staff the seminary in Macau. A Portuguese confrere, Manuel Correa, and an Italian confrere, Giovanni Augustino Villa, arrived in Macau in 1784 to undertake this work. Others soon followed, like the Frenchman, Raymond Aubin and the Irishman, Robert Hanna.

Secondly, with the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, one of its members, Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot, suggested to the French government that a French Community should take over the Jesuit mission in Beijing. With some hesitation, the Congregation of the Mission accepted. The Superior General chose three missionaries: Nicolas-Joseph Raux, Jean-Joseph Ghislain, and Brother Charles Paris.<sup>3</sup> Knowing that the Jesuits had won favor at the emperor's court because of their scientific acumen, the Superior General chose men who were quite competent in that regard. Raux was an astronomer and geographer who also knew botany well. Ghislain was a mechanical expert with knowledge of pumps, magnetism, vacuums, electricity (which was at an early stage of investigation), and many other practical matters that were very useful in Beijing. Brother Paris was a talented watchmaker and repairer.

Fr. Raux had extraordinary personal gifts. As superior of the community, he succeeded in creating a climate of peace and brotherly love between the Vincentians and the ex-Jesuits. A Jesuit of the time wrote: "We live together like brothers because the Lord has wanted to console us for the loss of our good mother."

The confreres soon began missions in the area around Beijing. Then in 1798, Joseph Han (1772-1841), a tireless missionary, set out for Mongolia. Out of this small beginning three apostolic vicariates eventually developed and a considerable number of native vocations began to come to the Congregation.

There were martyrs too. In 1795, Raymond Aubin gave his life for the faith. In 1820, Francis Regis Clet was killed after three decades of service in China.

Interestingly, the confreres at the new mission in Beijing had an indirect influence on the birth of the Church in Korea. A group of Korean laymen came to visit the emperor at Beijing. While they were there, one was converted and brought Catholicism back to his homeland where within a short time there were another 200 converts. Fr. Raux helped this group when they returned to China in 1789 for further instructions. Since the Church in Korea was completely lay, without priests, Fr. Ghislain offered to go there. Instead, Fr. Raux sent a Chinese priest, James Chou Wen-Mo, who found 4000 lay Catholics in Korea and on

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<sup>3</sup>Originally, Brother Bernard Faure, a nurse, was chosen. He was unable, however, to depart.

Easter Sunday, April 5, 1795, celebrated the first Mass there. When a persecution broke out, he was beheaded in 1801.

In 1811, the emperor expelled from Beijing all but three Portuguese Vincentians who were members of the Bureau of Mathematics and the French Vincentian, Fr. Louis-François Lamiaux, who was the French interpreter at the court. Nine years later when Lamiaux was exiled to Macau, the mission in Beijing, under the protection of the court, ground to a halt.

### **The Third Phase (1820-1949)**

With the departure of the French, Fr. Matthew Xue served as leader of the mission for 15 years. He and Fr. Joseph Han were extraordinary Chinese Vincentian confreres. They regularly visited the dispersed Christian communities in the north of China and in Mongolia. Fr. Han, who was a priest for 47 years, lived on little, was fearless, and touched others deeply by his preaching. He also translated a book of meditations for lay people.

At the beginning of this third phase, the focus of the Vincentian mission shifted to Mongolia. Fr. Evariste Huc and Fr. Gabé made a journey through Mongolia, Tibet, and China to investigate the possibilities of preaching the gospel among the nomads. Fr. Huc's book, *Souvenir d'un voyage dans la Tartarie, le Thibet, et la Chine*, entertained generations of readers. Fr. Xue transferred the preparatory seminary from Macau to Mongolia in 1835. In that same year, the future bishop, Joseph Martian Mouly, began to labor in Mongolia too. In 1840, he became apostolic vicar there and eventually became Apostolic Vicar of Beijing and the North.

This period too knew numerous martyrs. Near its beginning, in 1840, John Gabriel Perboyre died a death similar to Francis Regis Clet's 20 years earlier.

We know that in 1852 there were 25 Chinese Vincentians serving in Beijing, Mongolia, Honan, Zhujiang and Jiangxi. Our seminary at Beijing had 36 seminarians. From this time forward, there would be a great influx of foreign missionaries. They eventually came from Holland, Poland, Belgium, Italy, the United States, and Ireland. Native vocations continued to grow too. By 1942 (the last available statistics), there were 192 Chinese Vincentian priests and brothers.

This period too knew its tensions and misunderstandings. Fr. Vincent Lebbe played a prophetic role in the cause of the indigenous Church and the creation of an indigenous hierarchy. Like many prophets, he drew sharp

reactions. A large number of foreign missionary confreres failed to understand him. But he was much appreciated by the Chinese Vincentians. To him belongs much of the credit for the Holy See's eventual decision to ordain six Chinese bishops, two of whom were Vincentians. Today we pay tribute to him with joy for what he achieved and with sadness because so many of us his brothers failed to understand him.

The work of the formation of the clergy also continued to grow. The Vincentians had minor seminaries in most of their 14 vicariates and also staffed three major seminaries: the regional seminary in the Vicariate of Ningpo, the major seminary in Jiaying, and the major seminary in Beijing which after 1920 became a regional seminary. By the 1930s there were 260 major seminarians in the 14 Vincentian vicariates, as well as 875 minor seminarians.

### **The Fourth Phase (1949-1992)**

The third phase of the Vincentian mission ended abruptly in 1949 with the advent of the Communist government. But the mission continued in two streams.

A first stream continued to flow through the mainland. The 192 Vincentian priests and brothers were scattered. Many were sent to prisons and forced labor camps. The stories of their love for their people, their pastoral devotion in the face of adversity, and their fidelity in the face of persecution are largely undocumented. But we know that much blood was poured out into this stream. Many gave their lives for what they believed. Archbishop Joseph Chow of Nanchang is perhaps the most notable of these heroes. He spent 22 years in prison and under house arrest before he died in 1972 after refusing the Communist Party's offer to make him the Chinese "Pope."

The other stream flowed into the Church on Taiwan. After being expelled from China from 1949-1952, Chinese, Dutch, and American confreres continued their mission in Taiwan. In the early years they believed that it was only a matter of time before they would go back to the mainland. But as this hope disappeared, they poured their energies into the pastoral care of the young communities they founded. With exuberant zeal, they built more than 30 churches and baptized countless thousands of converts. From 1952 to 1965, Catholics on the island grew from 10,000 to 250,000

### **The Fifth Phase (1992- )**

The fifth phase has a prelude too. It really started in the early 1980s when Sr. Emma Lee discreetly began to reestablish contact with the Chinese confreres and Daughters of Charity on the mainland. Little by little she found 90 elderly Chinese Daughters of Charity and 14 Vincentians.

Then in 1992, the General Assembly challenged Vincentians “to go to the ends of the earth, even all the way to China.”

The Superior General and the Mother General were soon able to visit many of the priests, sisters, and brothers on the mainland. They found men and women of vibrant faith who live simply and joyfully, who have suffered for what they believe, who remain deeply convinced of their faith as Catholics, and who continue to love their Vincentian charism. Little by little, with increasing contact with the mainland, the members of our Vincentian Family began to hear the stories of the many heroes, living and dead, who have represented and continue to represent the Vincentian charism in China.

As they heard about these heroic missionaries and Daughters of Charity, confreres from nine provinces volunteered for the China Mission. But while in the fourth phase various countries were entrusted with different regions in China and lived and worked separately, in this fifth phase an “international” mission was organized. In other words, these confreres have come to live and work united as a team, even though its members are from many different lands.

## **Challenges for the Future**

Right from the beginning, China aroused the interest and won the heart of the Congregation. It continues to do so today. Wherever I go, people ask me about China. As we envision our Vincentian mission in China in the future, what are the principal challenges that lie before us?

### *1. To exercise a listening presence*

We must listen before we speak. We must learn before we teach. We must discern before we act. The missionary needs great humility. He must listen as a servant. He must seek to understand what lies in the hearts of his masters the poor and find ways of watering the seed of the Word that God has already sown in their hearts and in the created world around them.

What do the poor say to us today in Taiwan? What do they say in continental China? We must not come bearing gifts that we ourselves have chosen and wrapped. As servants, we must come responding to the Chinese people’s call.

Our numbers are much smaller in 1999 than they were in 1949. Then we had hundreds of missionaries in China: today we have less than 50. But history teaches us that numbers are not of huge importance. In several periods where we were relatively few in number, we had an enormous impact because of the influence exerted by a few well-prepared men.

In continental China today, most forms of explicit ministry are forbidden to us. Our role must, therefore, be largely one of presence. But that is what servants do. They are present, ever ready to do what is asked. Already a number of the members of our family are on the mainland teaching languages. They are deeply convinced of the value of this silent service to the people of China. It is clear to me that they and our older Chinese confreres and sisters touch the lives of many.

*2. To be deeply inculturated and to learn well the languages of those we serve*

Today more than ever we are conscious of the importance of language and culture not just as personal tools for the use of the missionary, but as a way of understanding the minds and hearts of those whom we are serving. We have wonderful examples of missionaries right here in this room who have learned Taiwanese, Mandarin and other languages very well in order to be good servants of God's people. For us foreigners, learning oriental languages is difficult. Today I encourage all foreign missionaries here to make linguistic and cultural studies a part of your daily bread. Without an adequate grasp of language and culture, you will always be seriously handicapped.

*3. To be inventive in devising new forms of popular missions, involving the various branches of our family*

Here in Taiwan are there ways in which we can renew our parishes through some creative form of mission involving Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, lay men and women, both older and younger? Are there ways in which we can similarly evangelize the aboriginal people? Are there ways in which we can renew the faith of immigrant Philippine workers? In continental China there are more than 850,000,000 "country people." Is it possible to envision some small, focused, inventive evangelization effort among them when political circumstances change?

*4. To contribute to the formation of the clergy*

In each of the phases of our history, this work has had a central place in the mission of the Congregation. What are the needs of the clergy today in Taiwan and continental China? Can individual missionaries bring an expertise to China in biblical studies, in liturgy, in other fields? It is clear that the formation of the clergy is one of the great needs right now in continental China. Can we teach young priests there English, or French, or computer science, or bible studies, or theology? Or can we offer them a rule of life, as they recently asked of us, that will strengthen them in living out the gospel that they preach? Can we ourselves move beyond regional and national differences and work side by side with the diocesan clergy and other communities for the formation and growth of the Church in China?

5. *To engage in the formation of youth*

Recently, much to my joy, Vincentian Youth groups have sprung up spontaneously here in Taiwan. Such groups are multiplying rapidly throughout the world; they are the fastest growing member of our Vincentian Family. One of the great challenges we face is to offer these youth groups a profound, healthy formation. I encourage you to reach out to young people wherever you serve as missionaries. The young are the future of the Church. They are the Church of the third millennium. They will be the evangelizers here in Taiwan and in continental China in the decades that come. Members of our family who live at present on the continent attest that the young there yearn for something, that they sense a deep need for transcendence and that they want to open their hearts. What can we do for young people in Taiwan and on the continent now and in the future?

6. *To provide formation for our Vincentians and Daughters of Charity on the continent*

Life is still difficult on the continent. The Vincentians and Daughters, young and old, struggle to live out their faith and express it. Our renewed contacts in recent years have been an encouragement both to them and to us. They cry out for help in regard to their own ongoing formation. Happily, we have been able to offer modest assistance in that regard. They are deeply grateful. I encourage you to continue to do so.

7. *To concretize the intellectual apostolate*

At various periods in the history of China, the Jesuits and the Vincentians served the intellectual needs of the court and of the people. They were very

conscious of the importance of learning and wisdom within Chinese culture. Today we have also become more and more aware of the need for intelligent solutions if we are really going to grapple with the problems of the poor. Intelligent understanding and energetic action must go hand in hand if we are to serve the poor realistically in the future. Can our Vincentian universities in the United States and the Philippines help in responding to some of the needs of China's people both in Taiwan and on the mainland? Can they bring expertise to fields where the Chinese people feel a vacuum? What are these fields? How can we serve?

#### 8. *To engage the wider Vincentian Family in our mission*

Today we are very conscious that we act not simply as Vincentian priests and brothers, but as members of a family that also includes sisters and lay men and women of varying ages. Ours is in fact a huge family with several million members organized in large groups like the Vincentians, the Daughters of Charity, the International Association of Charities, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Miraculous Medal Association, the Vincentian Marian Youth groups, and many others.

Can we envision our mission in Taiwan and continental China not simply as a Vincentian mission or a mission of the Daughters of Charity but as a mission of our whole family? Can we interest especially the young members of our family to find ways in which they can serve, perhaps by dedicating a year or two or three to working among the aboriginal people of Taiwan or to teaching English on the continent?

#### 9. *To promote devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus*

From the time of St. Vincent, a notable aspect of our tradition has been to promote devotion to the Virgin Mary, who was the first of the saints. To use Vincent's words, she penetrated to the meaning of the gospel more than all other believers and lived out its teaching. As I have visited Taiwan and continental China over the years, I have been struck by how prominent devotion to Mary remains. I remember how often and with what great enthusiasm St. John Gabriel Perboyre wrote back to Paris asking for more Miraculous Medals for his people. Can we find ways of holding up Mary in China as an icon of the tenderness of God and a model for all believers?

#### 10. *To undergo conversion*

On a recent visit to continental China, I visited the tomb of Vincent Lebbe. Priests and seminarians there hold him in the highest esteem, as do so many lay people today. One of the embarrassing questions a young seminarian posed to me was: Why did we not recognize him?

Unfortunately, we do not always recognize our own prophets. Will we see the prophets of the future? That is certainly an enormous challenge. To do so we must be persevering listeners with open hearts. To do so we must be fixed not on our own ideas, nor on our own methods, nor on our own native cultures. Our focus, rather, must always be on those we serve. How can we promote them? How can we make them agents in their own promotion? What are their deepest needs?

Today leadership in the Church both here in Taiwan and on the mainland is in the hands of the Chinese themselves. The passage of leadership from foreigners to Chinese came at a high price, but the Church is now deeply indigenous and that is a great blessing. Vincent Lebbe was a prophet in this regard. I hope that in the future, we can hear prophetic voices like his.

So, my brothers and sisters, those are ten challenges for the future of our mission in China. Today we thank God for the many gifts we have received over these 300 years. We ask God to renew our hearts with the gift of ongoing conversion. And we ask God for the strength and creativity we need to meet these challenges.

A new millennium stands before us. May it be one of peace, growth, and spiritual flourishing for the people of Taiwan and continental China.

*November 1999  
Taipei, Taiwan*

## The History of the Canonization of St. Francis Regis Clet

by Roberto D'Amico, C.M.  
Postulator General

At the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, held in Paris in 1835, in response to the proposal offered by the Province of Rome concerning the introduction of the cause of the beatification of our confrere Francis Folchi who died in 1823 in the odor of sanctity, the following decision was taken: "...this proposal is unanimously rejected ... because it is not in accord with the humble state of our institute...."<sup>1</sup>

This authoritative decree did not encourage, for at least a century, the processes of beatification and canonization in the Community. The result was that all the causes from the mid 1800's onward were initiated many years after the deaths of our confreres and our sisters, the Daughters of Charity. The postulators in presenting the "Positio" to the Congregation of the Causes of Saints, adopted the reason for the delay in the processes, the mind set that held sway in the Community caused by that decree.

A new intervention became necessary in 1931 by the Superior General, Fr. Francois Verdier, who abrogated that norm.<sup>2</sup>

But by the force of that decree the causes of the martyrs Sts. Francis Regis Clet and John Gabriel Perboyre were excluded.

The well attested to news of the martyrdom of Francis Regis Clet which occurred on 18 February 1820 arrived soon in Rome and Paris.

On 10 October 1821, not long after the martyrdom, Fr. Santucci, superior of the College of the Chinese in Naples, wrote to the superior of Montecitorio, Fr. Baccari:

*I have the honor of sending you a report about the martyrdom of Francis Clet of your respectable Congregation, written by a certain Francis Mu, a catechist. This came to me from Macao, together with letters for this College of the Chinese in Naples, sent by the procurator of the Mission of China, Fr. Marchini. As far as I am concerned, I am filled with joy together with my confreres for the glory of God which redounds to your community.... I would hope that the recent glorious martyr for Jesus Christ will intercede with the Almighty, in order to obtain an increase of fervor for your zealous confreres....*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Acta conventum Congregationis Missionis*, p. 246; e *Conv. Gen. XVIII*, sess. 8, an 1835.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Circular letter 1 January 1931 in *Raccolta Circolari dei Superiori Generali*.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of Msgr. Santucci, Superior of the College of the Chinese in Naples to Fr. Baccari, Superior of Montecitorio in Rome.

After the martyrdom of the venerated confrere, such was the fame of his sanctity and of his martyrdom, that the Christians started as a sign of veneration to gather up everything that belonged to him and that touched his body, as precious relics: his garments soaked in blood, the instruments of his final torture, and the chains.

These relics were immediately brought to Paris and, in 1833, John Gabriel Perboyre, director of novices, showing them the relics of our saint said: "These are the garments of a martyr, these are the garments of Fr. Clet, this is the cord by which he was strangled. What a joy it would be for us if one day we would have the same fate."

Clet's example and the death of Brother Louis on his way to China pushed Perboyre to request and then to leave for China, where on 11 September 1840 hardly four years after his arrival, was realized the desire, expressed to his seminarians, of giving his life as a witness to the faith through martyrdom.

The news of this new martyr struck the Vincentian community deeply.

Fr. Nozo, the Superior General, in his circular on the first day of 1841, announcing Perboyre's death, wrote thus: "We have shed tears of sadness and of joy on learning of the martyrdom of our confrere and of the generous constancy by which he gave witness to Jesus Christ, through the cruelest torments, through the faith he manifested, and the love with which he embraced the cross before the judges who wanted him to trample it.... His blood, we are certain, will be the seed of new Christians and will cause to spring up for this mission, so dear to his heart, new workers capable of succeeding him...."<sup>4</sup>

In those years His Eminence Cardinal Filippo Frasoni was Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which had dealt with the Community about the opening of the mission in Ethiopia, and had a good rapport with the procurator to the Holy Sea, Fr. Vito Guarini.

Being made aware of this new martyr, it suggested to the Procurator that it was time to begin the process of canonization for the two martyrs.

Thus on 12 June 1843, following the formal request presented by Fr. Guarini, a commission was set up at the Vatican to decide on the opening of the process. On July 9, following the favorable opinion of the Commission, Pope Gregory XVI declared the martyrs Clet and Perboyre to be venerable, joining them to 42 other martyrs of China whose causes had already been examined in 1840.

Processes were initiated in Kiangsi and Hunan Provinces in China and the witnesses emphasized the reputation both of holiness and martyrdom which the two servants of God had among the Chinese Christians.

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<sup>4</sup> Recueil des Principales Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de la Congrégation de la Mission, Tome II, p. 524.

The cause of John Gabriel Perboyre was soon separated from that of the other Chinese martyrs achieving beatification in 1889.

The processes undertaken in Rome and the two done in China were presented to the Congregation of the Cause of Saints on 22 July 1893, in the ordinary congregation. Concerning the validity of the processes in Rome, the validity of the processes in China and the obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII regarding the “non Cult,” the response was favorable to the first and third question. As to the processes in China, it was agreed to ask the validation of Pope by the “sanation” for every defect of form.

The Holy Father on 23 July 1893, having received the report on all these matters, confirmed the decisions and validated the processes undertaken in China.

On 3 February 1900, the Particular Congregation met to discuss the question: “Is there evidence of the martyrdom and its cause, and also are there signs or miracles which confirm the martyrdom of the person in question.”

On February 25, the Holy Father handed down his favorable judgment, that is on the martyrdom, the cause of martyrdom and the miracles.

Finally in the General Congregation of 25 March, an affirmative response was given to the request for permission to proceed to the Beatification. The Holy Father reserved his judgement in order to seek divine help.

On 8 April, Palm Sunday, he promulgated the decree in which it was decided that the beatification of the Venerable could proceed together with the other Chinese martyrs.

On May 7, the Brief of Beatification was issued in which Clet was introduced with the following words:

*The Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul which embraces every type of ministry and charity, and is spread out in various continents, offered as a companion to the other martyrs in China, the Servant of God, Francis Clet who, neither exhausted by his apostolic labors, nor frightened by dangers after long torments in harsh captivity, strangled and cruelly trampled, bore his long martyrdom with utmost constancy.*

On May 27 of that same year, Leo XIII beatified Francis Regis Clet together with 77 other martyrs of China and Vietnam. Forty-nine of these martyrs were members of the Foreign Mission Society of Paris, 26 were members of the Dominican family, and one was an Italian of the Friars Minor.

A solemn triduum was celebrated at St. Lazare in honor of the newly beatified Clet on 25, 26 and 27 June.

## **The Canonization**

The first petitions, at least in official form, to canonize together all the beatified martyrs of China, came through the direct involvement of the Chinese Episcopate of Taiwan.<sup>5</sup>

In 1984 a commission was convened to promote the cause, and the Bishops made a formal request to the Congregation of the Cause of Saints.

But the petition at that moment remained pending in the sense that the Holy Father, while fully committed to the project of one common canonization, did not think it to be an opportune moment to go further, given the extremely precarious political-religious situation on mainland China in that period. And so the “delay” order was issued.

At the consistory of 29 January 1996, the cause of John Gabriel Perboyre conducted independently by the normal process was concluded and his canonization was set for 2 June of the same year.

This news moved the new Bishop of Kaohsiung, Paul Shan Si, as president of the Chinese Regional Conference of Taiwan, to appeal again to John Paul II, on 28 February 1996, to declare all the other blessed martyrs to be saints.

1996 marked, in fact, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of the first six native Chinese bishops and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in that nation which, for half a century, was beset by a cruel religious persecution and was sustained by the clergy and faithful with heroic perseverance in imitation of the blessed martyrs. Important pastoral reasons were offered on behalf of the Church of China for petitioning a dispensation from the miracle prescribed by canon law, among other reasons it being impossible to begin to conduct Diocesan inquests on eventual cases involving miracles.

The letter of the president of the council was followed on 10 April by a request signed by the nine bishops of Taiwan, inviting John Paul II to preside at a ceremony that same year, dedicated by the local church to catechetical studies and to evangelization, matters favored by the translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

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<sup>5</sup> The blessed martyrs numbered 120, of whom 86 were of Chinese nationality and of these 4 were priests, 2 were seminarians, and 80 were lay people of various social levels. From 1684 to 1930, seven religious communities had members martyred in China: Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Foreign Mission Society of Paris, Vincentians, PIME and Salesians. These were of Italian, French, Spanish, Belgian and Dutch nationality: 6 bishops, 20 priests, and 7 Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate. St. John Gabriel Perboyre, as he was in 1889 the first martyr of China to be beatified, so in 1996 he proceeded all the other martyrs of China in canonization.

On 16 April 1996, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, responded: “Given the impossibility of postponing the canonization of Blessed Perboyre in order to join it with that of the other blessed, assurance is offered that the matter was being studied by the Congregation of the Causes of Saints for a quick and convenient solution.”

Actually the Holy Father thought it opportune to remove the “delay” issued in 1984 and had instructed the appropriate Office to examine the proposal of the Bishops.

Early in March of 1996, after an introductory meeting of the prelates of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints and three postulators, it was thought opportune to hold a meeting of all seven postulators who were involved with the various groups of martyrs.

At the meeting of 10 April, it was decided to send to John Paul II a common “Supplex libelus,” asking for the unification of the individual causes corresponding to the groups of martyrs, in order to have but one canonization. The postulators agreed to the ecclesial reasons presented by the bishops of Taiwan, and left the rest of the procedure to the Holy Father.

The same Holy Father John Paul II in his homily at the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre on 2 June, expressed the following:

*To the remembrance of John Gabriel Perboyre, whom we celebrate today, we wish to join all those who gave testimony in the name of Jesus Christ in the land of China during past centuries. I am thinking especially of the blessed martyrs whose common canonization hoped for by numerous faithful, might one day be a sign of hope for the Church present in the bosom of that people to whom I am close in heart and in prayer....<sup>6</sup>*

On June 15, the seven postulators, encouraged by the words of the Holy Father, offered some observations regarding the process. They also presented two collections of similar cases containing the jurisprudence adopted by the Holy See dealing with the joining together of causes of Blessed Martyrs directed towards a single canonization and the related dispensation of the required miracle.

Having referred to the Holy Father the question to be examined in view of a definitive decision, the Secretariat of State by its letter of 31 October 1996, communicated to the Congregation the conditions with which it had to comply.

Therefore the postulators, notified by the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, undertook the preparation of the documentation or “dossier” for each group of martyrs which would answer these three questions:

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<sup>6</sup> L'Osservatore Romano 3-4 giugno 1996.

- the need to show a continuing “reputation of martyrdom”;
- a thoroughly examined documentation for every group of the said “reputation for signs”; also data about the perseverance of many Christians in the faith, and the survival of the Church in China, attributable to the invocation and the emulation of the martyrs; which conditions must be verified before it would be possible to petition the Holy Father to dispense from the miracle;
- The eventual unification of the seven groups of Chinese Blessed following the evaluation of the requirements.

On 27 April 1997 the various “dossiers” prepared by the seven postulators were presented to the Congregation of the Cause of Saints.

In the month of November 1999, three consultors of the Congregation, having thoroughly studied the various dossiers, gave a favorable vote to proceed.

On 11 January 2000, the decree to unify the causes was issued and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the same month the Holy Father decreed that they could proceed with the canonization of the 120 blessed.

On 10 March 10, His Holiness Pope John Paul II in a public consistory announced the canonization of the 120 martyrs of China for 1 October 2000.

### **The Cult of the Sainted Martyr**

The missionaries who labored in China affirmed that Clet was much venerated and recognized for his long apostolic activity of about 30 years, for his virtue, for his cultural preparation and, finally, for his glorious martyrdom.

Immediately after his martyrdom at U-tch’ang-fu, the executioners buried him near the place where he was executed, in the cemetery reserved for criminals. But the precious remains did not stay there for very long, because the faithful, having agreed among themselves, carried them off at night to Hong-cian, or Red Mountain, in the Christian Cemetery. There they were venerated with great fervor by the believers.

When, in 1843, he was declared venerable together with his saintly confrere John Gabriel Perboyre, the superiors of the Congregation of the Mission wished that the mortal remains of the two martyrs be brought to Paris and placed in the chapel of the Motherhouse of the Congregation, and had recourse to the confrere bishop in China, Msgr. Delaplace.

The Chinese faithful came to know of this request and entreated Msgr. Delaplace, imploring him to leave the relics of Father Lieu, the Chinese name of Clet, in the land of China.

*In the name of all the Christians of Hou-kouang we are sending you this petition, that you permit us to keep with us the holy body of the Venerable Clet as an eternal memory of his martyrdom....*

*Nevertheless we beg you to consider that, if the relics of the saints who gave us such admirable examples do not remain in their primitive place, it is to be feared that with the passing of time they will be wiped away from our memory.*

*For this reason we all together humbly petition, imploring you to take into account the effect that this would have on the flock of the faithful, and to leave it the body of its old pastor.<sup>7</sup>*

Notwithstanding the request, on 23 May 1853, the remains of Clet were exhumed under the care of Msgr. Delaplace, a Vincentian, and of Msgr. Spelta, successor to Msgr. Rizzolati, and were brought first to Ningpo, and then to Paris.

On 30 January 1869, the relics of the heroic martyr, after a long and adventurous journey, were received with great festivity in Paris at the Motherhouse of the Mission.

On 6 September 1878, in the relic room at the Motherhouse of St. Lazare, the Auxiliary Bishop of Paris, Msgr. Richard, after a very detailed examination by two physicians, completed the canonical identification of the Venerable's mortal remains.

A particular veneration developed after the mortal remains were brought back to Paris, and an altar was dedicated in his memory after the beatification.

Clet's figure remained somewhat in the shadow of his confrere St. John Gabriel Perboyre. The latter was named patron saint of our seminarians and was therefore better known and consequently more venerated.

In all the churches of the Congregation and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, as well as in the chapels and on the altars dedicated to Perboyre, there are his image or portrait, depicting him at the foot of a gallows made in the form of a cross with a cord in his hands, signifying his death by strangulation.

In Grenoble next to the baptistery is a large stone which reminds the faithful of the baptism of their fellow citizen and martyr for the faith.

In the archives of the Motherhouse in Paris some letters are preserved which document several graces granted through the intercession of the saint: there are various cures often described by the Daughters of Charity, serving the sick in

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Tome XXXIV, p. 306ff.

hospitals, or for personal situations in very serious cases one would turn to Blessed Francis Regis Clet<sup>8</sup> asking for his intercession, and the prayers were heard.

The Archbishop of Hankow, Msgr. Doug Guang Ding (now deceased), affirmed in 1988 that the memory of the martyrs Clet and Perboyre were still alive in the region.

In February 1994 he wrote: “At the beginning of the cultural revolution, the markers that were placed on the tombs of Clet and Perboyre in China were hidden by the Christians for fear that they would be profaned and broken.” He had the markers searched for and they were found. Perboyre’s was intact, while Clet’s was damaged, missing the Chinese inscription. He had the markers located with honor in the patriotic regional seminary in Wuhan, “so that the future priests of the region might remember those who were their fathers in the faith.”

## **Conclusion**

On 1 October 1 during the grand jubilee of 2000, the Church by the canonization of the Chinese martyrs, wished to exalt the sanctity and the constancy in the faith of the Church in China, not withstanding the persecutions.

It was beautiful that, on the same day, Chinese Christians were exalted together with European missionaries.

Francis Regis Clet, genial, amiable, cordial and always available, with a welcoming manner, loved the Chinese and was loved by them in return. The situation of extreme poverty in which he had to labor, moved him deeply. Fr. Joseph Ly who knew him as a child wrote with admiration: “The heart and the spirit of Fr. Lieu (the Chinese name of our martyr) was a great lantern.”

With the canonization the “great lantern” emerges from the shadows and enlightens all those in the Church who feel themselves called to announce the Gospel to the poor of today.

(STEPHEN J. INDIA, C. M., Translator)

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 65 (585-587); 66 (145, 497); 67 (459-460); 68 (132). The originals, which are preserved in the Archives of the Motherhouse, are numbered ... 27, 34, 39, 40 ... and one is without a number, are letters addressed to the Superior General.

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