

Cooperation and Contradiction: Portugal and the Holy See in the Ecclesiastical Affairs of China in the 17-18th Centuries

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"Jesus Nailed on the Cross," from the *Historical Evangelical Images*, an illustrated history of Catholicism that was published in Macao in 1610, by the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni.



ORIGINS OF THE ROYAL PATRONAGE

As early as the fifth century, wealthy laymen were called upon by the Catholic Church to help in the construction of churches and the establishment of other religious institutions. In return, they were offered several kinds of privileges. The Council of Trent publicly recognized this matter. Rights that could be bestowed upon patrons included the administration of ecclesiastical benefice, and the right to nominate candidates to offices such as bishop, parish priest, abbot, and so on. Christianity developed throughout Europe by means of this system of patronage,¹ and Portugal was no exception. Kings and nobles were patrons of many churches, chapels, and other religious institutions.

In the fifteenth century, the Pope extended Portuguese patronage overseas. When Europe began to expand, there was a tacit mutual agreement that Christian states had the right to possess the lands of heathens and infidels without regard for the native

peoples. Another doctrine that was accepted, at least by Portugal and Spain, was the Pope's right to assign temporal sovereignty over any lands not possessed by a Christian ruler. As early as 1454, Pope Nicholas V issued a bull granting the Portuguese title to the territories they were exploring along the African coast toward India. On May 4, 1493, Pope Alexander defined a line of demarcation running 100 leagues west of the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands, granting to Spain all the lands to the west of this line, and to Portugal all the lands to its east. On June 7, 1494, Spain and Portugal negotiated an agreement, the Treaty of Tordesillas, that moved the line 270 leagues further west. Actually the demarcation line left to Portugal the only route to India that was feasible at the time,² and the treaty of 1529 that determined ownership of the Moluccas delimited the Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence. Portugal asserted an exclusive right to the East, and only by a geographical fiction were the Philippines permitted to fall within the Spanish zone. The Portuguese, moreover, under several Papal bulls,

claimed control over the Church in the East, and objected to any poaching on their preserves.

The Pope's main concern was that the Catholic Church had now gained an advantage over its adversary, the Protestants, and that it was thus necessary to encourage the Portuguese to carry their Catholic faith overseas. So from beginning of the Portuguese expansion, the attitude of the Pope was very enthusiastic. It was the Order of Christ, established in Portugal in 1319 to replace the Order of the Knights Templar, then just recently suppressed, that received this right of patronage. As the administrators of the Order of Christ were members of the Portuguese royal family, the system of overseas patronage became known as the Royal Patronage (*Padroado Real*).³

In 1534, Goa in India was made a bishopric with jurisdiction over all Portuguese possessions between the Cape of Good Hope and China. The right of patronage for this See was given to the King of Portugal.⁴

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VICARS-APOSTOLIC

By the middle of sixteenth century, the "age of discoveries" of Spain and Portugal had already passed its peak, and the advantages gained by the Church through the *padroado* system had gradually begun to diminish. The first innovation to this system resulted from a suggestion made by the French Jesuit Alexandre Rhodes (1596-1660). He was assigned to the missions of the East Indies and inaugurated his missionary labours in 1624, meeting with great success in Cochinchina. In 1627 he proceeded to Tonkin where, within three years, he converted 6000 persons, including several bonzes. When in 1630 persecution forced him to leave the region, these new converts continued the work of evangelisation.⁵ After an extensive tour of the East, Rhodes came to the conclusion that the Church could not depend altogether on the decadent *padroado* diocese. He suggested that the Holy See should appoint titular bishops, or Vicars-Apostolic, that would be sent directly by Rome and would be independent of Lisbon.⁶

The Sacred College of the Propaganda Fide was established in Rome on January 6, 1622. It was confirmed by the bull *Inscrutabili Divinae* on June 22 of the same year. The original College consisted of thirteen cardinals, two prelates, and a secretary. The two chief factors that

made this kind of missionary organization necessary were the lack of unity in mission methodology among the various religious orders, and the excessive control that Spain and Portugal were then exercising over the administration of the missions under the terms of the patronage. There was need for a firm and uniform organization within the Holy See itself to direct missionary work. Pope Pius V had earlier attempted to place the immediate direction of missionary activity more firmly in the hands of the Church, but his attempts had failed. The founding of the Propaganda was an important step in wresting control of the missions from Spain and Portugal.⁷ Through a study of the evangelical conditions overseas, the Propaganda was able to accumulate a wealth of knowledge on missionary affairs that enabled it to draw up the fundamental principles destined to govern all future missionary activity. The weaknesses and faults revealed by this study included an insufficient number of missionaries, their ignorance of native languages and cultures, the mercantile rather than missionary interests of many of them, the discord and conflict between the religious Orders, and an unwillingness to adapt to indigenous cultural values. Newly aware of these obstacles, the Propaganda Fide set to work to improve the Church's evangelical methods, to increase the supply of missionaries, and to foster the development of a native clergy.⁸

In 1658 the Holy See appointed the first two Vicars-Apostolic, Francis Pallu, Bishop of Heliopolis, and Peter De La Motte Lambert, Bishop of Verith. They were charged with the task of administering missions not only in Tonkin and Cochinchina, but also in all adjoining territories. One of their priorities was to cultivate a native clergy as soon as possible. Tonkin and Cochinchina had both been part of the *padroado*: Tonkin had been under the jurisdiction of the Macao diocese, but was taken over by the Propaganda in 1696, as was Cochinchina. In 1660, the Holy See appointed the third Vicar-Apostolic, Ignatius Cotelendi, to be the bishop of Nanjing, but Cotelendi died in Siam before ever entering China. Francis Pallu, however, did visit Fujian province several months before his death in 1684.⁹

The position of Vicar-Apostolic carried with it, in cases such as these, the same episcopal powers as a bishop, for the holder of the office was made titular bishop of a vacant See. However, while a bishop would rule in his own name, the Vicar-Apostolic ruled in the name of Pope, and the Holy See often restricted his powers. Vicars-Apostolic were under the immediate jurisdiction of the

ENCONTRO DE CULTURAS / Religião

Pope, who usually acted through the Propaganda. They were not subject to control by Portugal nor by the Primate of Portuguese India, the Archbishop of Goa.¹⁰ This was in order to avoid trouble with the Portuguese Crown, which still had the right to create ordinary bishoprics. In 1659, an unusual instruction from Propaganda Fide to three new Vicars-Apostolic in Tonkin and Cochinchina virtually mandated flexibility on the whole issue of adapting Christianity to local Chinese customs. The instruction read as follows:

“Do not try to persuade the Chinese to change their rites, their customs, their ways, as long as these are not openly opposed to religion and good morals; what would be sillier than to import France, Spain, Italy, or any other country of Europe into China? Don’t import these, but build faith. The faith does not reject or crush the rites and customs of any race, as long as these are not evil. Rather, it wants to preserve them.

Generally speaking, men prize and love their own ways, and especially their own nation more than others. That is the way they are built. There is no more effective cause of hatred and estrangement than to change a country’s customs, especially those people have been used to them from time immemorial. This is particularly true if, in place of the customs that have been suppressed, you substitute the practice of your own country. Do not disdain Chinese ways because they are different from European ways. Rather, do everything you can to get used to them.”¹¹

THE ATTITUDE OF THE PORTUGUESE

From the beginning, the Portuguese government was against the establishment of the system of Vicars-Apostolic. Portugal was of the opinion that since the *padroado* diocese had been created and their boundaries marked through a series of Papal bulls, any changes to these diocese would have to be agreed upon through mutual consultation. Furthermore, according to Portuguese officials, the Vicars-Apostolic would be welcome in territories not yet assigned to *padroado* diocese, but once within diocesan boundaries, they would automatically come under the jurisdiction of the diocese. King Pedro II sent a diplomatic delegation to Rome to negotiate this issue. In September of 1680, after intensive study and discussion, the Sacred College reached the following conclusions: (1) no Papal bulls had ever granted the Portuguese Crown jurisdiction over the development

of Christianity in all Asia; rather, they had simply guaranteed the king’s right to exercise patronage in the churches he sponsored; (2) in previous times, the Popes had required missionaries in Asia to first apply for licences from the Portuguese Crown, but since the Spain, Holland, France and other countries had settlements in Asia also, Urban VII had repealed this policy; (3) the Holy See did not accept the claim that the King could administer Christian churches in pagan countries that were beyond his control; (4) the power of Portuguese Archbishop in Goa would not be decreased by the Pope sending Vicars-Apostolic to Asia; and (5) the authority of the Portuguese Crown in East Asia would not be diminished by the sending of Vicars-Apostolic to the region.¹²

However, the Portuguese government did not abandon its original stand. In November of 1689, King Pedro II sent a letter to the Pope in which he requested permission to set up two episcopate diocese in Beijing and Nanjing, in addition to the one already in existence in Macao, and retain for the Portuguese Crown the right of presentation. The Propaganda did not agree this arrangement, but Pope Alexander VIII conceded to Portugal the privilege of fixing the limits of these diocese. This settlement seem to leave no room in China for the Vicars-Apostolic, for the Portuguese divided practically all China among their three bishoprics. The question soon arose as to who had jurisdiction over Guangdong and Guangxi—the Vicar-Apostolic or the Bishop of Macao—and this question was not resolved for several years.

In 1696 the Pope again asserted himself against the Portuguese. He limited the diocese of Nanjing, Beijing, and Macao to two or three provinces each, and created eight Vicariates-Apostolic, apportioning among them Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Huguang, Shanxi and Sha’anxi. In three or four of these provinces there was as yet little or no missionary work being done.¹³ In creating these vicariates, Rome organized a level of episcopal supervision that would be sufficient for as many Christians as China was to have for many years to come. The reason given for this act was that the edict issued by Emperor Kangxi in 1692, granting tolerance towards Christianity, had so increased the opportunity for missions that more adequate ecclesiastical supervision would be required than that which was afforded by the existing three dioceses. The King of Portugal demurred, but in vain. The Vicars-Apostolic continued to be sent, and continued to be subject to

direct control from Rome. They were not subject to the Portuguese Crown or to the Primate of Portuguese India.¹⁴

THE MISSION OF DE TOURNON, MEZZABARBA AND PORTUGUESE PATRONAGE

On November 20, 1704, the Holy See in Rome issued a decree condemning the Chinese Rites. To promulgate this decree in China, the Pope had decided to send a special papal legate.¹⁵ It was also hoped that on his way to China via India, the legate would settle the related issue of the “Malabar Rites.”

Late in 1701 Charles Maillard de Tournon was given the title of Patriarch of Antioch, and a few months later was appointed as *legatus a latere* (ambassador plenipotentiary) to the East Indies and China. Although Portugal was notified of this appointment, the approval of the Crown was not obtained. The Holy See allowed de Tournon to sail on a French ship. Considering the prestige of Portugal in both India and China, this could only mean trouble. In India, the Legate stopped at Pondicherry—a French post—and there attempted to settle the issue of the Malabar rites.¹⁶

During the long period of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, not only was there an intensification of the Chinese Rites controversy, but a somewhat similar dispute had arisen in India over the Jesuits’ attitude toward what were known as the “Malabar rites.”

The Holy See wished to establish more direct relations with the growing Christian communities in the East and to supervise more carefully the work of the clergy and the Vicars-Apostolic in that vast region. In so doing, however, Rome would need not only to satisfy the missionaries and native Christians in these regions, but also to avoid offending European colonial powers, especially the Portuguese.¹⁷

The “Malabar rites” was the conventional term for certain customs practiced by the natives of south India, which the Jesuit missionaries allowed their neophytes to continue practicing after conversion. This policy of cultural accommodation was advocated by Father Roberto de Nobili and other missionaries, but was later prohibited by the Holy See.¹⁸

Less than eight months after his arrival in India, de Tournon considered himself justified in issuing a

decree of vital import to the whole of the Christians of India. It consisted of sixteen articles concerning customs then practiced, or supposedly practiced, by neophytes in Madura and the Karnatic. The Legate condemned and prohibited these practices as defiling the purity of the faith and religion, and forbade the missionaries, on pain of heavy censures, to permit them any more.¹⁹

At the very beginning, the Legate was acknowledged and welcomed by Gaspar Alphonsus, Bishop of Mylapore. However, after the Legate published certain ecclesiastical censures against some missionaries in that diocese, he incurred the wrath of the Archbishop of Goa. Agostino da Annuniação issued a pastoral denouncing him on May 12, 1704. This edict was later publicized in the churches of towns or regions in Madraspatam and Pondicherry, and perhaps even elsewhere, and de Tournon’s decree was declared invalid. The censured clergy were allowed to administer the sacraments. Each and every person, ecclesiastic and lay alike, was instructed not to obey Monsignor de Tournon, and to disregard his censures. Moreover, the Legate, in a reversal of the penalties inflicted by canonical sanctions, was forbidden the free exercise of his jurisdiction.²⁰

Things did not go much better in China. In August, 1706, Emperor Kangxi ordered the Legate to prepare for an early return to Europe. In December of that year, the Emperor issued an edict decreeing that all missionaries in China would have to be examined by him and to obtain a certificate of imperial approval—a certificate that would be granted only to those who agreed to abide by the missionary practices of Matteo Ricci. When the Legate learned of this edict he almost immediately (on February 7, 1707) published, at Nanjing, a decree of his own, which insisted on the Papal decision of November 1704. He threatened those who disobeyed with excommunication—an even severer penalty than that stipulated in the original Papal decree. In June of 1707, the Imperial Court delivered the Legate into the hands of the Portuguese civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Macao.²¹

Meanwhile, on January 1, 1707, Pope Clement XI had written officially to the mission in India, supporting the censures that de Tournon had imposed in Mylapore and declaring invalid the actions of the Archbishop of Goa.²²

ENCONTRO DE CULTURAS / Religião

The Legate was kept under a kind of house arrest by soldiers sent by the governor of Macao, Diogo de Pinho Teixeira.²³ The bishop of Macao, João de Casal, at the direction of the Archbishop of Goa, Agostino da Annuniação, issued a pastoral forbidding the recognition of the Legate's power, and prohibiting him from exercising any authority in his Diocese of Macao. He furthermore forbade his subjects to obey him. Moreover, Lourenço Gomes, the Vicar General in Macao, imposed an interdict and other ecclesiastical penalties upon the Macao community of the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine,²⁴ because they had extended an honourable welcome to the Legate. In his turn, the Legate excommunicated the Bishop and some of Portuguese clergy and civil officials, and declared that anyone—be they of high status or low, laymen or ecclesiastics, secular or religious clergy of any Order—who had attended any of the meetings or assemblies against the authority of the Holy See would be subject to ecclesiastical penalties. De Tournon also issued an interdict against the Jesuit College and Cloister at Macao.

On August, 1, 1707, the Pope elevated de Tournon to the Cardinalate. But the bearers of the biretta (the ecclesiastical vestment worn by a cardinal) did not reach Macao until early in 1710, and in any case de Tournon did not long survive his investiture even with the insignia of his newfound dignity. By June 8th of that year he was dead.²⁵ Rome had been pressuring Lisbon on behalf of its Legate, but to no avail. On March 15, 1711, Pope Clement XI issued a papal brief decrying the treatment of de Tournon at the hands of the Bishop of Macao, and confirming de Tournon's censures against both prelates. The Pope declared all decrees against the person or dignity of Apostolic Legate completely null and void. On October 14, 1711, after the news of de Tournon's death reached Rome, the Pope delivered an allocution at a memorial service for his Legate in St. Peter's Basilica. On September 17, 1712, the Pope wrote a brief letter to the Bishop of Mylapore stating that de Tournon's decree regarding the Malabar Rites was still effect.²⁶

Rome was preparing to take still more vigorous action. In March, 1715, Pope Clement XI issued the bull *Ex illa die*. This reaffirmed the prohibitions outlined in the decree of 1704, and upheld de Tournon's edict of 1707.²⁷ Early in 1716, the Pope also wrote to the king of Portugal arguing that the practice of the Chinese Rites were dangerously

superstitious, and imploring the King to support the Holy See's efforts to halt the practice of these rites by Christians. The letter pleaded, "We are well aware of the illustrious services rendered the Catholic religion by the Kings of Portugal" and "please support us energetically with your royal authority." Obviously, Rome changed its attitude and sought the cooperation rather than the opposition of the Portuguese Crown in the religious affairs of the Far East.²⁸

In May, 1719, Jean Ambrose Charles Mezzabarba was given the title of Patriarch of Alexandria and Visitor Apostolic, and departed Rome. This time the mission gained the full consent of Portugal, as the King recognized in it an opportunity to safeguard what he deemed his rights by placing certain restrictions on Mezzabarba's powers. The Legate sailed from Lisbon in March, 1720, and King of Portugal and the Senate of Macao bore his expenses. In the meantime (1716), the Pope, in appointing a new Archbishop of Goa, had limited the jurisdiction of that See in a way which he hoped would leave no doubt as to the place and the authority of the Vicar-Apostolic. Mezzabarba arrived in Macao late in September, 1720, and he was received by the Portuguese authorities with every honour.²⁹

On the last day of 1720, after meeting the wary Emperor Kangxi, Mezzabarba put off as long as possible the delivery of the actual text of *Ex illa die* to the Emperor. When the Emperor finally received and reviewed the text, he was extremely angry. After some time Mezzabarba presented to the Emperor some concessions regarding the terms of the *Ex illa die* that he was authorized to make, which became known as the "Eight Permissions;" he hoped these would mollify some of the Emperor's concerns, but Kangxi was not at all satisfied.

At last, on July 11, 1742, Pope Benedict XIV issued the Papal constitution *Ex quo singulari*, which put an end to the Chinese Rites controversy. The constitution confirmed the bull *Ex illa die*,³⁰ annulled Mezzabarba's eight permissions, and ordered all missionaries who disobeyed to be returned to Europe for punishment.

CONCLUSION

Royal patronage was a kind of church-state relationship in which the state played an active role

CULTURAL ENCOUNTER / Religion

in the administration and support of the Catholic Church. It developed rapidly in the early stages of the Portuguese and Spanish colonial empires, when the Holy See used it as a powerful method for expanding evangelical activities. However, with the passage of time, the Holy See began to feel that king's power interfered with the internal affairs of the Church, especially in the question of nominations to the episcopacy. The creation of the system of Vicars-Apostolic was the way the Church tried to change this state of affairs. This led to the creation of two kinds of diocese in China, which threw Church administration into confusion. At the same time, however, the Holy See sought the cooperation

and support of the Portuguese king on the issue of the Chinese Rites controversy. This contradictory relationship between the Portuguese Crown and the Holy See determined the very complicated circumstances that informed the evangelical missions in China. Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the process of naturalizing the Chinese Catholic Church was delayed and the cultivation of native clergy ignored. It should also be noted, however, that most of the Western missionaries in the late Ming and early Qing era in China were not influenced by the *padroado*; their work formed an important part of the cultural exchange between East and West. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 1114.
- 2 R.S. Whiteway, *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India, 1497-1550* (Westminster, 1899), 441.
- 3 Fang Hao, *Historical Intercourse between East and West* (Hunan, 1987), 655.
- 4 C.W. Allen, *Jesuit at the Court of Peking* (Shanghai, n.d.), 171.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 173.
- 6 Paschal Elia, *The Catholic Missions in China: A Short Sketch of the History of the Catholic Church in China from the Earliest Records to Our Own Days* (Shanghai, 1934), 31.
- 7 K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York, 1929), 93.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 9 Allen, 283.
- 10 Chou Jing-Lan, *History of Diplomatic Relations between China and Portugal* (Beijing, 1996), 171.
- 11 Ray R. Noll, ed., *100 Roman Documents concerning the Chinese Rites Controversy* (San Francisco, 1992), 6-7.
- 12 Anders Ljungstedt, *A historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China; and Roman Catholic church and Mission to China* (Beijing, 1996), 232.
- 13 Stanislas Rou Guang, *History of Apostolic Nuncios to China* (Taipei, 1983), 164.
- 14 Gu Wei-min, *Historical Relationship between China and the Holy See* (Orient Press, 2000), 44-45.
- 15 Fang Hao, *Historical Characters in the History of the Catholic Church in China* (Beijing, 1981), vol. 2, 317.
- 16 F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York, 1983), 860-861.
- 17 Fang Hao, *Historical Characters*, Vol. 2, 284.
- 18 Cross, 861.
- 19 Noll, 24.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 21 Latourette, 93.
- 22 Fang Hao, *Historical Characters*, 324.
- 23 Noll, 25.
- 24 Fang Hao, *Historical Characters*, Vol. 2, 325.
- 25 *Ibid.*, Vol 2, 320.
- 26 *Ibid.*, Vol.2, 326.
- 27 Noll, 41.
- 28 Ljungstedt, 84.
- 29 Gu, 44-45.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 81.

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