

[Received in Paris May 18, 1838]

[December 9, 1836]

Mr. Director of the Seminary of the Foreign Missions of Paris.

Sir and very dear colleague,

I had the honor to send you last April the story of my entry into Korea with some notes on this country; I suppose that you have received it and I move on to the knowledge that I have been able to gather on the origin and the state of the Christian Religion.

About fifty years ago a Korean scholar, browsing through some works composed in Chinese by Fr. Mathew Ricci, observed in the editor's remarks that the doctrine of Ly Mato (Chinese name of Fr. Ricci) their author was true and established on unshakable foundations. He communicated this news to some of his friends and resolved to inquire; on this subject he sent one of his friends, also named Ly (Yi in Korean), to Peking with the king's ambassadors. He entered the Church of the French Jesuits, then governed by the French Lazarists. Fr. Gueslin received him, made him an apology for the Christian religion, made him savor it and set him on fire, baptized him under the name of Peter, gave him a collection of Christian books and sent him back to his homeland, recommending that he announce this doctrine alone, holy, salutary and absolutely necessary for men not to perish and suffer eternally; and then come back to tell of the fruits that this divine seed would have produced.

Back in his homeland, Peter explained to his friends the instructions he had received in Peking, and communicated to them the Christian books he had brought. A large number savored the holy truths they contained and embraced the Christian Religion. They learned, either by reading Christian books, or by the relations of Peter Yi, that there were two classes of Christians in the church, the teaching church and the listening church. They imagined that they could themselves make this distinction among themselves; they elected a bishop and at least three priests. 6 years later they returned to Beijing, told about this marvellous organization and the progress of the divine seed in Korea. They were told to abolish this organization as soon as they returned. They asked for a Missionary.

It was the time when France, in the throes of the fury of the Revolution, could no longer provide for the maintenance of its Missions. Fr. Gueslin could not therefore second their wishes, addressed himself to Bishop de Peking and asked him to send them a Missionary. The prelate acceded to the requests of Fr. Gueslin but on condition that this new Mission belonged to him by right. About 45 years ago he sent a Chinese priest from Kiang Nang named James Zhou. This missionary spent a year studying the Korean language and then began to exercise the holy ministry. In the first or second year, the king learned that a foreigner, who was a minister of the Christian religion, had entered his kingdom. He summoned 3 scholars whom he suspected to be the authors of his introduction. He put various questions to them on the Christian religion and sent them away without having shown any hostile intention toward the Religion. Some time later he learned that these 3 scholars had misled him, he called them again to a secluded place and had them put to death. It is said that he was one of the most learned kings who reigned in Korea, he had read a few Christian books; he was struck by the truth of Our Holy Religion, but he did not have enough courage to embrace it.

However, a wealthy woman who wished to become a Christian, fearing for Father Zhou's fate, prepared for him a less dangerous asylum in her apartments. In Korea as in China, no foreigner can enter the interior apartments. She was a strong woman, but little educated in our morals. She had a husband, unfaithful like her then, but who did not share her feelings. She dared not treat with him so secret and so important a matter as that of hiding Father Zhou at home. A pernicious custom of the great is to have at least one concubine, without any advice from the Father, she gave a concubine to her husband and sent him away

from the city to a country house. Then she made Father Zhou come to her house. When he learned of this woman's fault, he reprimanded her curtly, it is said. Why didn't this woman call her husband back? Undoubtedly Father Zhou's case was very difficult. It seems that times were even more difficult than they are today.

Father Zhou was only able to go out in two or three places during the entire space of 6 years that he lived in Korea. Christians could only approach him in case of extreme necessity, it is said. However, the king died and the administration of the kingdom fell into the hands of his mother. The knowledge of Christian truths had made religion at least respectable to him; his mother, who could not conceive truths she hated, began to take steps to destroy the Religion if she could. She ordered all the Christians to be arrested and put to all sorts of questions and tortured until they had declared all that they suspected they knew relative to the Christian Religion. Time does not allow me to explain to you the various tortures that are subjected to in Korea. Father Zhou, touched with compassion on their fate, realizing that there was no way of remaining hidden for long, was himself delivered or had to deliver himself into the hands of his future executioners. All Christians of adult age were arrested and tortured. The confessors of the faith and the apostates who had had a special part in the propagation of the faith were massacred, the other apostates condemned to perpetual exile. Father Zhou, two sticks stuck in his ears and crossed over his head, was led about two miles from Seoul, capital of the kingdom, between two lines of soldiers armed with large cutlasses. Arrived at the place of execution, one of these executioners cut off his head. I inquired what had been done with his body. Christians don't know that.

I have made many inquiries about what happened at the death and after the death of the Christians massacred in Korea. Here are the only facts that have been reported to me as miraculous. A man named Lawrence Pak, a native of Houangmousil village in the province of Chungcheong-do, was arrested with the other Christians among his neighbors and sentenced to be put under the rod. He suffered this ordeal without any complaint, encouraging Christians to generously confess the name of Jesus Christ. While the satellites and the mandarin sought by their exhortations and their threats to make them apostatize, Lawrence did not cease reminding them of the eternal truths and encouraging them to persevere faithfully to the end. The mandarin, irritated by Lawrence's conduct, condemned him to perish under the rod. He had received a hundred blows and the executioners believed him to be dead. Some time later he appeared in as good health as if he had received no blow. The satellites admiring this miraculous event, "I cannot perish under the rods, says Lawrence, but you can strangle me." We do not know of any miracle performed after his death by his intercession or thanks to him.

Satellites appointed to guard the corpse of a man named Paul Yi, put to death for the faith, seeing the grave illuminated during the night, went to warn his wife and said to her: "Do not be saddened by the death of your husband, certainly his fate is happy; we saw his grave all shining with light." The certainty of these facts rests only on the testimony of a single man. He says in his report that three men witnessed the events that happened at the death of Laurent Pac; but it is not known whether these witnesses were Christians or pagans. I couldn't find anyone who saw them, knew them, or even heard their names. The same and only author speaks only of the satellites as witnesses of the event operated at the tomb of Paul Yi. However, these events must have taken place only 36 or 37 years ago and there are Christians of all ages here.

My very dear Lord of Capsus believed that something miraculous had happened when a Christian woman named Columba died. I do not know who is the author of the Korean history that my late dear Lord had read, but I learned here that it contained a double error in the account of this single fact. [It is M. Maubant himself who is mistaken in attributing these errors to Mgr Bruguière. See *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* t.9 or the

report *** by Mgr Bruguière.] The author places Columba among the virgins. Now it is an obvious fact that this woman named Colomba, who he says gave hospitality to Father Zhou and who indeed gave it to him, was the wife of a Gentile and the mother of at least two children, a son and a daughter. This year I heard the confession of the wife of her son. He further reports that milk or a milk-like liquor was seen to flow from her body after her death. The Christians told me that Columba had generously given her life for the love of Jesus Christ, but that no miracles had been noticed at her death. It is said that out of the head or body of a virgin beheaded for faith came milk or a milk-like liquor. This virgin was called Agatha.

Here, gentlemen and very dear colleagues, is the summary of the information that I was able to receive on the origin and the state of the Religion in Korea until the time of the first persecution in fact. This persecution made a deep wound to the Religion, but it did not destroy it. Almost all the apostates had denied their faith only through fear or horror of torment. In the presence of the persecutors they denied the name of Jesus and in their private life, except in cases of danger, they never ceased to invoke him and to fulfil their duties as Christians to which they were accustomed before apostatizing. As soon as they could, they communicated with the children of the martyrs and worked together to repair the disasters of the persecution and to renew the Christian Religion.

The printing of Korean script in Korea is generally forbidden under severe penalties, and it is almost of no use. However, it was in Korean script that the catechisms or abridgements of Christian doctrine had to be disseminated again. So they began to write and succeeded in spreading in each house of the faithful more books than are found in the houses of the old Christians of Europe, good Christians nevertheless. It is with Korea as many Irish people once told me it was with Ireland. The Christians of Korea, although I think, lovers of ecclesiastical ceremonies, cannot compare the most beautiful of those to the most meager instruction. When they could, they chose a group of catechists, each to teach people in his region to profess the Christian Religion, to practice the commandments of God and of the Church, and to watch over the way in which Christians observed them, in addition to explaining the doctrine and make proselytes.

This is in a few words the way in which they repaired the losses of persecution, renewed the Religion and reached the number where they were 7 or 8 years ago when they asked the Sovereign Pontiff to send them a missionary. At this same time, the present king's father, ruling for his naturally inept father, ordered the arrest of all Christians in the southernmost province called Jeolla-do. It is said that 400 of them were arrested. Only 7 had the happiness of confessing the faith and the others apostatized and were set free. Two of the confessors died in prison, the other five are still suffering there. Three years ago, under the government of the inept imbecile king who had returned to possession of all his royal prerogatives except the ability to assert them, (he died in his imbecilic ineptitude), 11 Christians were arrested in the province of Gyeonggi-do. 8 apostatized and were set free. One of the three confessors of the faith died in prison; another, exhausted for several months under the cangue, feels his end near. This year in two provinces two fake catechumens delivered into the hands of satellites, one in Sehoul capital of the kingdom 3 Christians and 5 catechumens, the other in Oniang, canton of the province of Chungcheong-do, all the Christians of a village gathered at night to hear the local catechist explain to them pro posse Christian doctrine; the satellites arrested only two of them, whom they transferred to the Mandarin of I***. One of the catechumens arrested at Sehoul requested and received baptism in prison and confessed his faith in torments with three Christian companions. The persecutor asked them who had taught them the Christian doctrine, if they had discovered the whole truth, I had confessed the 3 Christians. If they had discovered the whole truth, I might already

be with the good God and Saints in paradise; but it is to be hoped that what is deferred is not lost.

When the arrest of these Christian women and catechumens was announced to the first of the 3 regents of the kingdom during the king's minority, at first he kept a gloomy silence; then: "They formerly put to death, he answered, a great number of Christians and it did not result from it any advantage for the royal family; go, he added to the mandarin who brought him this news, arrange this matter for the best"; the other two colleagues gave the same answer. From that moment on, the Christian captives were no longer tortured or questioned, although they are kept in prisons. The mandarins or the regents brought back on different occasions four unbaptized women who had denied the faith to solicit the 4 faithful Christians to apostatize. Fortunately the voice of grace was louder than that of the demon. I had also heard the confession of one of the Christians arrested in Onyang, I do not know the other. Both persevered in faith.

The Mandarin of Onyang, indignant at the conduct of the unfortunate man who had brought the Christians to him, had him called, it is said, and put him under the rod for having denounced the Christians: "How," he said, "wretch, you dare usurp the authority of the magistrates! eh, for the sole motive of black malice, you are going to disturb the peaceful inhabitants and faithful *** subjects of the prince!" Some add that after this reprimand he was condemned to exile. I do believe that Christians, especially the Christians of Oniang and the relatives of the captives, will have had difficulty in pushing away from their hearts thoughts of satisfaction about the misfortune of others.

Despite this kind of apparent tolerance, it is not here like in the infidel countries I have known. Our Christians, heirs to the habits contracted at the birth of the Christian Religion in their countries, have not ceased to hide themselves and to be really obliged to hide themselves, to avoid participating in the superstitions and idolatries of the pagans. The majority and, I believe, the best part, have taken refuge among the mountains in places that no one has yet wanted to live in because of their sterility. When they know or suspect that the pagans know them, they dispose of their funds as quickly as possible, those who have them and who find buyers. Otherwise they abandon everything and flee to another place where they think they can spend some time in safety or with less danger.

These sorts of over-repeated emigrations have already reduced a large number of them, not only to eating their bread by the sweat of their brow, but to a state of misery below that of begging. I cannot, gentlemen and very dear colleagues, give you a true idea of the poverty of the poor in Korea. I've seen in the dead of winter, I guess ten or twelve degrees of cold, children almost as naked as worms, black with cold, moaning at the door of the infidels. Without having the virtue of the Saints that the Church invites us to imitate, ah, I would have been happy to dress them. It was not possible for me. The roots of wild grasses and then the roots of herbs uprooted in the forests, here, with clear water, is all the substance on which too many of our Christians must feed at certain unfortunate times, or die. Their bed is the floor of their heated apartment as best they can. House floors in Korea are like flattened kiln roofs.

Apart from the non-observance of the divine commandments and the difficulty in observing them, here, gentlemen, is the greatest of my crosses; the consideration of the miseries of our Christians. Besides Sehoul, where I lived for several months, I visited 16 or 17 Christian communities in the provinces of Gyeonggi-do and Chungcheong-do. I baptized 213 adults and 150 children, performed the baptismal ceremonies of 110 adults and 22 children. I heard at least 630 confessions and blessed or rehabilitated 85 marriages, administered 8 or 9 dying. According to the precautions my guides took to show me the place where Koreans going to or from China are examined, according to what I was able to observe for myself, according to more extensive reports made to me by the Christians who formerly accompanied the Korean ambassadors to Peking, I could not help believing in the reality of the

danger that any foreigner who wishes to enter Korea by this route must run. Accordingly I sent in the month October last, ** with the instructions that I believed suitable, 3 men to examine the coasts of Korea nearest to the coasts of Manchuria.

Here is the report they gave me on the first days of September: "We went to the mouth of the river called Yalu-gang; this river separates Korea from Manchuria, we stopped at the sight of the Kouentonnoises(?) boats which came to fish on our coasts. At the mouth of this river on the right bank, towards Korea, is a beach or bay that the flow of the sea covers and that the ebb leaves furrowed in water trenches and sandbanks. At the entrance of this bay is a small island inhabited in summer by a Korean mandarin. From this island to the bottom of the bay, there are 30 li (about 3 leagues). It is separated from the river by a chain of rocks. From these rocks to the other side there are 10 li (a league). Further towards the coast of Korea, 5 or 6 li away, is an uninhabited rock. The Kouentonnois at high tide come to fish in this bay and some spend the night at the uninhabited rock. Koreans are forbidden to communicate with them. We are told that these fishermen are pirates. This is why we cannot promise to approach their coasts, but if honest Kouentonnoises boats can go to the place where these fishermen come from, it will not be difficult to communicate by this way.

I am sending these instructions to M. Chastan and Joseph Ouang. Everything is arranged on the Korean side. If they can find brave and faithful Kouentonnois who can come to the shores of Korea, next year we will communicate by sea. I am sending 4 men to Pienmen to lead 3 Korean students to introduce and accompany M. Chastan into Korea. After him, we will still find the location of a third, a fourth perhaps will also be able to find its place. But today I cannot promise accommodation for a fifth. A little patience and, over time, the help of your prayers, Divine Providence will perhaps open a breach for us to bring in others.

I promised in the April letter to give you more information regarding the Japanese. I have not yet been able to reach the southern province which faces Japan. I only know that there are 300 Japanese in Korea who trade several times a month with Koreans.

I pray to God for all of you and for the members of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. I particularly recommend myself and I also recommend all our dear Christians to your prayers and Holy Sacrifices and united with you in the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

I have the honor to be yours with the deepest respect and the most cordial attachment

Gentlemen and very dear Confreres
Your most humble and obedient servant
Maubant Petrus Philibertus miss. Korea