Also See:

<https://davidalton.net/2014/07/24/british-parliament-debates-the-united-nations-commission-of-inquiry-report-into-crimes-against-humanity-in-north-korea/>

<https://www.facebook.com/LordAltonofLiverpool?ref=hl>

**Reuters report on Christianity in North Korea**

*In North Korea, a church renovated, missionaries jailed*

Tue, Aug 12 22:30 PM BST

**By James Pearson**

**SEOUL (Reuters)** – Tucked between trees and paddy fields in a quiet suburb in the west of Pyongyang, Chilgol Church is one of four state-operated churches in the capital of a country that espouses freedom of religion but effectively bans it.

In recent months, the Protestant church has been renovated – its rusted iron roof replaced with new tiles, and its faded brown brick walls repainted yellow, according to a North Korean propaganda video. At the same time, North Korea has sentenced two foreign missionaries to hard labour and along the border with China, both countries have cracked down on religious groups.

**As Pope Francis visits South Korea this week in his first trip to Asia, religion in North Korea is under the spotlight.**

People who regularly travel to the North Korean capital describe its churches as showpieces for foreign residents and tourists. Many foreigners are invited to sit in front-row pews, they say, but are prohibited from mingling with a congregation hand-picked by the state.

North Korea’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion provided it does not undermine the state, but outside of a small handful of state-controlled places of worship, no open religious activity is allowed.

*“To be a Christian in North Korea is extremely dangerous, and many Christians who are discovered end up in the prison camps or, in some cases, executed,”* said Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which campaigns for religious freedom.

*“The regime demands absolute loyalty and devotion and sees religion as undermining this,”* he said.

North Korea turned down an invitation from the South Korean Catholic church for members of its state-run Korean Catholic Association to attend a papal mass next week in Seoul, citing the start of joint U.S.-South Korean military drills, due to begin on the same day.

A United Nations report earlier this year cited estimates that between 200,000 and 400,000 of North Korea’s 24 million people are Christians. The number is impossible to verify because most Christians cannot worship openly.

An overwhelming 99.7 percent of defectors from North Korea said in a survey late last year that there was no religious freedom in the country. Only 4.2 percent said they had seen a Bible when they lived there, said the survey of over eight thousand defectors by the South Korea-based Database Centre for North Korean Human Rights.

In May, the isolated country detained U.S. tourist Jeffrey Fowle for leaving a Bible in the toilet of a site visited by his tour group, and U.S. missionary Kenneth Bae is serving a 15 year hard labour sentence on charges of attempting to bring down the government.

Another missionary, South Korean Kim Jeong-wook, was sentenced to life with hard labour in June after a North Korean court found him guilty of espionage and setting up an underground church.
 **GRANDSON OF A PREACHER MAN**

Religion was once considered part of the North’s unification policy, with the strategy of trying to align with religious leaders in the South who were battling the country’s military rulers at the time. But the success of South Korean religious groups in helping to oust its own military dictatorship may have caused Pyongyang to treat its official relationship with religion more carefully.

***“Part of North Korea’s fear of Christianity stems from the successful challenge which Christians like Kim Dae-jung and Cardinal Stephen Kim made in ending the military dictatorship in South Korea,”* said Lord David Alton, chairman of the United Kingdom’s All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea.**
As head of the Korean Catholic Church, Cardinal Kim helped mobilise South Koreans against South Korea’s military dictatorship in the 1980s, alongside former President and democracy activist Kim Dae-jung, a fellow Roman Catholic.

*“With the imminent arrival of Pope Francis in Seoul, they (Pyongyang) will also be reflecting on the role which John Paul II played in ending Eastern European communism,”* Alton said.

However, North Korea’s founding president Kim Il Sung was the grandson of a Protestant priest and his mother, Kang Ban Sok, was a devout Christian whose first name came from an early Korean translation of the biblical name Peter.

The Chilgol Church was built in her honour, but sits 300 metres (yards) from a propaganda museum and statues dedicated to her as the revolutionary mother of the man who became father to the state.

As at any church, a softly-spoken vicar may shake hands and chat with visitors as they leave, but officials carefully scrutinise the church after services and count Bibles to make sure none have gone missing, regular visitors say.

In the 1980s, the North, under pressure to change with the deepening of economic problems and main ally China’s growing openness, began looking to foreign religious groups as a means to forge links with the outside world.

The government gave official status to religious groups and allowed the publication of the Bible, and in 1988 the main churches for the Catholic and Protestant faiths, Jangchung and Pongsu, were built in Pyongyang. The Chilgol Church and a Russian Orthodox church were set up later.

But there is no genuine religious freedom in North Korea, the U.S. State Department said in a report late last month. State media dismissed the report as an attempt by the United States to “tarnish its image”.

But fealty to the Kim family that has ruled North Korea for over half a century is paramount.

*“They have attempted to replace religion with a cultish dynastic ideology,” said Alton. “But by outlawing religious freedom they have denied their society an engine for social and economic change.”*

**(Additional reporting by Ju-min Park; Editing by Tony Munroe and Raju Gopalakrishnan)**

**As Pope Francis visits Korea the North Koreans send a missionary to a forced labour camp and according to a United Nations Report thousands of Christians suffer crimes against humanity.**

**Putting a new roof on Chilgo church in Pyongyang is a maldroit attempt by the North Korean regime to suggest that it respects Christian beliefs and religious freedom. Replacing a decaying rusted roof should be set alongside the sentencing of two missionaries to hard labour and the imprisonment of thousands of North Korean Christians in forced labour camps. A United Nations report says Pyongyang’s treatment of Christians constitutes crimes against humanity while a celebrated international law firm believes it amounts to genocide.**

***Chilgol is where Kim Jong Un’s great grandmother was an Elder and where she worshipped. It’s not Chilgol’s roof he should be replacing but policies which persecute Christians who have the same beliefs as his great grandmother.***

**As Pope Francis arrives in South Korea Kim Jong Un should announce an amnesty for imprisoned believers and commit his country to upholding Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees religious freedom. If he did so he would win universal approbation instead of condemnation.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBgySamj4KY>

<http://www.ncregister.com/site/article/land-of-vibrant-faith/>

**New Pilgrimage
Korean Bishops Embark on Pilgrimage dedicated to Martyrs**

**Year of Faith Event Commemorates Those Who Gave Their Lives for the Gospel**

Followed by The Coming of Christianity To Korea – also see “Building Bridges” (Lion, 2013)

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Building-Bridges-There-North-Korea/dp/0745955983/ref=sr\_1\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1379593788&sr=1-1&keywords=building+bridges+david+alton](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Building-Bridges-There-North-Korea/dp/0745955983/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1379593788&sr=1-1&keywords=building+bridges+david+alton)
[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Building-Bridges-ebook/dp/B00CYBNG0O/ref=tmm\_kin\_title\_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1379593788&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Building-Bridges-ebook/dp/B00CYBNG0O/ref%3Dtmm_kin_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1379593788&sr=1-1)

*SEOUL, September 17, 2013 (Zenit.org) – Last Tuesday, Korean Bishops embarked, for the first time, a pilgrimage on foot to the Martyrs’ Shrine in Seoul, South Korea. The Year of Faith event marked the Month of Martyrs celebrated in September to commemorate those who gave their life for the Gospel.*


The Feast of the Korean Martyrs is celebrated on September 20th and commemorates 103 Christians killed during persecutions in the country that went on from 1839-1867. According to Fides News Agency, the Korean Bishops embarking on the pilgrimage were accompanied by over 300 priests, religious, and lay people who reflected on the spirit of martyrdom.

The pilgrimage began with the opening prayer in the chapel at the Songsin Theological Campus, The Catholic University of Korea, in which some pieces of the remains of Saint Andrew Kim Dae-gon (1821-1846) are preserved, the first Korean priest and martyr, canonized by John Paul II in 1984.

The Bishops made a pilgrimage to martyrs’ shrines, following this itinerary: site of the Left Podo-Cheong – police headquarter, execution site of Korean martyrs; the Myeongdong Cathedral, in whose crypt there are the relics of 9 martyrs; Seosomun Martyrs’ Shrine, built on the site where 44 out of the 103 Korean martyrs, many Servants of God and other Catholic martyrs in the earlier Church in Korea sacrificed their lives; Danggogae Martyrs’ Shrine where 10 Korean Catholics were martyred on this hill; Saenamteo Martyrs’ Shrine, where 11 priests were killed; Jeoldusan Martyrs’ Shrine, place of martyrdom during the Byeong-in persecution in 1866. In the underground sepulchre of the church there are the relics of 28 Martyrs, a museum and a large outdoor statue of Saint AndrewKim Dae-geon.

(2) Text of JPII Homily at Canonisation
Mass for the canonization of Korean martyrs, Homily of John Paul II, 6 May 1984

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,
SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND
(MAY 2-11, 1984)

MASS FOR THE CANONIZATION OF KOREAN MARTYRS

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Youido Place – Seoul
Sunday, 6 May 1984

“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory”? (Luc. 24, 26)

1. These words, taken from today’s Gospel, were spoken by Jesus as he was going from Jerusalem to Emmaus in the company of two of his disciples. They did not recognize him, and as to an unknown person they described to him all that had happened in Jerusalem in these last days. They spoke of the Passion and death of Jesus on the Cross. They spoke of their own shattered hopes: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luc. 24, 21). These hopes were buriedwith the death of Jesus.

The two disciples were downhearted. Even though they had heard that the women and the Apostles, on the third day after his death, had failed to find the body of Jesus in the tomb, nevertheless they were completely unaware that he had been seen alive. The disciples did not know that at that precise moment they were actually looking at him, that they were walking in his company, that they were speaking with him. Indeed, their eyes were kept from recognizing him (Ibid. 24, 16).

2. Then Jesus began to explain to them, from Sacred Scripture, that it was precisely through suffering that the Messiah had to reach the glory of the Resurrection. The words alone however did not have the full effect. Even though their hearts were burning within them while they listened to this unknown person, nevertheless he still remained for them an unknown person. It was only during the evening meal, when he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them that “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (Ibid. 24, 31), but he then disappeared from their sight. Having recognized the Risen Lord, they became witnesses for all time of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Through them, through all the Apostles, through the men and women who were witnesses of the life and death of Jesus Christ, of his Gospel and Resurrection, the truth about him spread first to Jerusalem, next to all Judea, and then to other countries and peoples. It entered into the history of humanity.

3. The truth about Jesus Christ also reached Korean soil. It came by means of books brought from China. And in a most marvellous way, divine grace soon moved your scholarly ancestors first to an intellectual quest for the truth of God’s word and then to a living faith in the Risen Savior.

Yearning for an ever greater share in the Christian faith, your ancestors sent one of their own in 1784 to Peking, where he was baptized. From this good seed was born the first Christian community in Korea, a community unique in the history of the Church by reason of the fact that it was founded entirely by lay people. This fledgling Church, so young and yet so strong in faith, withstood wave after wave of fierce persecution. Thus, in less than a century, it could already boast of some ten thousand martyrs. The years 1791, 1801, 1827, 1839, 1846 and 1866 are forever signed with the holy blood of your Martyrs and engraved in your hearts.

Even though the Christians in the first half century had only two priests from China to assist them, and these only for a time, they deepened their unity in Christ through prayer and fraternal love; they disregarded social classes and encouraged religious vocations. And they sought ever closer union with their Bishop in Peking and the Pope in faraway Rome.

After years of pleading for more priests to be sent, your Christian ancestors welcomed the first French missionaries in 1836. Some of these, too, are numbered among the Martyrs who gave their lives for the sake of the Gospel, and who are being canonized today in this historic celebration.

The splendid flowering of the Church in Korea today is indeed the fruit of the heroic witness of the Martyrs. Even today, their undying spirit sustains the Christians in the Church of silence in the North of this tragically divided land.

4. Today then it is given to me, as the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter in that Apostolic See, to participate in the Jubilee of the Church on Korean soil. I have already spent several days in your midst as a pilgrim, fulfilling as Bishop and Pope my service to the sons and daughters of the beloved Korean nation. Today’s Liturgy constitutes the culminating point of this pastoral service.

For behold: through this Liturgy of Canonization the Blessed Korean Martyrs are inscribed in the list of the Saints of the Catholic Church. These are true sons and daughters of your nation, and they are joined by a number of missionaries from other lands. They are your ancestors, according to the flesh, language and culture. At the same time they are your fathers and mothers in the faith, a faith to which they bore witness by the shedding of their blood.

From the thirteen-year-old Peter Yu to the seventy-two-year-old Mark Chong, men and women, clergy and laity, rich and poor, ordinary people and nobles, many of them descendants of earlier unsung martyrs – they all gladly died for the sake of Christ.

Listen to the last words of Teresa Kwon, one of the early Martyrs: “Since the Lord of Heaven is the Father of all mankind and the Lord of all creation, how can you ask me to betray him? Even in this world anyone who betrays his own father or mother will not be forgiven. All the more may I never betray him who is the Father of us all”.

A generation later, Peter Yu’s father Augustine firmly declares: “Once having known God, I cannot possibly betray him”. Peter Cho goes even further and says: “Even supposing that one’s own father committed a crime, still one cannot disown him as no longer being one’s father. How then can I say that I do not know the heavenly Lord Father who is so good?”.

And what did the seventeen-year-old Agatha Yi say when she and her younger brother were falsely told that their parents had betrayed the faith? “Whether my parents betrayed or not is their affair. As for us, we cannot betray the Lord of heaven whom we have always served”. Hearing this, six other adult Christians freely delivered themselves to the magistrate to be martyred. Agatha, her parents and those other six are all being canonized today. In addition, there are countless other unknown, humble martyrs who no less faithfully and bravely served the Lord.

5. The Korean Martyrs ave borne witness to the crucified and risen Christ.Through the sacrifice of their own lives they have become like Christ in a very special way. The words of Saint Paul the Apostle could truly have been spoken by them: We are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies . . . We are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh”.

The death of the martyrs is similar to the death of Christ on the Cross, because like his, theirs has become the beginning of new life. This new life was manifested not only in themselves – in those who underwent death for Christ – but it was alsoextended to others. It became the leaven of the Church as the living community of disciples and witnesses to Jesus Christ. “The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians”: this phrase from the first centuries of Christianity is confirmed before our eyes.

Today the Church on Korean soil desires in a solemn way to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the gift of the Redemption. It is of this gift that Saint Peter writes: “You were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ”. To this lofty price, to this price of the Redemption, your Church desires, on the basis of the witness of the Korean Martyrs, to add an enduring witness of faith, hope and charity.

Through this witness may Jesus Christ be ever more widely known in your land: the crucified and risen Christ. Christ, the Way and the Truth and the Life. Christ, true God: the Son of the living God. Christ, true man: the Son of the Virgin Mary.

Once at Emmaus two disciples recognized Christ “in the breaking of the bread”. On Korean soil may ever new disciples recognize him in the Eucharist. Receive his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine, and may he the Redeemer of the world receive you into the union of his Body, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

May this solemn day become a pledge of life and of holiness for future generations. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and is living in his Church today. “Yes it is true. The Lord has risen”. Amen. Alleluia!

With thanks to –*Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (1984)

(3) Background info. on some of the martyrs
Saint Paul Chong Hasang

St. Paul Chong Hasang(1795-1839) was one of the lay leaders who have participated in the establishment of the early Korean Catholic Church. He was also the second son of Chung, Yak Jong, a martyr who was killed during the Shin-Yu Persecution (1801). During this persecution, the Korea’s only priest, Chu, Moon Mo and many prominent leaders of the early Korean Catholic Church were martyred. After these incidents, it seemed impossible to reconstruct the devastated Korean Catholic community. It was St. Paul Chong Hasang who gathered the scattered Korean Catholic members and ignited their hearts with the raging flames of faith. Furthermore, he reorganized the structures and activities of the Korean Catholic church and initiated a movement for the Beijing Bishop to send priests to Korea.

To accomplish this mission, from 1816, he has crossed the China borders nine times, overcoming many dangers and fiercely cold weathers, totaling 2000 Km of round trips. He entered the China territory as a lowly servant to the Korean diplomatic members who have made their annual tributary missions to China to exchange gifts with the Chinese Emperor. By using these opportunities in Beijing, St. Paul Chong requested many times that the Beijing Bishop send priests to Korea. As many of his attempts failed, he directly pleaded the case to Pope Gregory X. Finally, on September 9th, 1831, the Pope proclaimed the legitimacy of the Korean Catholic Diocese to the World.

The followings are St. Paul Chong Hasang’s main achievements:

First, he was the leader of the early Korean Catholic Church during the persecution period, during which he provided the essential momentum to establish the Korean Catholic Diocese with progressive and worldly vision.

Second, he contributed greatly to the development of the Korean Catholic Church by dedicating his life to accommodating and assisting the priests who were sent to Korea after the establishment of the Korean Catholic Archdiocese.

Third, he was one of the seminary students of Bishop Imbert to become a priest. However, during the Gi Hye Persecution in 1839, the bishop and St. Paul Chong Hasang were martyred, unfortunately he was unable to actualize his dream of becoming a priest.

Fourth, he wrote a document declaring the position of the Korean Catholic Church that the Catholic faith is good for the nation but not a threat, the Sang-Je-Sang-Su. In this document, he firmly pleaded to the persecutors to stop persecuting Catholic members. The document, Sang-Je-Sang-Su, is a short writing of only two thousands words but, it is a well written Catholic doctrine explaining why the Korean government should not persecute Catholics.

Fifth, his martyrdom became the testimony of his faith toward Christ and through his eternal glory, he became the pinnacle of the Korean Catholic faith.

St. Paul Chong Hasang was martyred at the age of forty-five on September 22, 1839 during the Gi Hye Persecution. Two months later, his mother, Yu Cecilia, passed away during the imprisonment and the following month, his younger sister, Jung Hye was also martyred. The three martyrs were beatified on June 6th, 1925 and were canonized, declared as saints, on May 6, 1984 by Pope John Paul II.



The lives of a few more of these martyrs, from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea.

Saint Kim Ob-I Magdalene (1774-1839)
Saint Kim A-gi Agatha (1787-1839)
Saint Han A-gi Barbara (1792-1839)

Kim Ob-I Magdalene and Han A-gi Barbara were arrested together in September 1836. It is not certain whether Kim A-gi Agatha was captured with them or at her own home. In any event, the three of them were taken into custody on the same day.

In prison they found themselves in the company of several other Catholics. They were Nam Myong-hyok Damian, accused of hiding the bishop’s vestments, Kwon Tug-in Peter, accused of making and selling crucifixes and holy pictures, Pak A-gi Anna, who remained in prison despite the apostasy of her husband and children and Yi Ho-yong, Peter’s sister Yi Agatha.

The first to be questioned was Pak A-gi Anna. In spite of the torture she remained unbowed.

“So what if my husband and son have apostatized! I choose to keep my faith and die for it,” she lightly answered the police. Next was Han A-gi Barbara. No less brave than Pak A-gi Anna, her body was a bloody mess when they had finished with her. While Han A-gi Barbara was undergoing torture, Kim Ob-I Magnalene have witnessed her faith by explaining Catholic doctrine to the police commissioner. Next Kim Agatha was called.

“It is true you believe in the Catholic Church?”

“I don’t know anything but Jesus and Mary.”

“If you could save your life by rejecting Jesus and Mary, wouldn’t you reject them?”

“I would rather die than reject them.”

And in spite of the tortures Agatha could not be persuaded to change her mind. Seeing this the police commissioner had them moved to prison. When the other Catholic prisoners saw Kim A-gi Agatha arriving they cheerfully greeted her.

“Here comes Agatha who doesn’t know anything but Jesus and Mary,” they said, congratulating her on her bravery.

Because of her inability to learn the doctrine and prayers Kim A-gi Agatha had not yet been baptized. She was the first to be baptized in prison during the persecution.

Baptism gave her new strength and with it she went on to overcome terrible torture and punishment.

After all the investigations and trials, death sentences were handed down on Nam Myong-hyok Damian, Kwon Tug-in Peter and Pak A-gi Anna on May 11, 1839. The next day Yi Kwang-hon Augustine and Pak H.I.-sun Lucy were also sentenced to death.

It took three more days of discussion before Kim Ob-I Magdalene, Han A-gi Barbara and Kim A-gi Agatha were given the sentence for believing in Catholicism and refusing to give up that belief.

Finally May 24, 1839, arrived. The events of that day are described by Cho Shin-ch’ol Charles as follows “On the appointed day ox carts, with crosses taller than the average person erected on them, were brought to the jail. When all was ready guards brought the condemned prisoners out and tied them to the crosses by the arms and hair. A foot rest was put under their feet and the signal given to depart.

When they arrived at the steep hill on which the Small West Gate is situated the guards suddenly pulled away the foot rests and the drivers urged the oxen to run headlong down. The rad is rough, with many stones. The carts lurched, causing extreme agony to the prisoners who were hung on the crosses by their arms and hair. The execution ground is a the foot of the hill. The guards took the prisoners from the crosses and tore off their clothes. The executioners tied their hair to the wooden beam and proceeded to cut off their heads.”

The nine martyrs received their crown at three o’clock in the afternoon, the same time as Jesus breathed his last on the cross several tens of centuries. In accordance with the law the bodies were left at the execution site for three days.


In the court record of the time it is written:

“On April 12, Yi Kwang-hon Augustine, Kwon Tug-in Peter and others, in all none criminals, were executed for following the false religion.”

Bishop Imbert wrote as follow:

“With difficulty we reclaimed the bodies at dawn on April 27. We buried the bodies of the martyrs at a place I had prepared earlier. I would have liked to have dressed the bodies in fine clothes and anointed them with expensive perfume, in the European manner. However, we are poor and to dress the bodies in this way would have been a burden on the Catholics, so we just wrapped them in straw matting. Now we have many protectors in heaven. When the day of religious freedom comes to Korea, as I know it will, these bodies will be a precious heritage.”

Saint Kim Ob-I Magdalene, Saint Kim A-gi Agatha and Saint Han A-gi Barbara were beatified on July 5, 1925 and together they were canonized on May 6, 1984 at Yoido, Seoul, by Pope John Paul II.

Saint You Chin-gil Augustine (1791-1839)

St. Yu Chin-gil Augustine came from a family of government officials. Among the Korean martyrs, he was one of three who held government posts and the father of the 13-year-old martyr, St. Yu Tae-ch’ol Peter, the youngest of the 103 Korean Martyr Saints.

He was known as a man of deep contemplation. Curious about the origin and meaning of natural phenomena, especially philosophical and religious truths on the origin of man he spent much of the night examining the texts of Neo-Confucianism looking for answers. However, the more he studied the classics the more dissatisfied he became with the Tae-geuk-eum-yang (traditional Korean explanation of reality). His search led him on to investigate the teachings of Taoism and Buddhism. What is the origin of the universe? Is it the Li (basic principle) that Neo-Confucianists talked about or is it the Kong (emptiness) of Buddhism or the Mu (nothingness) of Taoism?

In his youth he heard of the Catholics who had been arrested and killed. He began to wonder if the books they had studied could be of any help to him. One day he came upon an old chest hidden away in a corner of the house. Inside it was lined with sheets of paper on which words like “spirit of life”, “spirit of understanding””and “soul” were written. Such terms had not appeared in any of the books he had read. On tearing off the sheets and putting them together he found the parts of the book called the Cheon-ju-sil-ui (True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven).

The first Catholic writings had been brought into Korea by envoys or interpreters who had gone on official business to Beijing. Since Yu Chin-gil’s family members had visited China as interpreters they were among those who brought back such books. However, during the persecution of 1801, when people were ordered to destroy all books on Western Learning, Yu’s family used the book to repair a tattered storage chest.

Yu Chin-gil went over the torn pages a number of times. They touched on the questions that had bothered him. But the few torn pages were not enough to satisfy him. So in the hope of finding a complete copy he began to inquire as to where he could meet Catholics. One day he met Yi Kyong-on Paul who was the younger brother of Yi Kyong-do Charles and Yi Soon-I Lutgardis who had been martyred in 1801. They had a long conversation and found that they were of the same mind. Yu borrowed True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven and other books on Western Learning. He discovered the one who created and supervised the world. It was not the basic principle that Neo-Confucianists talked about nor was it the Kong of Buddhism or the Mu of Taosim. It is the Lord who resides in Heaven. Humans have not only bodies but also souls, so when people die their bodies are disintegrated but their souls are immortal and subject to the final judgement of God.

He got down on his knees and marvelled.

“The true nature of humans is not to grow and get fat but to burnish their soul till it becomes bright and beautiful. This indeed is the correct truth.” He felt as if the eyes of his soul opened and he began to see the sun shining through dark clouds.

He went back to Yi Paul from whom he learnt Our Father and Hail Mary as well as the Ten Commandments. Soon he was ready to enter the Church. Through a meeting of Western and Eastern thought, Yu Chin-gil solved the question that had troubled him most. He was introduced to Chung Ha-sang Paul and other Catholics.

At that time, following the persecution of 1801 when Father Chu Mun-mo, Chinese priest sent from Beijing, was martyred, there was not a priest in Korea. The Catholics who had survived were struggling to re-establish the Church and to have another priest sent in from China. Even though he had not yet received baptism, on the instructions of Chung Ha-sang Paul, he recited morning prayer and evening prayer each day and faithfully followed the Ten Commandments.

In October of 1824 the winter diplomatic delegation was preparing to go to China. Yu Chin-gil did not want to miss this opportunity, so he made every efforts to be included as an interpreter and to have the noble-born Chung Ha-sang Paul to accompany him disguised as a servant.



The delegation safely arrived in Beijing. Avoiding their companions, the two Catholics slipped off to meet the Bishop of Beijing. In Chinese, Yu asked him for baptism. The Bishop was delighted to receive visitors from so far away but felt he should question Yu Chin-gil to find out how much he knew about the teachings of the Church. Yu Chin-gil replied with the answers exactly as they were in the catechism. Why are humans born into the world? To know and honor God and to save their souls…” The Bishop was amazed that such zealous and well-instructed believer could come out of a Church that was being persecuted and had no clergy. “This is indeed a miracle of God,”” he exclaimed.

Yu Chin-gil was baptized during a special Mass. When the priest recited, “Receive and eat this. It is my body which will be offered up for you,”” he felt as if the blood of Jesus was flowing through his own veins.

He returned to his lodgings but was unable to sleep. He felt as though his heart was shining brightly in the dark room. He was moved by a deep religious experience. He knelt down and prayed.

“God, I thank you for the wonderful way in which You have led me to baptism. Send priests to our land so that the people there who live in darkness might have the joy of receiving the Eucharist. May this foolish servant, no matter what suffering or persecution is to come, give witness to You by offering my life in Lord’s work of opening the eyes of our nation. Give me the deep faith, strength and courage that I need. Amen.”

The Korean envoys learned from the priests in Beijing about practical sciences and Western inventions. In their discussions with the Western priests they became familiar with many aspects of Western learning. They were particularly surprised to learn that China was not the center of the world nor the most enlightened nation in the world. They were surprised to hear that humans were not created as nobles or commoners, but the division was a social system by which the nobles oppressed the commoners. Humans were all equal before God and all brothers and sisters in Christ, the Son of God. With words like equality, universal love and freedom ringing in his ears, Yu Chin-gil Augustine felt as if the teachings of the Chinese sages had come crashing down around him. It was as if he had heard the roar of thunder and seen Jesus rise from Golgotha. It was a sign of faith and a discovery of God. Even before he had set out for Beijing he had a faith that did not fear death, but after meeting the Western priests his understanding had deepened and his eyes had grown brighter.



Korean Catholics, because of their faith, were to lead a profound change in the consciousness of the Korean people. In a nation which did not know such a God, they were to sow seeds which would alter lives. This was due to their own love of truth and the providence of God. Yu Chin-gil, Augustine and Chong Ha-sang Paul asked the priests to see the bishop who welcomed them and asked about the need of the Church in Korea. Yu Chin-gil Augustine told him of the difficulties they had to overcome in order to meet the bishop. Their Church was in a pitiful state. For almost 20 years it was without a priest. Yu Chin-gil Augustine was fortunate in being able to come to China and receive baptism, but there were many catechumens in Korea who were unable to receive baptism and many Catholics who could not receive Confirmation, Confession, the Eucharist or the other sacraments. The bishop was moved by what they said. He replied regretfully that, because of the persecutions in China, priests could not go into that country freely either and so he had no one to send to Korea. However, if they wrote directly to the Pope explaining the situation the bishop would do all he could to support their request. Yu Chin-gil Augustine and Chong Ha-sang Paul took courage from the bishop’s promise to help them. They returned to their lodging and composed the following letter requesting priests. Knowing that if this letter was discovered by the Korean authorities it would lead to another persecution, they signed it with the name “Ambrose”.

Holy Father, With troubled heart we greet Your Holiness and seek your help. Since Fr. Zhou Mun-mo was martyred, the spread of the Gospel has been blocked by persecutions. About one thousand believers remain in hiding and can do little by way of witness or evangelization.

No matter how much truth the teaching of the Korean Church contains, if the Church continues in its present form that truth will be wasted. Because our brains are dull the teaching of the Church do not bear fruit and the grace of God is being blocked. Those dying from old age or sickness cannot receive the Last Rites and go to their graves in sorrow. Those they leave behind endure in grief and are tired of life. Sorrow and pain are gradually eating into our hearts. Therefore, despite the dangers involved, we have on a number of occasions asked the Bishop of Beijing to help us. The bishop sympathizes with us in our concern and would like to send priests to give new life to souls that have fallen into sin, but he has no one available.

Having explained the situation in Korea in this way, they suggested that there might be missionaries in Macao who could come to their assistance. They went on to state the way that the priests should come, if they came by boat, how many sailors they would need, what dangers to avoid, the best places to land and how to handle any officials they might encounter.

When they had finished the letter to the Pope they gave it to the bishop. The bishop, in turn, sent it to the representative of the Congregation for Evangelization in Macao, Fr. Umpierres, who translated it into Latin and sent it on to the Pope on December 3, 1826. On their return to Korea, Yu Chin-gil Augustine and Chong Ha-sang Paul gave a full report to Nam Myong-hyok and the other leaders. News of the letter they had sent to the Pope gave new hope and courage to the fragile Church. When Yu Chin-gil Augustine returned home good news awaited him. He now had a son whom he named Tae-ch’ol Peter.

Due to appeals by You Chin-gil Augustine and his companions, Pope Gregory XVI, on September 9, 1831, established Korea as a Vicariate Apostolate separate from Beijing and appointed Bartholomew Bruguiere of the Paris Foreign Mission Society as its first bishop. This initiative was due to the letter of 1826 which so moved the Pope.

Bishop Bruguiere, who had been working in Bangkok, Thailand, received news of his appointment as first bishop of Korea sometime after July 25, 1832. Unfortunately, in his efforts to enter Korea, Bishop Bruguiere fell ill in Yodong while traveling towards Korea and died on October 20, 1835. This news soon reached Korea. You Chin-gil Augustine and his companions were much saddened, but determined to keep up their efforts to help other priests to enter the country. Meantime, You Chin-gil Augustine acted like a priest and converted many prominent people and scholars. However he couldn’t convert his own wife and daughters although his son followed him in faith. His 13-year old first son, You Tae-ch’ol Peter, became the youngest of the 103 Martyr Saints of Korea.

You Chin-gil Augustine was arrested at home in July of 1839. Many of his relatives begged him to renounce his religion, but he refused to do so. They reminded him of what would happen to his family, position and property, but You Chin-gil Augustine told them that it was more important to save souls than to take care of bodies, although he was sorry to cause trouble for them. The police chief interrogated. “As a government official, how can you adhere to a religion prohibited by the government? Reveal where the Catholics and the books are hidden.”You Chin-gil Augustine did not reveal anything, and so he was severely tortured on five occasions, and his flesh was torn apart.

The police chief asked You Chin-gil Augustine about Bishop Imbert and two other missionaries. Augustine told him that they came to Korea to teach Korean people about God and to help them save their souls. He said that the missionaries didn’t seek their own glory, wealth and pleasure. The police chief questioned who brought them to Korea. You Chin-gil Augustine said that he did. The police chief then brought in Bishop Imbert and questioned them together. The bishop told You Chin-gil Augustine that the government already knew that Fathers Maubant and Chastan were in Korea.

However, You Chin-gil Augustine refused to reveal the names of the Church leaders in Korea. His legs were twisted and tied with ropes, and were bleeding profusely.

Police interrogation continued. “This is not the sort of crime a stupid and low class person like you could do on your own. Who among the Catholics masterminded this? Since you have abandoned the beautiful customs and ritual of your country and accepted the treacherous ways of the foreigner, even if you were put to death ten thousand times, would the punishment not be too light? This is a solemn interrogation. So answer carefully without any deceit.” They stressed that since Catholic teaching was false, treacherous and anti-social, those who brought foreign priests into the country had committed treason.

However, You Chin-gil Augustine answered them calmly. “I have already told the investigating officers all that I did. Ten years ago I joined Chong Ha-sang Paul and his group in studying about the Catholic Church. When I reflected on what I learned, I realized that there are various sacraments and procedures in the Church which can be performed only by a priest. Since God is the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, we have to believe in Him and praise Him. The only crime I committed is to deceive the king since this teaching is prohibited in our country. I have already spent three months in jail. Among the Catholics I know, some have suffered the death penalty, some are held in prison and the rest have been scattered like the wind. Since I was born and have lived in the capital how could I know anything about the people in the country? If I have committed any great crime, I’m alone the responsible.” The police chief asked again. “How did you come to brake the law of the country and fall into these traitorous acts?” He replied. “how can you compare suffering the death penalty with going to hell after death? Which is the worse?” You Gin-gil Augustine said and did not want to argue with them further. So, he said. “I have nothing to say further. My only sin was to deceive the king.”

After this, You Chin-gil Augustine was tortured on two further occasions. His flesh was torn apart and his bones terribly crushed. But his faith did not waver and received the death sentence.

On September 22, 1839, You Chin-gil Augustine and Chong Ha-sang Paul were taken outside the Small West Gate in Seoul. On the way to the place of execution You Chin-gil Augustine showed no sign of fear. It was as if he had no interest in the things of the world and was lost in contemplation. With serene faces he was beheaded. You Chin-gil Augustine was beatified on July 5th, 1925 and canonized on May 6th, 1984 at Yoido, Seoul, by Pope John Paul II.



Saint Kim Song-im Martha (1787-1839)

In the “Diary of the Persecution of 1839”, Saint Kim Song-im Martha is referred to as Pup’yong House, a title referring to the fact that she was married to someone from Pup’yong.

Kim Song-im was a 50-year old pagan widow. Her husband was of a very uncompromising temperament and they did not thave a peaceful relationship. This was before Kim Song-im became a Catholic. The situation became so bad taht she had no choice but to separate from her husband. She left quietly and went to live in Hanyang. There she met and lived with a blind man who made a living by telling fortunes. At this stage she was over fifty but she still had not learned about the Catholic faith.

One day she heard about the God and His Only Son, Jesus, from a Catholic who was living in the same house. With this encounter she began to believe in God and her faith grown eventually.

Life with her blind husband had been difficult but when he suddenly died Kim Song-im Martha’s future looked bleak. Some Catholic came to her aid. Martha began working in the houses of the Catholic firneds to repay their help. It was during this period that her faith grew deeper and she repented of her past sins, her inability to put up with her first husband and her subsenquent living by superstition.

At times Martha felt deep sorrow but in her total dependence on the Lord she came through her depression The concern and Christian example of the other Catholics made her realize and confirm how great is the love of God.

One day Martha was with Yi Magdalena, Yi Theresa and Kim Lucy talking about the persecution, the courageous martyrs and the happiness of Heaven. They were so deeply moved by the love of God that all decided to give themselves up to the government authorities to profess their faith.

They wanted to do mortification and sacrifice following the cross of Jesus Christ. The Hisotry of the Catholic Church in Korea says: “Voluntary surrrender is not in accordance with the ordinary rules. However, it might have been evoked by divine grace, or God might have given His tacit approval to them, because the women were steadfast in their faith and wanting to be witness of God by being martyrs. There are other laudable examples in church history, such as St. Plollina, St. Aurelia and others.”

By the end of March or in the beginning of April of 1839 these courageous women went to the police station and told the police to put them in prison because they were Catholics. To the unbelieving policemen they showed their rosaries. The police tied them up and put them in prison. Therefore, it can be easily understood that these pious women courageously endured all tortures and pains for the love of God.

The police chief interrogated the women.

“Do you believe that the Catholic religious in the true religion?”

“Of course, we do. Otherwise we woudln’t be here.”

“Deny God.”

“We can never deny God. Even if we have to dies.”

” Are you not afraid of turtures?”

“You are wasting time in persuading us to deny God. We surendered ourselves for the sake of God. How can we deny Him” We will die if required by the law of the country, but we can never deny God.”

They were repeatedly and severly tortured. The courageous women were sent to the higher court, where they were interrogated atain.

“Do you still believe that the Catholic religion is the tru religons?”

“Yes, we do. We worship God, and we are determined to die for Him.”

The police chief tortured the women more severly than others to punish them for surrendering themselves. But they didn’t succumb to him. They were finally sentenced to death.

According to the government Sungjongwon Diary, these four pious women and four otehr Catholics were beheaded outside the Small West Gate on July 20th, 1839. Martha was 53 years old, when she was killed for her faith.

She was beatified on July 25th, 1925 and canonized on May 6th, 1984 at Yoido, Seoul, by Pope John Paul II.

Won Kwi-im Maria (1819-1839)

Won Kwi-im Maria was boarn in 1819 in Yongmori, Kyuanggun. She lost her mother when she was a child, and followed her father, who wandered around begging for food. When she was nine years old, one of her relatives, Won Lucy, who was a very devout Catholic, took her and taught her prayers and the catechism. She also taught Maria embroidery for her lifelihood. Maria was very intelligent, genial and pious. Her aunt was proud of Maria’s devotion and faithfulness. Maria was baptized at the age of 15. Soon after that she received an offer of marriage. But she refused to be married because she wanted to offer herself to God. The next year she put her hair up in a style which indicated that she was a married woman.

Maria was accused of being a Catholic by a neighbor and was arrested. She looked a little discouraged when she first was put in prison. But she thought that everything was according to God’s Will, and regained her usual peacefulness. Mary was interrogated by the police chief.

“Are you a Catholic?”

“Yes, I am, as you say.”

“Deny God, and you will be saved.”

“I want to worship God and save my soul. If I have to die, I would rather die for God to save my soul.”
Maria’s legs were twisted and she was beaten with a cudgel. Many of her bones were dislocated, but her faith was not shaken.

According to the government document Sungjongwon Diary, Maria and seven other Catholics were beheaded outside the Small West Gate on July 20th, 1839. Maria was 22 years old, when she was crowned with martyrdom.

She was beatified on July 25th, 1925 and canonized on May 6th, 1984 at Yoido, Seoul, by Pope John Paul II.



Saint Kim Barbara (1805-1839)

Saint Kim Barbara was one of those who died of disease while in prison. According to Hyon Sok-mum Charles in the “Diary of the Persecution of 1839”, over sixty people died of torture and disease in prison.

In fact, while the pain of torture was terrible, every day prison life was even worse and unbearable. There were many who bravely witnessed through all forms of torture, but finally gave in because of the hunger and thirst. Given no more than two fistfuls of rice a day the prisoners were often reduced to eating the dirty straw they lay on. Also, with a large number of people crammed into the small cells, it was inevitable that disease would break out and spread very quickly. Bishop Daveluy, who would himself later die as a martyr, wrote of the prison situation: Our Catholics were packed in so tightly that they could not even spread out their legs to sleep. Compared to the suffering of imprisonment the pain of torture was nothing. On top of everything else the stench from their rotting wounds was unbearable and in the heat typhoid would break out killing several in a few days.

People like Kim Barbara suffered the extremes of prison life. Those in prison worried most whether they would live long enough to claim the glory of martyrdom from the executioner’s sword.

Kim Barbara was born to very poor family in Kyonggi Province. Her family was Catholic, but not very devout. At the age of thirteen Kim Barbara was sent as a servant to the wealthy Catholic family of Hwang Maria. It was there she spiritually met God and her devotion for Jesus grew. She was forthright and diligent, inscribing in her heart the teachings of the Lord. Very much aware of the Lord’s grace in her life, she was determined to remain a virgin.

One day her father came to tell her that a match had been made for her with a young Catholic man.

“It is very good match and we have already agreed to it so you must now prepare for marriage,” he told her.

“It is my wish to preserve my chastity for the Lord.”

“If husband and wife are both believers there are no obstacles for a faithful life and this match will be advantageous for you, so do not be so obstinate,” her father responded and she had no choice but to agree to the marriage.

However, it turned out that her husband was a pagan and all her efforts to convert him were of no use. She had several children of whom she only managed to baptize a daughter. Differences in faith created many difficulties between the couple and these problems were never resolved. After her husband’s death she was able to devote herself to prayers and good works.

With the arrival of foreign priests in the country she was able to lead a more fervent and happy spiritual life. Barbara was arrested in March, 1839, and subjected to torture, but she refused to apostatize or reveal the name of other Catholics. During the three months of her prison life she suffered from torture, hunger, thirst and disease. On May 27th, 1839, Kim Barbara died of typhoid fever lying on the dirty mat of her cell at age of thirty-five. She was beatified on July 5th, 1925 and canonized on May 6th, 1984 at Yoido, Seoul, by Pope John Paul II.



Saint Kim Rosa (1784-1839)

In June 1839, Cho Pyong-ku who had a pathological hatred for Catholics took control of the Korean government. On July 5th, a decree came down to completely eradicate the Church. The first to be martyred after this decree were eight Catholics who were already in prison. Of these Kim Rosa was the first to have been arrested.

Kim Rosa was born in a non-Catholic family in 1784, Hanyang. She was married, but she and her husband subsequently separated. After the separation Kim Rosa went to live with a Catholic relative and this was her first contact with the Church. Although it was late in her life she happily applied herself to learning the doctrine. She was intelligent and could communicate well so she was able to make others understand the value of her belief. She taught her mother and older brother the truths of the faith helping them to repent of their past. Thus the family was able to live in harmony, practicing the teaching of the Church.
Kim Rosa lived according to her faith, examined her conscience frequently, repented her sins and prayed constantly. She had high respect for priests and did all she could to help them. She was a model to other Catholics.

On January 16th, 1838, in the middle of the night, the police surrounded her house but she did not show any concern. Happy that at last her time had come, she went to prison calling on the names of Jesus and Mary. She never betrayed her faith, but testified to all in the prison. Even the guards were impressed by her attitude. However, she could not avoid the fury of the government. When she first appeared before the judge he displayed all the instruments of torture before her and said,

“Criminal Kim Rosa, before we use these instruments to break your leg and lacerate your flesh, give up your God and report the names of other Catholics.”

“Judge! I cannot give up my God. He is the Creator and Father to all of us. He loves virtue and punishes sin, so how could I abandon Him? Harming others is also a sin. A long time ago I decided to shed my blood for these truths. Do as you please.”

“Listen to me, criminal. Your religion’s doctrine has been forbidden by our king, yet you still insist on belnging to that Church?”

“My body is now in the hands of the king but before that it belonged to God. We are all God’s sons and daughters. How is it that Your Excellency does not know this simple fact?”

The judge was furious and had her tortured before sentencing her to death. The sentence was carried out on July 20th, 1839. She was fifty-six years old. Kim Rosa was beatified on July 5th, 1925 and canonized on May 6th, 1984 at Yoido, Seoul, by Pope John Paul II.



**The Coming of Christianity To Korea**
In 1984, Pope John Paul II visited the flat sands of the Han River and there forty seven Korean women, fort seven Korean men, seven French priests and three French Bishops, all martyred for their Christian faith, were canonized as saints. It was the first time that such a ceremony had been performed away from Rome. Those chosen were a representative group from among thousands who lost their lives refusing to renounce their religious beliefs.

John Paul described the Korean church as “a community unique in the history of the church.” Although her story is one of great suffering and endurance that is not what makes the coming of Christianity to Korea unique: it is unique because of the manner of its coming. It was a church formed without foreign missionaries and by lay people.

The first news of Christianity came to Korea in the seventeenth century. It entered via the caravan which travelled each winter to China – where, to Peking, goods, gifts and slaves would be taken in tribute to its powerful neighbour. Returning travelers brought news of agriculture, astronomy and mathematics – part of the early “scientific diplomacy” practiced by the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits.

The Cambridge scholar, historian and Fellow of Jesus College, Mary Laven, in her superb “Mission to China” charts the late sixteenth, early seventeenth century encounter of the remarkable Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, with China. These were the ideas with which Korean travelers would connect.
Laven forensically analyses the challenges which faced Ricci and his compatriot, Michele Ruggieri, and details the more than two thousand conversions and the widespread dissemination of the Christian narrative which followed Ricci’s arrival in the Orient.
On reaching China the Europeans initially shaved their heads and dressed as monks but soon realised that by identifying with Buddhist and Taoist idolatry they were failing to reach the literati – the educated Confucian elite. So, Ricci chose instead to dress and behave as a Confucian scholar – engaging China’s culture and leadership through science, books and reason – fides et ratio.
“The Chinese have a wonderful intelligence, natural and acute” he wrote…”From which, if we could teach our sciences, not only would they have great success among these eminent men, but it would also be a means of introducing them easily to our holy law and they would never forget such a benefit.”
Unlike his more aggressive Portuguese and Spanish counterparts, whose presence in Macao became a source of conflict with the Chinese authorities, Ricci’s admiring embrace of Chinese culture, language and customs, gradually made him persona grata in many circles.
Ricci’s publication of his world map, the Mappamondo, along with translations of Western classical scholarship; his knowledge of astronomy and mathematics; his decision to import hitherto unknown musical instruments, such as the harpsichord, along with Venetian prisms and mechanical clocks, gained him acceptance and, despite occasional attempts to close the missions, the ultimate forbearance of the Emperor.
His legacy included astronomical instruments and installations brought by Jesuits to Beijing, which remained untouched even during China’s disastrous Cultural Revolution and may be seen to this day, beautifully preserved at Beijing’s Ancient Observatory. An even more enduring memory has been Ricci’s admirable willingness to find ways through difficult situations and his innate respect for Oriental culture and civilisation.
His reasoned approach also bore spiritual fruit – with the Jesuit’s work blessed by healings and miracles. In his diary, Ricci wrote: “From morning to night, I am kept busy discussing the doctrines of our faith. Many desire to forsake their idols and become Christians”.
Ricci brought the hugely admired Plantin Bible to China – eight gilded folio volumes with printed parallel texts in Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. His True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven was printed and distributed widely, drawing heavily on Aquinas but also appropriating Confucian ideas to bolster the Christian cause. He brilliantly re-positioned the important Chinese custom of ancestor worship by tracing everything back to “the first ancestor” – the Creator, the Lord of Heaven.
Among Ricci’s seventeenth century writings were his Catechism and a treatise “On Friendship” building on Confucius’ belief, expressed in the Analects, that “To have friends coming from distant places – is that not delightful?” Simultaneously Ricci introduced his readers to Cicero’s assertion that “the reasons for friendship are reciprocal need and mutual help.” Amicitia perfecta – perfect friendship – was, for Ricci, the highest of ideals. The Chinese came to value him as a true friend.
On his death, on May 11th 1610, he was uniquely accorded a burial site in Beijing by the Emperor – which, according to Laven was “an extraordinary coup, which testified to the success of nearly thirty years of careful networking and diplomacy.”
In 1644, thirty years after Ricci’s death, the Crown Prince of Korea returned to Seoul from Peking with five baptised Chinese eunuchs and three baptised Court ladies.

There are also accounts from the same period in Korean records mentioning England, France, and Catholicism. Books on Christianity became prized by certain young Koreans and some of Christianity’s radical teaching about the innate value of every person began to be discussed in a country where poverty was rife, worsened by the punishing strain of Manchu tutelage. The population topped five million but more Koreans died of famine and epidemics in 1671 than during all of Japan’s repeated raids and invasions. In the decades following people stole clothes from graves, babies were abandoned, and the starving were eating the dead. Floods added more misery.

It was in this climate that a young Korean intellectual, Yi Pyok, read about Christianity from Chinese books circulating among a group of friends. In 1777 he brought them together to make further study. They met in a Buddhist monastery happily known as The Hermitage of Heavenly Truth.

They concluded that the Confucian ideals of personal goodness, mutual forbearance, reverence for ancestors, meekness, dignity, and respect for the aged – the Confucian “way” – which permeates Korean culture- and, to this day, make Koreans such wonderful people – sat very comfortably with the Catholic tradition of the Christian faith.
Curious Korean youths were eager to plumb the depths of this religion, impressed by a doctrine where all were loved equally by God; and where they were struck by the Jesuit demands for justice for the poor and an end to slavery.

On a subsequent winter embassy to Peking one of Yi Pyok’s young associates, Yi Sunghun, travelled to China with his father and sought out the Christian community. He was baptized by a Jesuit and took the name Peter, returning to Korea in 1785.

Korea’s first priest, Father Zhou Wenmo from China, entered the country during the same period and ministered until 1794. There would not be another priest for 35 years. Yet without missionaries or priests, belief in Christ spread rapidly, first among the nobles and educated, then protected by these aristocrats, among thousands of poor.

Within a year of Yi Sunghun pilgrimage to Peking, in 1786 a secret church had been established in Pyongyang. The authorities raided the house church and discovered a prayer group. The owner of the house, Thomas Kim, was so badly injured during interrogation that he died of the injuries.

That same year, 1786, belief in Christ had been banned. Notwithstanding its Asian antecedents Christianity was perceived by most powerful Koreans as “western learning” and as such treacherous, dangerous. It omitted ancestor worship and was therefore considered “opposed to human morality”.

State hostility was harsh, even toward the royals and members of the nobility who had converted. In 1790 there were 4,000 believers in Korea, and while there were executions every year, by 1800 the number of believers had risen to 10,000. In 1801 more than 300 Christians were executed.

One fearful Christian penned a letter to Jesuits in China appealing for military protection. The letter was intercepted and brought to Korea’s dowager Queen. Immediately she decreed that to hold the evil learning was high treason. Capital persecution now became policy.

Some Christians died in prison. Many others recanted their faith. One who had renounced his beliefs and then returned to the faith and given himself up, was sentenced to “25 blows of the big paddle”. The beating left him insensible and a few hours later dead. Yi Sunghun (who had been baptised as Peter Yi), would, like his name sake, also, under pressure, repudiated his faith but then re-embraced it and in 1801 was martyred along with three hundred others, including two royal princesses.

Many of the ordeals faced by prisoners are described in Martyrs of Korea by the late Msgr. Richard Rutt ( a noted Korean scholar and one time Anglican Bishop of Korea, Canon Rutt became a priest of the Plymouth Diocese and was given the title Monsignor by Pope Benedict XVI) : “a cord was passed under the thighs, crossed over the front then held taut by men on either side who applied a sawing motion that cut through the flesh like a cheese-cutter, right to the bone”. Prisoners were given boiled millet twice a day. Those who could not buy or acquire more food were reduced to eating the foul straw and lice. Many who had not recanted under torture, cracked because of prison.

Intermittently, itinerant priests arrived in the country – most were executed. For 35 years the fledgling church was without a single priest. Only one sacrament could be given – and thousands came forward to be baptised.

In 1834, a French priest, Fr Pierre Maubant, who had been working in Sichuan in Western China, volunteered to go to Korea to minister to the country’s Christians.

Border guards along the Yalu River would not allow Europeans to enter so Fr Pierre waited until the river froze. In January 1836 he crossed into Korea, taking two weeks to walk to Seoul where he was greeted by a Chinese priest called Fr Pacifico. From there he arranged for three young men to be smuggled out to Macao to study as seminarians. He was joined by another Frenchman, Fr Jacques Chastan, and in 1838, a third, Laurent Imbert, who became the first bishop of the Korean diocese.

To conceal their features the three men wore capacious Korean mourning costumes and very wide-brimmed hats. They carried out their duties at night, three priests for thousands of believers. Within weeks 2,000 had been baptised bringing the total number of Korean Christians to 9,000. Two years later, with two other priests, he was decapitated. Hundreds of Korean Christian suffered the same brutal fate, including many members of the same family: fathers along with their sons and daughters, wives and mothers.

Typical was Peter Yu, aged 13, who was tortured on 14 occasions. In his defiance he even picked up shreds of his own flesh and threw them before his interrogators. He was strangled in the prison in October 1839. 150 years later he would be among those canonized by John Paul II.

Perhaps most famous among the Korean martyrs is St.Andrew Kim, born on August 21st 1821. His parents had become Christians. His father, Blessed Ignatius Kim, was martyred in 1839. Andrew was baptized at the age of fifteen.

He was one of the three seminarians who had been secreted out of Korea by Fr Pierre Maubant five year earlier in 1836. The British consul in Shanghai had arranged shelter for him and having, in 1844, become the first Korean to be ordained as a priest and having experiencing all sorts of adventures attempting to return to his homeland, later that year he crossed the Yalu River. By the autumn of 1846 Father Andrew Kim was on trial. He impressed the judges with his eloquence and good manners, and they might have considered a lenient sentence. But during the trial two French warships, commanded by Admiral Cecile, appeared off the Korean coast. The admiral sent insulting letters to the King, demanding an accounting for the deaths of the three French clergy, and saying he would return the following year. This soured the mood against those who colluded with foreigners. Fr Kim’s fate was sealed

Andrew Kim, aged just 25, was arrested, stripped naked, and decapitated. On 16th September 1846, he was taken to the Han sands and beheaded, proclaiming as he died:
“This is my last hour of life, listen to me attentively: if I have held communication with foreigners, it has been for my religion and for my God. It is for Him that I die. My immortal life is on the point of beginning. Become Christians if you wish to be happy after death, because God has eternal chastisements in store for those who have refused to know Him.”

It required eight strokes of the sword to kill Andrew Kim. Customarily his head would have been displayed on a pole for three days but the authorities were afraid of the public reaction. They buried Kim immediately.

Forty days later his relics were recovered and in 1984 he was among those canonized by John Paul II – one of at least 8,000 Korean martyrs from the time the first house church was planted in Pyongyang.

Pyongyang, -which is located on a majestic S-curve of the Taedong River– would become known as “the Jerusalem of the East” because of the scale of Christian conversion which followed the Great Revival of 1907 – would itself be the scene of another hugely significant martyrdom.
It occurred in 1866 – twenty years after the execution of Andrew Kim and during a year of increased persecution. What happened links Korea’s Christian story to a small chapel in South Wales and also to one of North Korea’s most hopeful contemporary stories, the creation of a university of science and technology, of which the author is a trustee. The tale is recounted by Stella Price, with whom I was in North Korea in 2011, in her “Chosen for Chosun”. It is the story of a remarkable Welshman.
Robert Jermain Thomas was born in Rhayadar South Wales in 1839. He enlisted with the London Missionary Society and in 1863 he went to Peking where his wife, Caroline, died of fever.
In 1865 Thomas met two Korean traders who told him that there were about 50,000 Catholics in Korea, and they recounted the story of how Koreans had spread the Christian message and baptised many others. .
Funded by the Scottish Bible Society Robert Thomas decided to take bibles to the beleaguered Catholic community. He obtained work as an interpreter on the American schooner the General Sherman and as the boat traveled around Korea Thomas handed out Bibles. Near Pyongyang the boat became involved in an altercation with the Korean army and Thomas leapt overboard with his Bibles and, while calling on the name of Jesus, he handed them to the angry crowd which had gathered at the river side.
It is said that he handed out more than 500 Bibles before being captured and executed, giving his lat one to his executioner. The authorities ordered the people to destroy the Bibles they had received. However, some removed the pages and used them as wallpaper in their homes. It was from these people that a Presbyterian congregation would be formed. One of its leaders was Thomas’ executioner, who, having picked up Thomas’s own bible, and impressed by the Welshman’s courage and ardor, read the Scriptures and later asked for baptism. The executioner’s son would, in turn, become an Elder of the Presbyterian church – the Thomas Memorial Church.
After Thomas’ execution Pyongyang was subsequently visited for two weeks in 1890 by the American Presbyterian, Samuel A.Moffett. He returned the next year with James Scarth Gale and in 1893 returned to establish a mission station – which, despite attempts on his life, opened in 1895. By 1935 the 120 acre Presbyterian campus consisted of secondary academies for boys and girls; a college; industrial shops; a facility for the provision o vocational training for abandoned wives and widows; a seminary; a Bible school; a foreign school; the Union Christian Hospital and the West Gate Presbyterian Church.
Thomas’ church was destroyed by the Japanese during their occupation of Korea. It is, however, the site where Pyongyang University of Science and Technology ( PUST) now stands. Its founder and President, Dr. James Kim, believes it is “the hand of God bringing two histories together.”

After the ferocious wave of persecutions in 1866 a trade treaty was concluded with the United States. This Treaty of Amity and Trade, concluded in 1882, included a clause requiring toleration and protection for Christian missionaries. Proselytising was still forbidden but missionaries were permitted to embark on educational and medical initiatives. This is turn led, in 1884, to the arrival of Horace Allen, the first American missionary in Korea, to be followed by Horace Underwood in 1885. These Presbyterians were followed by Methodists, including Henry Appenzeller.
The Korean King, Gojong, allowed Allen to establish previously unknown Western medical facilities – initially known as The House of Extended Grace and later as the House of Universal Helpfulness – and to train Koreans in Western medicine. Gojong granted Appenzeller permission to open a school- Pai Chai Hak Dang – and Underwood created an orphanage – later becoming Gyeongsin High School. Mary Scranton, meanwhile, with the support of Queen Min, created Korea’s first school for girls at Ewha Hak Dang. From these seeds, some of the great Korean schools and universities would germinate and grow.
Christianity was also having a fundamental impact on the mores of Korean society. Despite the clash over ancestor worship (which often arose from a mistaken belief that Koreans deified their ancestors rather than venerating their memory) there was much which Koreans had embraced in Christian teaching and which revolutionised feudal attitudes towards women and children. From the outset, in the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church allowed widow to remarry ( normally not permitted in East Asia); it prohibited concubinage and polygamy; it forbade cruelty to or desertion of wives; and . Catholic parents were taught that each of their children – girls and boys – was a precious gift from God – not merely the first-born son. Along with the other denominations which arrived in Korea it insisted that girls should be educated as well as boys. The Church also placed a prohibition on the traditional arranged child marriages.
Beyond all this activity a new danger was, however, looming – one which would shape contemporary Korea and the role of the Christian community: the invasion of the peninsula and its occupation by Japan. The Japanese would rule Korea from 1905 until 1945 and the refusal of many Christians to worship the Japanese emperor would lead to more martyrdom – and ruptures within the Christian community as those who collaborated were ostracised. This, in turn, would lead to the identification of Christianity with Korean nationalism and independence and increase its standing, reputation and reach within the Republic of Korea during the post war years.
Open discontent with Japanese rule erupted on March 1st, 1919, with a Proclamation of Independence and the emergence of the March First Movement which saw many street demonstrations led by Christians and followers of the Cheondogyo native Korea religion challenging Japanese rule. The predominantly Catholic Ulmindan (Righteous People’s Army, a movement for independence) was formed and a Methodist, Syngman Rhee – a future South Korean President – formed a Korean Government-in-exile. Hatred of the Japanese was consolidated as seven million people were either exiled or deported and Japan sought to culturally assimilate Korea’s people – even banning the Korean language. As the world came to terms with the enormity of Japanese ambitions, and became embattled in the Second World War, in Korea worship at Shinto shrines became mandatory, and any attempt to preserve Korean identity or culture was asphyxiated.
A similar asphyxiation – this time of religion itself – would follow the withdrawal of the defeated Japanese from the peninsula accompanied by the severance of Korea, divided by the Korean War, at the 38th parallel.
In 1945, at the end of Japanese occupation there was still a thriving Christian presence in Pyongyang although different factions had emerged – some had chosen to collaborate with the Japanese, others were persecuted. That year Presbyterian Ministers Yoon Ha-yong and Han Kyong-jik, formed the Christian Social Democratic Party, the first political party in North Korea. Communists raided a planning meeting at a church in Yong-am-po, resulting in the death of twenty three people. Meanwhile, in Pyongyang, Kim Hwa-sik, a Christian leader was arrested with forty others, as they met to create a Christian Liberal Party.
The Communists then enrolled a Protestant Minister, Kang Yang-uk, Kim IL Sung’s maternal uncle, one of the Christian Ministers who had told believers to worship at Shinto shrines during Japanese rule. In 1946 they helped him establish his pro-Communist Christian League. By 1949 those who refused to collaborate and to join the League were being rounded up and thrown in jail. Simultaneously, church property (along with 15,000 Buddhist temples) was being confiscated and schools and other church-run projects sequestrated. Divisions and denominational rivalries – and the mistaken belief that they could simply remain quiet and survive – had blinded many Korean Christians to the enormity of the threat which Communism posed. Typical of the consequence was the massacre which occurred in a cave at Wonsan, where the mass murder of 530 religious and political dissenters, many of them children, occurred. A journalist who visited the site in October 1950, as the North Korea army retreated, described the carnage, a mass grave of twisted bodies, many of them women and children, all shot in the back of the neck.
Another foretaste of what awaited Christians in the new Communist State was the fate of some of the Christian clergy captured during the hostilities.
In 1955 one of the most vivid accounts of these depredations appears in a harrowing account by an Australian Columban missionary priest, Fr.Philip Crosbie.
“March Till They Die” is the story of his imprisonment between 1950 and 1953.
Unlike seven of his Columban colleagues who died in prison, Philip Crosbie survived to tell his story.
Those who paid with their lives included the Chicago born Msgr. Pat Brennan and Fr.Tony Collier, who worked with Fr.Crosbie at the mission station of Chunchon.
During his epic ordeal Fr.Crosbie and others imprisoned with him, were marched from place to place, given starvation rations, and frequently left exposed to the elements.
One of his companions was Msgr. Thomas Quinlan who originated from Thurles in Tipperary – one of a pioneering group of Columban missionaries who went to Korea from Ireland – and Fr.Frank Canavan from Galway. Another was a Maryknoll priest, Bishop Patrick Byrne.

Others on the forced march included a captured group of Carmelite nuns along with French nuns from the Community of St.Paul of Chartres, and their provincial superior, 76-year-old Mother Beatrix.
They were later joined by other prisoners: members of the British and French Legations in Seoul; the Anglican Bishop, Cecil Cooper, and the Reverend Charles Hunt; members of the Methodist mission; Herbert Lord, head of the Salvation Army in Korea; and a clutch of South Korean politicians. Later they were joined by a group of American Prisoners of War.
The title of Fr.Crosbie’s book is drawn from the remarks of a North Korean major.
When Commissioner Lord protested that many of the group was elderly or infirm “…but they will die if they have to march” the Korean major responded “Then let them march until they die.”
Following his capture in July 1950 Fr.Crosbie saw many deaths and terrible suffering. Among the fatalities was Mother Beatrix – who had given more than fifty years of her life caring for the sick, the poor and orphans in Korea.
When she could walk no further and lay by the roadside one of the guards shot her dead.
On November 18th, Mother Mechtilde – a Belgian Carmelite succumbed and was followed, on November 25th, by that of Bishop Byrne.
Fr.Crosbie records his burial “The only sign of his rank was a light cassock of black silk, with red buttons and piping. The buttons under their covering of red cloth were of metal. Some day they may help to identify the remains.”
Charles Hunt and Fr.Canavan died a few days later.
The remaining prisoners were marched ever onwards – and their peregrinations took them to the River Yalu (close to where the American journalists would be arrested in 2009), to the Chinese border, and back again to Pyongyang. Some, including Msgr Quinlan, Bishop Cooper and Herbert Lord, survived and were eventually freed.
Msgr. Quinlan would return to South Korea in 1954 as Regent to the Apostolic Delegation.

In 1953, on May 25th, Fr.Crosbie was handed over to an official of the Soviet Union, taken to Moscow and was freed. Staff at the Australian Embassy welcomed him: “And so”, he wrote, “I came to freedom.”
Movingly, describing his return to “laws that respect an individual’s freedom while providing for the good of the State; …a land where the Muses are not completely chained to the chariots of politicians; where books and newspapers are freely published, and I can freely read them. …All this I prize; but I have gained a still greater and more precious freedom. It is the freedom to believe in God and openly profess my faith.” Philip Crosbie prized his regained freedom but he also observed that the cruelty and atrocities had not only flowed in one direction and he had seen enough to know that the South Koreans had blood on their hands, too.
He concluded his account with a prayer for those who did not live to see freedom; and a prayer for those who had captured and abused them: “May there be none of us who will not find Him at the end!”
Kim IL Sung’s antagonism towards Christianity stemmed from his embrace of Marxism and his belief that Korean Christians and his American opponents in the Korean War amounted to one and the same thing. Although his mother, Kang Pan-sok, was a Presbyterian deaconess, in his writings Kim IL Sung frequently criticized religion. North Korean literature and movies caricature religion as a negative force and as unscientific while the Juche philosophy of self reliance has been presented as an alternative.
In Article 14 of his 1948 Constitution, Kim IL Sung did, however, decree that “citizens of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall have the freedom of religious belief and of conducting religious services.” By 1972 this had been modified to permit “freedom to oppose religion” (Article 54) of the 1972 constitution, which amounted to open season – and open hostility – on religious adherents.
Further modification came in 1992 with Article 68 granting freedom of religious belief and the right to construct buildings for religious use and religious ceremonies. It, too, was tempered by a prohibition on any person using religion “to drag in foreign powers or to destroy the state or social order.” Social order, of course, refers to every aspect of the tightly controlled apparatus of the state.
So, regardless of the theoretical constitutional provisions, what is known about the fate of the Jerusalem of the East and of North Korea’s Christian believers?
Comprising around 47,000 square miles and around 23 million people North Korea has an unknown number of religious believers – although the Government claim there are around 10,000 Protestants, 4,000 Catholics, 10,000 Buddhists and 40,000 Chendogyo practitioners.
Religious Intelligence UK suggests different numbers: 64.3% professing atheism; 16% followers of Korean Shamanism; 13.5% Chendoists; 4.5%. Buddhists; and 1.7% (406,000) Christian.
In Pyongyang there are four Christian churches which are heavily controlled by the State: two Protestant churches —the Chilgol (dedicated to the memory of Kim IL Sung’s mother, Kang Pan-sok) and Bongsu churches— the Changchung Roman Catholic Church, opened in 1988, and a new Russian Orthodox Church, opened in 2006. No Catholic priest has been permitted to serve in North Korea for more than sixty years, and North Korea has refused to normalise its relations with the Holy See – which would send an immediate signal to the world’s one billion Catholics that North Korea wants friendly relations with Catholic people.
Since 1988 there has been some attempt to use the churches to open dialogue beyond North Korea’s borders and agencies such as the Catholic relief organisation, Caritas, have been permitted to bring food and medicine into the country. However, the officials who run the Korean Christian Federation are Party officials whose job is to control not to enable. But, in a hopeful move, it is reported that five North Koreans have been selected by Cardinal Nicholas Chung Jin-Suk to study at Seoul’s Incheon University. It would be a highly significant step forward if they are permitted to return to the North once ordained.
Such pastoral provision was “an unfulfilled dream” of the widely admired and revered late Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-Hwan – the great champion of Korean freedom and democracy. It is an aspiration which, during each of our visits, Lady Cox and I have repeatedly raised with the officials who control religious belief. In another conciliatory move the North Koreans have also extended an official invitation to Dr.Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, to visit the country.
Another development has seen the visit of some South Korean Protestant pastors to the North and they have been permitted to hold regulated services in their churches and to carry out extensive refurbishment and to build a small seminary. The students pursue a five-year course and are then admitted to the Korean Christian Fellowship as pastors upon graduation.
The author has visited all four churches and has spoken to the congregation at the Changchung Catholic church and met with members of the congregations at the other churches. At Changchung I met Jang Jae On, the Communist Party official who regulates religious belief.
Much about these “Potemkin” – or show churches – is aimed at creating an illusion of religious freedom but, not-withstanding the illusion, the author has had conversations with a handful of North Koreans who have favourably mentioned their family’s religious antecedents and understood the value and importance of religious belief.
Wholly unverifiable reports suggest that there may be several hundred permitted family worship centres and many more underground unregulated house churches.
In Anju, a town about 80 kilometers north of Pyongyang, visited by the author, the mayor said that Catholics meet in the rubble of their church, destroyed during the Korean War, and have continued to do so every Sunday without pastors.
However, it is those Christians who refuse to be controlled by the State whose fate is the most disturbing.
Becoming an illicit Christian is a serious crime. Some who have escaped say that they had never seen a church or a Bible before leaving the country. Many are in camps or prison – where they are kept in horrific conditions, fed on starvation rations. Deprived of sleep they are crammed into overcrowded cells. They are unable to even lie down straight.
In 2011 there were further reports of the execution of Christians in North Korea. At least 20 other Christians were arrested and sent to Camp No. 15 in Yodok.34 . In several meetings, I raised this case with North Korean officials, but was told that these reports were “lies” and that the execution of Christians was “impossible”
The United Nations estimate that 400,000 people have died in the camps in the past 30 years. Ironically, many of the barbaric practices which characterise the camps were pioneered by the Japanese during their occupation of the Korean Peninsular. After the Korean War, the Communist regime in the North and the military dictatorship in the South used many of the same methods to stamp out dissent.
Since being elected Chairman of the British Parliamentary All Party Group on North Korea seven years ago I have chaired several open hearings at Westminster where we have taken evidence and heard first hand accounts from North Koreans who have escaped from prison camps – and these have included Christians.
Yoo Sang-joon was a North Korean Christian defector who came to Westminster eight years ago. Having seen his wife and children die during the famine he has become an Asian Raoul Wallenberg, bravely re-entering North Korea and helping people flee across the border. This led to his arrest by the Chinese, who as a result of international representations showed clemency and repatriated him to South Korea rather than the North as they had originally intended.
On one occasion we were addressed by two diminutive North Korean women who, speaking through an interpreter, recounted their experiences in North Korean prison camps. From time to time their stories were interrupted as the women wept.
Jeon Young-Ok is 40. When she was a little girl her mother took the family across the Tumen River to try and flee to China. They were caught and her father and brother imprisoned. Her mother died of a heart disease and left her three children alone. Years later, now married with three children of her own, Jeon managed to make furtive forays from North Korea into China to secure money and food for her children. Twice she was apprehended and jailed.
Movingly she told the parliamentary hearing: “I couldn’t bear to die with my children in my arms. As long as I was alive I couldn’t just watch them die.” Many of her compatriots were among the 2 million who starved to death during the 1990s famine.
In China Mrs.Jeon remained at risk “nowhere was safe.” If she was caught the Chinese would send her back. And this is exactly what happened to her. Caught in 1997 and again in 2001 – she was sent to Northern Pyeong -an Detention Camp.
“I was put in a camp where I saw and experienced unimaginable things. We were made to pull the beards from the faces of elderly people. Prison guards treated them like animals. The women were forced to strip. A group of us were thrown just one blanket and we were forced to pull it from one another as we tried to hide our shame. I felt like an animal, no better than a pig. I didn’t want to live.”
Jeon Young-Ok added: “They tortured the Christians the most. They were denied food and sleep. They were forced to stick out their tongues and iron was pushed into it.”
Despite all this, she harbours no hatred for her country and shows extraordinary fortitude and equanimity: “The past is not important but these terrible things are still happening in North Korea. These camps should be abolished forever.”
Those camps were created at the conclusion of the Korean War when many Christians fled from the Communist North and from what they knew would be the beginning of another period of phenomenal persecution.
Chastened and strengthened by the suffering which had preceded the emergency of the South’s Republic of Korea came a determination that they would not settle for a military dictatorship or for a degraded form of totalitarianism. Christianity has, therefore, been the leitmotif against which South Korea’s social and political policies have been formed. In particular, during the 1970s a theology called Minjung evolved. Minjung is formed from Chinese character min which means people while the character jung means the mass. When combined the phrase translates as the common people.
Minjung theology interprets the Bible, history and the political challenges of the
moment in relationship to their working out and impact on the common people not
on the rulers, the politically powerful or economic elites. Jesus’ appearance in
history is a defining moment for the common people – and betokens the need for
justice, mercy and compassion for the common people. During the 1970s
dictatorship of General Park the theology manifested itself in the emergence of
several Christian initiatives such as the Catholic Farmers Movement and the
Protestant Urban Industrial Mission, which campaigned for better remuneration
and working conditions for agricultural and industrial workers; a period of
widespread social unrest. It was also a key influence on two men who served prison
sentences for their democratic beliefs and who would be future Presidents o the
Republic of Korea, following the restoration of democracy in 1988, Kim Young
Sam, a Presbyterian, and Kim Dae Jung, a Catholic.

The story of Christianity on the Korean peninsula seems to be the perfect proof of Tertullian’s ancient assertion that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church”. The shedding of so many lives did not deter Koreans from embracing Christianity. As St.Augustine Yu, who was martyred along with his wife, son and brother, said: “Once having known God, I cannot possibly betray him.”
As the Christian faith was passed from father to son, from mother to daughter, some families would produce four generations of martyrs. One of those who would die for his faith was John Kim Bo Hyeon. His life ended in prison while preaching his faith to his fellow inmates. His grandson, Stephen Kim Sou-hwan, born in 1922, and doubtless inspired by the heroic witness of his grandfather, would become Korea’s first Catholic Cardinal, outspoken defender of human rights, and fearless opponent of military dictatorship. His Cathedral church in Seoul, Myeongdong Cathedral, where some of the relics of the early martyrs are preserved and honoured, would become the scene of the twentieth century showdown between democracy protestors and the military dictatorship of South Korea
Perhaps his family history was also the necessary preparation for his service as Apostolic Administrator of the Pyongyang Diocese of North Korea – which he was never allowed to visit and where the church would be violently suppressed by the Communists in the aftermath of the Korean War.
But on a happier note, I allowed myself a wry smile that as I arrived for my third visit to North Korea with my colleague (Baroness) Caroline Cox in 2010, aboard an Air China plane, the piped music which accompanied our landing was Isaac Watts’ Christmas hymn, “Joy to the world! The Lord has come! Let earth receive her King.” Along with the sight of diplomats from the once Marxist Russia arriving to worship at Pyongyang’s Russian Orthodox church, I couldn’t help reflecting on twists in ideological and social history. Although Marx was wrong in suggesting that religion is “the opium of the people” perhaps the rest of that much cited quotation does has great application and resonance in the story of Korea where: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of the soulless condition.”

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The following text was compiled by the late Monsignor Richard Rutt, one time Anglican Bishop of Korea and later Catholic priest of the Plymouth Diocese. Published by the Catholic Truth society it is no longer in print.

MARTYRS OF KOREA
by
Msgr.Richard Rutt
All booklets are published thanks to the
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The Korean names in this story are pronounced with consonants as in
English, vowels as in Italian. The sound for ö varies from that of o in
‘word’ to that of o in ‘song’; and the sound for ü resembles that of oo in
‘book’. The surname Ch’oe sounds like chwè.
Canon Richard Rutt worked as missionary in Korea for 20 years. He is
now attached to St Mary Immaculate, Falmouth, Cornwall. (Honorary
D.Litt. of the Confucian University, Seoul. Joint author with Keith Pratt
of Korea: a Historical and Cultural Dictionary, London 1999.)
4
LAND OF MORNING CALM
Korea in the late 18th century was a land of peace and
prosperity. There were poor people in plenty, but the
harvests were generally good, there was no trouble
from abroad, and the King maintained a benevolent rule
that kept the court free of the bloody strife to which it
was so liable.
The country was beautiful. Even in the broadest of
rice-growing plains, the horizon was lined with blue
peaks: distant mountains covered with luxuriant forest
trees, among which Siberian tigers roamed. In spring
apricot and peach blossom canopied the villages, while
the hills were veiled with bright purple azaleas. High
summer brought bright green foliage, autumn a rich medley
of gold, scarlet and purple. In winter the bald rocks
and dark pines were draped in frost and snow. Bamboo
delighted poets at all times of the year.
The common people’s houses, both in the cities and in
the villages that nestled on the sunny slopes of the hills,
were built of cob and stone with mushroom-shaped roofs
of barley thatch. The houses of the gentry were more elaborate,
built of wood with grey tiled roofs turning up at the
eaves in Chinese style, with windows of white paper
stretched on delicate wooden lattices; but without upper
storeys. Similar graceful roofs covered Confucian temples
near the towns, and Buddhist temples hidden in the deep
mountain valleys. Nearly every beauty spot had its kiosk
or pavilion, where in spring and autumn local men would
hold picnics at which they all composed Chinese poems.
A Chinese culture
Every educated man could turn out verses in Chinese
rhyme and metre. Education was indeed restricted to mastering
the classical Chinese language – pronounced in a
Korean fashion – in order to read Chinese literature and
Chinese history. All serious books and papers were written
in Chinese, and Korean personal names were modelled
on Chinese names: surname first, given name afterward,
two or three syllables in all. As in China, there
were very few surnames, and married women retained
their maiden names.
The king was theoretically a vassal of the Chinese
Emperor and sent tribute to Beijing every year. Apart from
this annual embassy and a few tightly controlled annual
markets at border towns, the country had no relations with
foreigners. Like China and Japan, Korea was a closed land,
allowing neither foreigners in nor its own people out.
Yet the Koreans were a distinctive non-Chinese race
with their own language, distantly related to Manchu and
other north-east Asian languages. In the 15th century a
gifted king had created an alphabet that all but the most
underprivileged knew, but only women and labourers
LAND OF MORNING CALM 5
MARTYRS OF KOREA
used very much. Chinese was the only writing for men –
save that they too enjoyed the popular novels and songs
that could be written only in Korean.
Confucianism
With Chinese writing came Confucianism, which provided
Korea’s whole philosophy, morals, manners and politics.
Confucius himself was a Chinese sage who flourished at
the beginning of the 5th century BC and taught a ‘way’
based on personal goodness, mutual forbearance, reverence
for ancestors and respect for seniors. Confucian temples
were simply halls for honouring ancestors and great sages.
There were no priests or monks: the head of the family or
community officiated at ancestral sacrifices, and there was
no other form of worship, though there were meetings for
instruction of the young and for discussion of principles.
There was a concept of Heaven, which meant both the sky
and a vaguely defined universal deity. Some scholars, both
oriental and Western, have thought that this Heaven was
another name for God, but the records of the 19th-century
martyrs’ trials show that this was not the opinion of most
Koreans at that time.
The state was carefully constructed on a Confucian pattern.
The king’s power was absolute, and since there was
no parliament, there could be no political parties. There
was, however, an unwieldy bureaucracy that provided the
only career possible for a gentleman. Financial corruption
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and factional strife were endemic. One group would accuse
another of treason or of Confucian heresy, and when the
accusation was upheld, the losers were banished to remote
corners of the country or barbarously executed. One of the
reasons for 18th-century prosperity was the success of a
strong king in putting an end to most of these bloodbaths.
Buddhists and shamans
The heart of Confucian morality was the family. It was
a moral duty to marry and have children – celibacy was
very wrong in Confucian eyes. Family ancestral sacrifices
were the core of Confucian religious practice, and
were seen as vital for the unity of the nation. The ceremonies
were stately and solemn, strictly non-emotional.
They were important for bonding men in both local and
national society; but women were excluded. Even had
they not been excluded, they found little comfort in the
stark rituals. Buddhism, on the other hand, had many
prayers, rosaries and ceremonies with incense and
lights, which were all more appealing to women. In the
Middle Ages it had been the state religion, but the
power and politicking of monks had been so abused
that since the 16th century no Buddhist temples or
monasteries had been allowed in urban areas. The relatively
small numbers of monks and nuns withdrew to
the mountains, where women of all social classes
flocked for picnic and pilgrimage.
LAND OF MORNING CALM 7
MARTYRS OF KOREA
There was also a third religious strand: shamanism.
Every village would have at least one shaman, usually a
woman, a medium who would call up spirits in nightlong
ceremonies in clients’ homes. The noise of her gongs,
songs and dances went on from dusk to dawn. This was a
primitive faith with no formalised doctrine, but with a
strong hold on the people.
As for Christianity, well-read men had sometimes
heard of it. Since the Churches of the Reformation had
not yet begun missions in East Asia, for Koreans
‘Christian’ meant ‘Catholic’. They knew there were some
Christians in China; but Christianity had been virtually
extinguished in Japan, and was kept out of Korea because
of respect for Confucius.
Science and democracy
Korea’s unified society, apparently so contented and stable,
had in-built flaws, of which none was more keenly felt than
the rigid class structure. The educated gentry enjoyed everything
that was good in life. They had the privileges of an
aristocracy and used their position to extort all they could
from the labourers and the poor, who survived at subsistence
level. Outdoor folk plays gave vent to their sense of injustice,
and the gentry themselves wrote satirical poems about
it, but the social system seemed indestructible. Illegitimate
sons were most likely to nurse discontent, because the social
class of a gentleman’s son was determined by the rank of his
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LAND OF MORNING CALM 9
mother. While the sons of a rich man’s wife would be gentlemen,
their half-brothers, born to his concubines, would be
slaves. There were many such illegitimate men, highly conscious
of injustices of all kinds, and from time to time they
raised rebellions. Thoughtful people realised that the class
system needed to be changed.
Intellectual change was coming too. At the beginning
of the 17th century, western scientific ideas had begun to
interest the Chinese, not least because of the mathematical
and astronomical skills of the French Jesuit mission in
Beijing. Western ideas began to enter Korea when
Chinese books, some of them Christian, were brought
back in the baggage of men who had been with the annual
embassy to Beijing at the winter solstice. Not all Koreans
were impressed; but many became interested in the new
mathematics, better agricultural methods, novel building
techniques and developments in machinery. In a society
that had always treasured the ancient above all, some of
the younger scholars started valuing what was new. There
was no organised movement, but 20th-century historians
named the new wave ‘practical learning’.
A Church founded without missionaries
One of these young intellectuals was 30-year-old Yi Pyök.
He was intrigued by what he read in books from China
that were circulating among his friends. He discovered
that the God of the Christians loved all men equally. This
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very reasonable doctrine might lead to changes in social
justice. Perhaps he overestimated the stress placed on this
point by the Catholic Church of that period, but it led him
to further study of the Christian religion, and in 1777 he
gathered a few friends of his own age for group study.
Such quasi-retreat seminars were typical of the time. They
met in a small Buddhist monastery south of the River Han
near Seoul, auspiciously named Ch’önjin-sa ‘Hermitage of
Heavenly Truth’. Politically they were all connected with
an old faction that was now in the political wilderness and
had no influence at court. Among them were two brothers,
Chöng Yakchong and Chöng Yagyong. Yagyong was
eventually to be recognised under his pen name, Tasan, as
the greatest thinker of the day.
They needed more books from China. One of the
group, 28-year-old Yi Sünghun, a relative of Yi Pyök and
brother-in-law of the Chöng brothers, had so far spent a
quiet life studying at home; but in 1784 his father was
sent as envoy on the annual winter embassy to China.
Sünghun was thus able to gain a place in the great caravan
that made its way over the northern mountains and
across the Manchurian plain to Beijing. Members of the
embassy always had plenty of time for sightseeing in the
capital, and Sünghun contrived to visit the French missionaries.
The Catholic mission was now in the hands of
the Lazarists (the Company of the Mission, also called
Vincentians) under the Portuguese Bishop Alexandre de
10
Gouvea. Sünghun contacted an ex-Jesuit, Fr Jean
Grammont, who had stayed in the city after the Jesuit
Order was suppressed by the Pope a year earlier. He gave
the young Korean some books, crucifixes and other
objects, and baptised him with the name of Peter before
he returned to Korea at the beginning of 1785.
Yi Pyök and his friends were fascinated by what they
now read. Within twelve months they set up a secret church
in Seoul at the house of Kim Pömu, one of the royal interpreters
of contemporary Chinese, who was a member of the
Hermitage group. (The site of his house is now part of the
Catholic cathedral compound in Seoul.) Peter Yi (Sünghun)
began baptising them, beginning with Francis Xavier
Kwön, a man of about 50. Yi Pyök became Peter, Kim
Pömu Thomas, and Chöng Yakchong Augustine. Since
Korea knew nothing of a seven-day week, they kept the 7th,
14th, 21st and 28th of each Chinese lunar month as Sunday.
By 1787 they realised a Church needed clergy.
Choosing Francis Xavier Kwön as bishop, they also chose
a few as priests and began to celebrate mass, confession
and confirmation. A few months later they began to have
doubts and suspended these ministries until they could
consult Bishop de Gouvea through a friend on the annual
Beijing embassy. The bishop’s reply came in 1790. They
had to dismantle their makeshift and invalid priesthood.
They must also renounce all Confucian rites. The bishop
promised to send them a real priest as soon as he could.
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THE FIRST MARTYRS
Persecution began when they were discovered at prayer
in Thomas Kim’s house. This socially aberrant behaviour
led to them all being questioned. The names of the gentlemen
were not published, but, as an interpreter, Thomas
was not a gentleman. He belonged to the so-called ‘middle’
or professional class that included doctors, architects,
artists, astronomers and others. He was questioned under
torture, found guilty of impiety to the state and banished
to Tanyang in the central mountains. On the way there he
died in the city of Wönju from the injuries he had
received during his interrogation. Today he is regarded as
the first martyr of the new Church.
A young man named Yun, whose home was in the far
south-west of the country and who was in Seoul successfully
working his way through the state examination
process, had joined the group at Thomas Kim’s house in
1784. He was baptised as Paul. In 1789 he joined the
embassy to Beijing and while he was there received the
sacrament of confirmation from Bishop de Gouvea. On
returning home he destroyed the ancestral tablets in the
family’s Confucian shrine, and when his mother died in
1791 he had her buried without Confucian rites. He and
an elder cousin named James Kwön were arrested for this
impiety that threatened the whole structure of the nation.
12
They were taken to the provincial capital at Chönju and
beheaded. At least eight other men were martyred in the
south-western regions before 1799. To become a
Christian was dangerous.
Defections were to be expected. Yi Pyök, Chöng
Yagyong, Francis Xavier Kwön and even the first baptised,
Peter Yi, were among those who withdrew, persuaded by
their families. Many Korean Catholics today are convinced
that some of them returned later, but we can be sure of
Peter Yi only. He was destined for martyrdom.
A woman in charge
Bishop de Gouvea did not forget his promise. He
despatched a priest in 1791, a Fr Wu; but Fr Wu was
unable to enter Korea and returned to Beijing, where he
died two years later. Then in winter 1794 Fr Zhou Wenmo,
baptised James, managed to reach Seoul. He celebrated
mass for the first time at Easter 1795. Alexander Hwang, a
brilliant young son-in-law of the Chöng family, served as
his interpreter and Korean tutor. As a Chinese in Korean
dress, Zhou would attract no attention, but when he spoke
his accent would betray him as a foreigner and the fact that
he was a priest would have led to his arrest. For the next
seven years he worked secretly among the 4,000 or so
Christians in the capital and surrounding countryside, making
his base in the house, or rather in the woodshed, of a
woman called Columba Kang. He made her a catechist.
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The Korean word for catechist literally means ‘leader of
the congregation’ and catechists had a broad pastoral role
in teaching, organising, guiding and encouraging the
faithful. Columba became the most powerful member of
the Church, because she controlled access to Fr Zhou, and
she alone always knew where he was.
She had become a Christian in her home region in the
Naep’o district south of Seoul, near the west coast, one of
the first districts to be evangelised and one that produced
more martyrs than any other. Her husband divorced her
because of her Christian faith and she moved to Seoul
with her mother-in-law, daughter and stepson, all
Christians. She had independent means and partly
financed Fr Zhou’s journey from China. As catechist, she
recruited and trained women workers and generally oversaw
the Christian women. She converted two royal
princesses: Princess Song, a sister-in-law of the King, and
Princess Song’s daughter-in-law, Princess Sin. Astute and
capable, Columba kept Fr Zhou’s presence secret until
1801, when he was arrested. She and four of her helpers
were arrested too and fiercely tortured.
Fr Zhou was executed by the elaborate and sickening
ritual of ‘decapitation and display’. The two princesses
were convicted of having dealings with a foreign male,
adopting evil teachings and leaving the palace precincts.
They too were executed. Columba was beheaded at the
West Gate prison on 3 July. She has not yet been beatified,
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because the documentation is incomplete, but the Korean
Church is now forwarding her cause, together with the
causes of 16 other martyrs. Even though more Korean
women than men have been canonised, the canonisation
of Columba Kang would bring more attention to the powerful
role of women in the story of Korea’s martyrs. In
periods of persecution women are always vital to the
strength of the Church: they train their sons and daughters
to be ready for martyrdom. Columba did more. She was
for seven crucial years the chief organiser of the Church.
Arrest and torture
The martyrs were treated as ordinary malefactors. They
were arrested by the police, who bound them with red
cord and took them to the Police Prison, often called in
English the Thieves’ Prison. This appalling place was an
unpaved yard – usually mud or dust – surrounded by sheds
with fronts of stout wooden bars, built against the walls.
Men and women were separated, but otherwise all prisoners
were packed in together, with no protection against
freezing cold in winter or scorching heat in summer.
Prisoners were allowed into the central open space during
daylight hours. At night they were forced into the sheds,
where they usually had no room to stretch or to lie down.
Once the doors were closed they were not opened until
dawn for any purpose at all. There was no sanitation.
Disease was rife. Prisoners were given a pitifully small
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ration of boiled millet twice a day, though some were
able to buy or bribe extra food. Others ate foul straw and
lice. It was said that some Christians who bore tortures
with fortitude collapsed and apostatised under the strain
of prison conditions. Others often claimed that imprisonment
was harder to bear than torture.
After interrogators had compiled the evidence against
the prisoners under the police procedure, which might
take many days, those who were not released were sent to
the Criminal Court Prison. This was similar to the Police
Prison, though sometimes less crowded.
Interrogations were normally accompanied by torture.
Merciless beating was administered with a variety of paddles,
besoms, scourges, rods and wands, each inflicting its
own peculiar kind of pain. Savage beating caused bloodshed
and there are accounts of martyrs whose flesh fell off
in shreds, even of bones being exposed. Wooden blocks
and ropes were employed to bend leg and arm bones, even
to break them and dislocate joints. Pointed bamboo rods
might be stuck into the victim’s flesh. In another torture a
cord was passed under the victim’s thighs, crossed over
the front and then held taut by a man on either side who
applied a sawing motion that cut through the flesh like a
wire cheese-cutter, right through to the bone. Such tortures
would be repeated over many days, even weeks. Few
martyrs, if any, escaped being tortured again when they
were brought to the execution ground.
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Execution
Some executions were carried out by strangling. This was
usually done in the Police Prison. The prisoner was placed
between two posts. The rope was passed round his neck, the
ends crossed at the front. Each end was then wound round
one of the posts and drawn tight by an executioner. Most of
the martyrs were, however, beheaded at an execution ground
outside the Little West Gate of the city. The condemned person
was tied by hands and hair to a large cross erected on a
bull-cart, and deliberately driven by a rocky and steep road,
calculated to make the journey as painful as possible. At the
site there was a block at which the victim was made to
kneel. The head was cut off with a huge sword. Several
blows were needed to finish the work. (During the decapitation
of St John Pak the executioner actually withdrew after
striking a few blows in order to whet his blade. Then he
returned and finished severing the head.)
When the authorities wanted to make the public more
widely aware of an execution, it was not performed at
one of the relatively small execution grounds, but at a
place where a far larger number of spectators could be
assembled. At Seoul that usually meant the broad sands
of the Han River, near the big flat island of Yöüido and
the army training camp, a mile or so further west than
the regular execution ground.
The procedure was called ‘displaying the head before
the military camp’. It was a military function, with one of
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the commandants of the capital garrison in attendance at
the head of a hundred or so soldiers. A tall stake was
erected on the sands for each of the condemned. The man
was brought to the place, bound in a rough wooden chair,
carried by two soldiers with an escort. On arrival he was
stripped to his floppy white trousers, and his topknot
unravelled (Buddhist monks alone did not wear topknots).
An arrow was thrust downwards though the top
and lobe of each of his ears. His face was dashed with
water and lime, his hands tied in front of his chest. Two
poles were put under the rope binding his wrists and one
pole pushed under each armpit. Two men, one in front
and one behind, took the ends of these poles, lifted the
victim and carried him three times round the arena, to the
execration and insults of the crowd. A soldier attached a
banner to the top of the stake, inscribed with the crime in
Chinese, while another read out the sentence. The man
was then ordered to kneel back to the stake. His hair was
gathered in a bunch and tied to the stake to stretch his
neck so that his head was ready for severing. A small
troop of soldiers then performed a slow dance round the
stake, chanting and brandishing heavy sabres, with which
they struck his neck. Several blows were needed to sever
it. As the head rolled off, another soldier picked it up and
presented it on a tray to the presiding commandant. The
head was then displayed on a stake, as a warning to the
public, and left there for three days. It was forbidden that
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anyone should touch the corpses. This ritual execution was
used for all foreign missionaries and for other Christians to
whom the authorities wanted to draw attention.
1801, The Year of the White Cock
Three hundred Christians were executed that year in an
outburst of violence that has gone down in history as the
‘Persecution of the White Cock Year’, because the
Koreans numbered their years according to the twelve
Chinese ‘zodiacal’ animals. Although there had been
martyrdoms nearly every year since 1791, there was no
policy of seeking out Christians until the Year of the
White Cock, 1801, when a change of policy followed the
accession to the throne in 1800 of a ten-year-old boy.
When a child became king, the senior Queen
Dowager acted as regent until he was of an age to rule
for himself. Since there were no other royal families in
Asia for the kings to marry into, they had to marry
women of their own country, which inevitably gave
political power to the families from which the queens
came. In 1800 the Queen Dowager was from a family in
the conservative tradition, which disapproved of
Christians because they were favoured by those who
followed the ‘practical learning’ vogue. Christianity was
already being called ‘Western teaching’. She ordered
that Catholics should be sought out, and executed if they
would not apostatise.
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Things were made worse by the incident of the ‘silk
letter’. During the year Fr Zhou’s 25-year-old tutor,
Alexander Hwang, wrote a letter on a roll of silk to the
Bishop of Beijing, asking for the Pope to send military
assistance to the Korean Christians. The letter (now in
the Vatican) was intercepted, Hwang was executed,
and there was further reason for the government to
attack Christians.
Peter Yi – the man who had first brought Christian
books to the scholars at the Hermitage of Heavenly Truth
27 years before, but apostatised – returned to the faith and
was among those martyred in the Year of the White
Cock. So was Augustine Chöng.
Thirty-five years waiting for a priest
For its first ten years (1784-1794) the Korean Church had
no sacrament but baptism. Now again it had no priest.
This time it would have to wait for thirty-five years. Soon
the young king married a woman from the Andong Kim
family, which was sympathetic to the liberalising intellectuals.
Persecution eased, but the frontiers remained tightly
closed. There were probably 7,000 or 8,000 Christians
throughout the country, mostly in Seoul and the southwestern
provinces, drawn almost entirely from the gentry
and professional classes.
A natural leader appeared among them: Peter Yi’s
cousin, Paul Chöng Hasang, son of the martyred
20
Augustine Chöng. Paul’s brother also was martyred in
1801. His mother and sisters, though reduced to poverty,
brought him up as a devoted Christian and provided him
with an excellent home education. At the age of 20 he got a
post as a servant on the annual embassy to Beijing. He was
able to do this again on nine subsequent occasions, and
thus to maintain contact with Bishop de Gouvea. In spite of
his youth, he was appointed catechist and effectively
became the lay pastor of all the Christians in the country.
He persisted in efforts to get another priest from China,
and very nearly succeeded with a Fr Shen in 1826, but that
plan came to nothing. Korea still had to wait for a priest.
In 1823 Paul was introduced to a man four years his
senior named Yu, a remarkable scholar and famous bookcollector.
One day Yu had noticed that the paper used to
line a drawer in his furniture had scraps of philosophy
printed on it. Intrigued, he succeeded in stripping all the
fragments from the cabinetwork and found he had part of
a treatise on the true meaning of God, written by Mateo
Ricci, the greatest of the China Jesuits. In his attempts to
find someone who would explain more about Ricci’s
ideas, Yu met Paul Chöng. They became firm friends. Yu
held a senior post in the royal interpreters’ bureau and
frequently went on the annual mission to Beijing. Paul
found a place as a servant on the embassy in 1824 and
they both went to see Bishop de Gouvea. While they were
there, Yu was baptised, taking the name of Augustine.
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Soon his authority in the Korean Church was less only
than that of Paul Chöng.
On one of these Beijing journeys Paul and Augustine
got to know a servant in his twenties named Cho, an
able man with an unusual spiritual history. For a while
he had been a Buddhist monk. Paul and Augustine
recognised his qualities and encouraged him to become
a Christian. He was baptised and confirmed in Beijing,
with the name of Charles. On return to Korea he became
a trusted helper, willing to undertake difficult and dangerous
tasks.
The instruction of new Christians continued with zeal.
Every year saw more manuals and prayerbooks arriving
from China, including stories of saints. Saints’ names
were always given at baptism, in Chinese form and with a
seeming preference for the names of martyrs – Lucy,
Agnes, Sebastian, Protase and the like. Korean Christians
knew they might need the help and example of earlier
Christian martyrs.
In 1825 Paul and Augustine, with some others, sent an
earnest letter for help to Pope Leo XII. It was received
two years later, but nothing came of it until Pope Gregory
XVI, as part of his revival of world missions (he established
some 70 new dioceses and vicariates), created the
Korean Vicariate Apostolic in 1831. This was the first
step towards creating a Korean diocese.
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The new vicariate was entrusted to the Paris Foreign
Missions Society, which had been working in east and
south-east Asia for two centuries. Barthélemy Bruguière,
a priest who had been two years in Bangkok, was
appointed Vicar Apostolic and ordained bishop. He set
out for Korea overland from Thailand in 1831. A young
priest called Jacques Chastan, recently arrived at Penang
in Malaya, was detailed to join him. Then Fr Pierre
Maubant, who was working in Sichuan (western China),
volunteered to join the Bishop as he passed through
Sichuan on his way to Korea.
Before any of them could get there, however, a
Chinese priest named Pacifico Yu, who was studying in
the Chinese College at Naples, volunteered to work in the
new vicariate. Paul Chöng, Augustine Yu and another of
the gentry class, Sebastian Nam, helped him to enter the
country in 1833. Sebastian lived with Fr Pacifico in Seoul
and took care of him.
Meanwhile Bishop Bruguière and Fr Maubant travelled
the length of China by separate routes. They met in
Manchuria and stayed in a tiny Christian village they
thought was a suitable place from which to attempt crossing
the Korean border. While waiting there the bishop fell
ill and died on 20 October 1835, broken by the exertions
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of the journey. He was 43 years old. Fr Maubant, a strong
man in his twenties, went on alone. No European could
get through the frontier guardposts. The only way he
could enter Korea was to wait till the depth of winter and
struggle over the River Yalu when it was frozen. Helped
and guided by Paul Chöng, Fr Maubant crossed the ice at
night in January 1836.
He had to disguise himself as a mourner, because
mourners wore huge umbrella-like straw hats that hid
their faces and his brown beard would show he was not a
Korean. Travelling on foot in severe winter weather, usually
at night and in constant risk of discovery, he took 15
days to reach Seoul, where he was greeted by Fr Pacifico,
Sebastian Nam and others. Immediately he was swamped
with pastoral work, travelling among the scattered flock
in the two central provinces, often accompanied by
Charles Cho, he who had once been a Buddhist monk but
now became the Frenchman’s guide and interpreter.
People who had not been able to make their confessions
for thirty-five years could do so at last. Some made their
confessions in written Chinese, others had to use interpreters.
On Holy Saturday they celebrated the Vigil of
Easter in the cramped space of an ordinary Korean house
– a clandestine liturgy lasting five hours.
Fr Maubant’s most important achievement was the
selection of three teenage boys to become seminarians:
Francis-Xavier Kim, Andrew Kim and Thomas Ch’oe.
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Accompanied by Fr Pacifico (who never returned), they
were smuggled out of Korea in 1836 and sent to the Paris
Society’s seminary at Macao. Paul Chöng, Augustine Yu
and Sebastian Nam saw them out of the country.
The other French priest, Jacques Chastan, had reached
the northern frontier in 1833. He was the same age as
Maubant. He had come by sea routes from Penang to
Macao, thence to Fujian, and finally by a fishermen’s boat
to Manchuria. Though he came within sight of the mountains
of Korea, he could find no way to cross the frontier.
He therefore withdrew and worked for about two years in
Shandong until he could get a message to Fr Maubant,
who was by then in Seoul. Fr Maubant arranged for
couriers to meet and help him; but they then had to wait
until the Yalu froze. Fr Chastan crossed the ice on the last
day of the year 1836, arriving in Seoul in January 1837.
During the summer both priests managed to give a few
weeks to language study, though they never dared stay
long in one place. They had to acclimatise themselves to
rough food, especially the standard meal of turnip pickled
in brine, served with rice and thin soup. Dried persimmon
fruit served them as iron rations, for they were constantly
travelling on foot, sleeping by day, saying mass and
doing pastoral work at night. Fr Maubant fell ill. Fr
Chastan rushed to see him in Seoul and gave him the last
rites. Miraculously, he recovered, and after three months
rest returned to the punishing work that had brought him
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low. They had some 6,000 Christians to look after.
During 1837 they heard over 2,000 confessions and baptised
1,237 new Christians.
A pastoral bishop
Communications with Europe were very slow. At length
Laurent Imbert, a priest of the Paris Missions who had
been working in Sichuan, western China, since 1820, and
knew Pierre Maubant, was appointed bishop for Korea,
and ordained in May 1837. By November he had arrived
at Mukden (now Shenyang) in Manchuria. In mid-
December, he crossed the frozen Yalu and on New Year’s
Day 1838 he met Fr Maubant in Seoul. Fr Chastan was
away in the south, and did not meet the bishop until May.
Between the bishop’s arrival and November 1837,
2,000 were baptised. By the end of the year there were
9,000 Korean Christians. Imbert soon recognised that
Paul Chöng would make a good priest. He even went so
far as to start teaching him some Latin and a little theology.
In spite of the enormous difficulties, there were
gleams of hope.
The bishop’s life scarcely differed from that of his
priests. He rose at 2.30 a.m. At 3.30 he began baptising,
confessing, confirming, celebrating mass and caring for the
Christians, who rarely dared to be seen coming and going
in daylight. He suffered from hunger, because he often
could not eat until his pastoral work was finished for the
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day. He went to sleep at 9 in the evening. ‘A life so hard’,
he wrote, ‘we hardly fear the sword-blow that must end it’.
1839, The Year of the Yellow Pig
The premonition was apt. A new king had come to the
throne in 1834, one whose in-laws were opposed to what
they called ‘western learning’ – meaning Christianity.
Christians had to be more careful, and by the time the
bishop arrived, persecution was intensifying. Peter Yi, a
catechist, had been imprisoned for four years but not executed.
He died on 25 November 1838 in the Criminal
Court Prison. His sister Agatha had been arrested in
February 1836 and was still held in prison. Pressure on
Christians increased during spring and summer 1839, the
Year of the Yellow Pig. A stern new decree against
Christianity was published in April.
We have records of some 140 martyrs during the
whole year, in Seoul and several southern provincial
cities, but this can be only part of the whole story.
Dispossessed Christians were taking refuge in the further
parts of the country. Already some of them were becoming
potters, because makers of earthenware traditionally
travelled from place to place in search of suitable clay,
setting up earth kilns in waste places and moving on
when they had exhausted local clay deposits. Itinerant
potters were to remain a feature of the Korean Catholic
Church for two hundred years.
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In mid-May Protase Chöng, a man of 41, was arrested
and questioned by a kindly magistrate who persuaded
him to deny his faith. Protase went home, but could not
rest. A few days later he presented himself to the police,
demanding to be re-arrested. They refused to take him
seriously. He redoubled his demand. Finally they beat
him severely and threw him into prison, where, a few
hours later, he died during the night.
Three men and six women, 24 May 1839
On 24 May Agatha Yi was beheaded with eight others,
including the catechist Augustine Yi, on an execution
ground outside the Little West Gate of Seoul. The police
had found a silver mitre (whose workmanship astounded
them), a chasuble and a Latin prayerbook in the catechist’s
house. This discovery strengthened the government’s
determination to find the illegal foreign entrants.
Most of that day’s martyrs were of the gentry class.
Lucy Pak had rich relations in the royal palace. Damian
Nam, however, declared that he would be happy to enter
heaven with no other rank than ‘Damian Nam of the
Scapular Confraternity’. Anna Pak was devoted to the Five
Wounds of Christ. Agatha Kim was such a simple soul that
she could only repeat the names of Jesus and Mary. She
was baptised in prison. The others were Magdalene Kim,
Barbara Han and Peter Kwön, whose beatific smile was
said to have survived on his severed head.
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A day or two later there were three deaths in the Police
Prison. One of these was 14-year-old Barbara Yi. The
others were Barbara Kim and Joseph Chang the herbalist.
One man and seven women, 20 July 1839
Executions continued throughout the summer. The
next canonised names are those of a man and seven
women beheaded on 20 July. The man was John Yi,
brother of Augustine Yi, martyred in May. John had
been baptised in Peking when he was there as a member
of the annual embassy.
The eldest woman was Rosa Kim, a convert widow in
her mid-fifties, who calmly murmured the names of
Jesus and Mary as she was arrested. Anna Kim was a
few years younger. Maria Wön was only 20. She had
been orphaned at 9 and was brought up as, Christian. She
was determined to stay a virgin. For that reason she
dressed her hair like a married woman’s and earned a
living by needlework. When neighbours delated her to
the police, she tried to run away but failed – she had
some difficulty in coming to terms with her situation.
Magdalene Yi had never seen Seoul before she left her
pagan father’s house in the countryside to find a
Christian family to live with in Seoul. She followed her
father to Seoul without his knowledge, and by leaving
bloodstained shreds of her clothing in the woods on the
way, successfully persuaded her family that a tiger had
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killed her. Her father soon learned the truth, but forgave
her. Lucy Kim had a fine head of hair, which she sold in
prison in order to buy thin soup for other starving prisoners.
She had joined with Theresa Yi, Martha Kim and
Lucy Kim in a pact to surrender themselves to the
authorities and seek martyrdom. The judges gave them
extra tortures to punish their presumption.
Agnes Kim also died that day. She was the younger
sister of Columba Kim, a remarkable woman who was to
die a fortnight later.
The maker of straw shoes
On 3 September another man and five women were
beheaded outside the Little West Gate. The man was
John Pak, a maker of straw shoes who had often said he
needed to die a martyr in order to atone for his sins,
striking his shin with the mallet of his trade as he said it.
He had sent his wife away to stay with relations the night
before he was arrested.
The eldest of the women was Maria Pak, whose sister
Lucy had died on 24 May. Barbara Kwön and MariaYi,
wife of Damian Nam, had each made her house a masscentre
for Bishop Imbert. Barbara Yi had insisted on marrying
a Christian, and had put off a pagan suitor by staying
abed for three years pretending to be unable to walk.
She had then married a Christian, but he had died after
only two years. Her sister Magdalene and her aunt
30
Theresa had been beheaded on 20 July, her young niece,
also called Barbara Yi, had died in prison at the end of
May; and she left her mother Magdalene Hö in jail, waiting
for martyrdom.
Father of a priest
A week later, on 12 September, Francis Ch’oe, aged only
34, father of the lad Thomas who had been sent to the
seminary in Macao with two other boys in 1836, died in
prison. Francis had been baptised when young. He had a
fiery temperament, which he succeeded in controlling, so
that the impression he left on others was one of generosity
and gentleness. When he realised persecution was growing,
he hid his pious medals and other devotional objects,
but did nothing to hide his Christian books. He said the
images must be protected against sacrilege, but the books
were his manuals of strategy in the coming battle.
When police came to his home in the country to fetch
him, he entertained them overnight – and gave new
clothes to one of them whose clothes were threadbare.
Then he persuaded a group of nearly forty Christians to
go to prison with him, saying it would be better to die by
the sword in Seoul than to starve in the country – for there
was a famine that year. Only three of the forty stayed to
the end. When asked to renounce his Christian faith,
Francis replied that if asked to live without eating, he
would try, though it would be very difficult; but it was
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 31
MARTYRS OF KOREA
impossible for him to pretend not to believe in God. At one
point he was asked to put on the bishop’s vestments. He
refused, and they were put on another prisoner. Francis
straightway prostrated himself before the man. When
asked whom he was reverencing, he replied, ‘The crucifix’.
The questioner raised his hand to strike Francis; then
thought better of it.
The officers goaded a repulsive thief to insult and
pester him, even to opening and hurting the sores from
his beatings. Francis bore everything with such resignation
that the thief exclaimed, ‘He really is a Christian.
You other Christians! Do as he does!’
On 11 September he was beaten with 50 blows – having
been beaten every second day since the beginning of
August. The next day he died in prison, disappointed that
God had not allowed him to shed his blood, but accepting
the Divine Will.
The good shepherd gives up his life for the sheep
So many of his flock were being imprisoned, tortured and
executed that Bishop Imbert wondered whether he and
the two priests should try to leave the country, in order to
save the laity. The three Frenchmen met near Suwön, but,
deciding that any plan to leave Korea would be impracticable,
they separated on 3 July and went into hiding.
On 10 August a new Christian named Andrew Chöng
came to the bishop in the middle of the night, saying a
32
messenger had come from Seoul, where the government
had changed its mind and would now treat him with due
honour. Imbert realised at once that his hiding place had
been betrayed. He wrote straightway to his two priests,
then went to meet the ‘messenger’ in a nearby village.
The messenger turned out to be an apostate called Kim
Yösang. The bishop went with him to Seoul. There he
was soon bound with the red cord of arrest, and taken for
questioning with the usual tortures. He had persuaded the
police to allow Andrew Chöng return to his own home.
Anxious now to find the two priests, the police
deceived two more Christians, one of whom went along
with the ruse so far as to meet the bishop, from whom he
was able to take a note for Fr Maubant and Fr Chastan,
written in Latin. The note said: ‘In extreme circumstances
the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep, so if you
have not already left, come with the officer Son Kyejong,
but do not let any of the Christians follow you. Imbert,
Bishop of Capsa.’ (Capsa was his titular see, because
Korea was not yet a diocese.)
The letter soon reached Fr Maubant, who sent it on to
Fr Chastan and at the same time wrote to Son, telling
him that Fr Chastan was away, but they would both
arrive in about ten days. Jacques Chastan received the
message on 1 September. He at once sat down and wrote
a farewell letter to his family in France, giving thanks to
God for calling him to be a martyr. When the two met,
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 33
MARTYRS OF KOREA
near the town of Hongju, they both wrote further letters
on 6 September, to the Maubant family, to the Roman
Propaganda and to the Paris Foreign Missions Society.
They reported to Cardinal Fransoni of the Propaganda
that the mission had about 10,000 Christians. They also
reported 1,200 baptisms, 2,500 confirmations, 4,500 confessions,
4,000 communions, 150 marriages, 60 anointings
of the dying, and 600 catechumens under instruction.
For three men this was a huge accomplishment,
especially when the necessary travelling and the language
difficulties are taken into account. They both then
wrote letters to their Christians, exhorting them particularly
to ensure that Christians married Christians.
From Hongju they were taken on ponies to Seoul. On
12 September they were in Seoul with their bishop, all
three being interrogated by the Criminal Court. They were
beaten on the 15th and 16th and again on the 19th. They
were finally sentenced late on the 21st, and executed on
the sands by the Han that evening. The whole ritual of
military decapitation with display of the heads was gone
through. When Fr Chastan received the first sword blow it
fell on his shoulder and he started up, but immediately fell
back on his knees. Otherwise they remained still till they
died. Not until three weeks later were Christians able to
disinter the three bodies surreptitiously and take them
away. Many decades later they were enshrined in the crypt
of Seoul cathedral.
34
Late in the afternoon of the next day Paul Chöng and
his fellow-worker Augustine Yu were beheaded outside
the Little West Gate.
So the leadership of the infant Church was destroyed
in two days. Bishop Imbert, realising that this would happen,
had committed the Church to the care Charles Hyön,
a gifted catechist of the professional class.
Strong women
Four days after Paul and Augustine were killed, nine
other Christians were martyred outside the Little West
Gate on 26 September. The six women among them had
been under arrest for many weeks – Magdalene Pak for
six months. She and Agatha Chön had connections with
the palace, where she had lived and worked. Perpetua
Hong had been in prison for over four months, Columba
Kim since June and Julietta Kim since July. Magdalene
Hö was the mother of Barbara Yi and Magdalene Yi, who
had been beheaded on 20 July and 2 September.
The life of women, especially those of the gentry class,
was severely circumscribed. They rarely travelled, indeed
rarely left the house and were not allowed in the streets in
daylight. Most of them could not read Chinese characters.
They were conventionally regarded as unintelligent. The
truth was very different. In spite of their manner of life,
women were often of strong character, perceptive, and
influential in the lives of the men.
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 35
MARTYRS OF KOREA
Their steadfastness is illustrated by their response to torture.
It was allied to a meekness and dignity that were in
themselves virtues for Confucians too. Most of these
women had been looking forward to martyrdom, some for
many years. Perpetua Hong had long said she wanted ‘to
wear the red dress (of martyrdom)’. When they came to
interrogation they surprised the questioners by the cogency
of their arguments for believing in God and Christ.
Columba Kim made a great impression by her poise
and lack of fear. She had been imprisoned with her sister
Agnes, who had been beheaded three weeks earlier. They
were aged 26 and 23. Their questioners were so exasperated
by their constancy that the women had been stripped
of all their clothing and put into a men’s section of the
Police Prison, with a suggestion that the ruffians already
there were welcome to treat the women as they liked.
After two days they were given back their clothes and
returned, untouched, to the women’s prison. When they
were next under torture Columba complained about this
incident with calm dignity. She said she would not complain
about treatment that was legal, but she and her sister
had been treated illegally. The court was appalled and
sent a report to higher authority. Some of the prison staff
were punished with severe bastinado.
Columba could be satirical too, as she was in describing
the nonsense involved in believing that the souls of the dead
would come and enjoy the meal prepared for them in the
36
Confucian ancestral sacrifice ritual. She won admiration for
her intelligence and courage, but these virtues could not
spare her; nor would she have wished that they might.
Also in September another Lucy Kim, 70 years old and
generally known as ‘the hunchback’, died in prison.
Three male martyrs and three more women
On 26 September three more men were executed with
the six women: Charles Cho, Sebastian Nam and
Ignatius Kim. They represented the second level of
leadership in the Church
Charles Cho and Sebastian Nam had been among those
who went on the embassies to Beijing. Charles, who went
every year, had helped to arrange for the foreign priests to
enter Korea and had acted as guide for Maubant in his
pastoral journeys. On his return from China at the beginning
of 1839, he had received a vision of Christ with St
Peter and St Paul, which he had interpreted as a promise
of martyrdom. When he was taken from the cross on the
cart that took him to the execution ground, Charles Cho
noticed some of his relations, not Christians, present there
in great distress. He gave them an affectionate smile.
Sebastian Nam had been Fr Pacifico’s helper and was
an experienced leader in the Church. He also was taken
through the treachery of a Christian.
Ignatius Kim, whose own father had been martyred in
1814, was father of the boy Andrew Kim who had gone
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 37
MARTYRS OF KOREA
to Macao in 1836 to study for the priesthood. Ignatius
broke under torture, but was still condemned to punishment
for having let his son go abroad. When he was
returned to prison, the others encouraged him to reassert
his faith. This he did three times, under increased torture;
and so died a martyr.
On the last night of the month two more women died
in prison, both of them sick with disease contracted from
the conditions under which they were detained: 57-yearold
Catherine Yi and her 33-year-old daughter Magdalene
Cho. Catherine had been reduced to poverty by her persistence
in the faith and earned a meagre living as a seamstress.
She realised her ambition of dying a virgin.
Boy martyr
Augustine Yu’s family, of whom only two had accepted
their father’s faith, was outlawed and banished from the
capital. Before then, however, his younger son Peter, aged
13, had become the youngest of the martyrs who would be
canonised 150 years later. This remarkable boy had begun
to hope for martyrdom long before. After his father was
arrested he had gone to the police early in August and
urged them to arrest him. They did so and proceeded to
question him with torture on 14 occasions. At least once he
picked up shreds of his flesh from the ground and threw
them defiantly before the judges. To many of the onlookers
it seemed that he was happy throughout the five horrific
38
weeks, hoping to be beheaded. In the event he was strangled
in the prison on 31 October.
Paul’s mother
Paul Chöng’s mother, Cecilia Yu, was 79 years old. The
police arrested her on 19 July and subjected her, old as
she was, to 230 strokes of the wand in her first 5 interrogations.
She wanted to join her beloved Paul in martyrdom,
but because of her age the authorities would not
behead her. She resigned herself to dying in prison, and
lingered on until she fell asleep on 23 November, quietly
murmuring the names of Jesus and Mary. Her daughter
Elisabeth was still alive in prison for her faith.
Winter martyrs
On the day Cecilia died, 23 November 1839, the State
council issued an even stronger edict against Christianity.
On 29 December, seven more martyrs were killed.
Benedicta Hyön was sister to Charles Hyön, the catechist
who had become leader of the new generation. Their
father had died for the faith in 1801. Magdalene Yi was
an impoverished lady of the gentry class who had
watched her mother die in prison. Peter Ch’oe, father-inlaw
of Charles Cho, was a man of the professional class
who after a dissolute youth had become a Christian and
tamed his wild ways. Magdalene Han was married to a
distinguished scholar who had been baptised in articulo
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 39
MARTYRS OF KOREA
mortis. Cecilia Yu’s daughter and Paul Chöng’s sister,
Elisabeth Chöng, had always lived in poverty and was
accustomed to earn her pittance by needlework and weaving.
She was the fourth member of her family to be executed.
Bishop Imbert declared she should have been made
a catechist. As she left the prison on her way to execution,
she exhorted those she left behind to pray always for
the poor and for the suffering. Barbara Cho was the wife
of Sebastian Nam, who had died among those killed on
26 September. She was also cousin of Paul Chöng and
had kept house for Fr Pacifico. Barbara Ko had been a
toddler when her father had been martyred in 1801. She
left her husband Augustine Pak in prison, awaiting his
inevitable death before long.
Strangulations
January 1840 saw four martyrs strangled in the Police Prison.
On the 9th the two victims were women. Theresa Kim
was an aunt of the boy Andrew Kim who had gone to
Macao to study for the priesthood four years earlier. Her
husband Joseph Son had died in prison for the faith in
1824 in the country town of Haemi. She had provided a
home for Fr Pacifico till he went with the three boys to
China. Later she joined Bishop Imbert’s household. She
was strangled after nearly six months’ imprisonment.
Agatha Yi, who died the same day aged only 17, had
been imprisoned in April, with her father Augustine
40
(beheaded in April) and her mother Barbara Kwön
(beheaded in September).
Later the same month, the same brutal death put an
end to the sufferings of two more men. The first was
35-year-old Andrew Chöng, the naive convert who had
fallen into the trap set by the apostate Kim Yösang to
capture Bishop Imbert. Andrew had been duped again
into betraying some new converts; but he woke to the
truth when Kim tried to persuade him to betray Fr
Maubant and Fr Chastan. In his distress at that time
Andrew spoke of giving himself up to martyrdom. The
priests dissuaded him; but he was soon caught and subjected
to rigorous tortures. Five months later he was
strangled on 23 January 1840.
His companion in martyrdom, Stephen Min, was killed
a week later. He was nearly 60, a childless widower,
reduced to staying in other peoples’ houses, earning a living
by hand-copying books. His sufferings climaxed in
40 strokes of the paddle, at every one of which he cried
‘A rascal fit only to die!’ Yet in those last weeks of misery
this rather solemn soul managed to persuade two
apostates to repent: Dominic Yi and Cosmas Yö – both of
whom were executed before Stephen himself.
Five men and five women
Ten martyrs died on 31 January and 1 February 1840 –
five men and five women.
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MARTYRS OF KOREA
Paul Hö was a soldier of the city garrison. At first he
broke down under the torture, but soon he recovered his
courage and was subjected to depraved tests by the
guards, who made him eat and drink filth to prove his
fidelity to Christ. He died while being tortured by beating
with the heavy paddle.
The other nine were beheaded at Tang-Kogae, another
place of execution outside the western walls of the city.
The five women were all at least acquaintances, if not
friends. Maria Yi was sister of Magdalene Yi, beheaded
with six others on 29 December. Magdalene Son was the
wife of Peter Ch’oe, who had also been martyred on that
December day. Barbara Ch’oe was their daughter, whose
husband Charles Cho had been martyred in September.
Magdalene was another seamstress, and both she and her
daughter each arrived in prison with a tiny daughter. Both
children were sent away into the care of others.
The fourth woman, Agatha Kwön, was a stranger case.
She died at the age of 21 and was the daughter of
Magalene Han, who had been beheaded outside the Little
West Gate at the end of December. Magdalene’s husband
had been converted on his deathbed. They had arranged
for Agatha to be married at the age of 12. Marriage at this
age was more common than not, and the bride and groom
were not expected to cohabit until some years later. This
bridegroom’s family, however, was too poor even to take
Agatha to live in their house and she was confided to his
42
relations. When Fr Pacifico arrived in Korea she entered
service in his household. He became very fond of her,
and approved her wish to break off her marriage and live
as a virgin. Their relationship became too close and gave
cause for scandal. Fr Maubant talked to her and she
became overwhelmed with penitence, claiming that only
martyrdom would expiate her sins. Kim Yösang, who had
betrayed Bishop Imbert, sank further into depravity by
trying to persuade her to go off with him, but she was
steadfast. She entered the prison with some happiness.
The guards were sorry for Agatha and set her free, but
she soon returned voluntarily to the prison. Her martyrdom
was a singular triumph at the close of a life of frailty
and great trials.
The fifth woman was Agatha Yi. She had been married
to a eunuch. Bishop Imbert advised that she should leave
him, but her mother was too poor to support her. She
moved in with Agatha Kwön and was arrested with her.
Of the four men, two were brothers aged 39 and 42:
Peter and Paul Hong from Sösan district in the central
province, grandsons and nephews of two martyrs of 1801.
Both were catechists and had helped shelter Fr Maubant
and Fr Chastan in spring and summer 1839. The dastardly
Kim Yösang fingered them as he did the bishop and the
two priests.
Augustine Pak was 48, a member of the professional
class, cultured and kind, but very poor. His wife Barbara
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 43
MARTYRS OF KOREA
Ko, whose own father had been martyred in 1801, had
been beheaded in November. Augustine had been one of
the group that arranged for the three Frenchmen to enter
the country and Bishop Imbert had made him a catechist.
It is recorded that he was insulted and tortured even by
other prisoners. The torturers left him unable to use either
arms or legs.
The last of the group was John Yi, 31 years old. He was
of the gentry class, a widower without children. He had
accompanied Fr Maubant on pastoral journeys. During
1839 he had been at pains to offer relief to imprisoned
Christians; and he had led the group that secretly removed
the bodies of the three French martyrs from the Han River
sands at the end of September. Six days before he died he
wrote a lengthy letter of advice to his fellow-Christians, trying
to strengthen their faith. He advised them particularly to
practise the Stations of the Cross frequently and to have
recourse to the prayers of the Ever-virgin Mary.
Barbara Ch’oe and Paul Hong could not be executed
with the others, because no one could be beheaded on the
same day as a close relation. Paul had a brother, and
Barbara her mother, among the condemned. Seven of the
group were therefore beheaded on 31 January, but these
two and John Yi on 1 February.
The list of those canonised for the persecution of the
Year of the Yellow Pig ends with Antony Kim strangled
on 29 April 1841, after 15 months in prison.
44
FRENCH MISSIONARIES 45
Rebellions and poor harvests
For the next six years there were few martyrdoms. The
royal in-laws were Kims again, favourable to modern
learning, and the police stopped searching out Christians.
The Church however could not lower its guard. Most
Christians were hiding in the countryside, and all had
been impoverished. Few remained who belonged to the
gentry. Not only had they lost all their priests; they had
lost their Korean leaders too. Three men remained who
could give some leadership, but they were less gifted than
Paul Chöng and his companions: Fr Chastan’s servant,
Charles Hyön; Fr Maubant’s servant, Peter Chöng; and
Thomas Yi, a grandson of the very first Korean to be baptised
in Beijing, Peter Yi, martyred in 1801.
The state of the whole country was now far from being
as prosperous as it had been when Peter Yi collected
Christian books in Beijing for the scholars of the
Hermitage of Heavenly Truth. Government by the royal
in-laws had been corrupt; the kings had lacked charisma;
there had been too many poor harvests; and a succession
of uprisings, led by illegitimate sons and other malcontents,
showed the general malaise of the nation.
The Paris Foreign Missions Society and the Office of
Propaganda in Rome appointed John Joseph Ferréol as
Vicar Apostolic for Korea. He arrived in Manchuria by
sea and reached Shenyang (then called Mukden) in 1840.
He was unable to get further for four years. Had Paul
MARTYRS OF KOREA
Chöng still been alive, things might have been different.
Christians were still able from time to time to get on the
embassies from Seoul to Beijing, but the network had been
broken. Ferréol withdrew beyond the Mongolian border
and stayed with the little Christian community that had
sheltered Bishop Bruguière five years earlier. Not until
1842 was contact established with Charles Hyön. The way
would soon be open. The route would again be over the
frozen Yalu River, in the coldest, darkest part of the year.
46
47
SAINT ANDREW KIM
By this time the three boys who had been sent to the Paris
Missions seminary in Macao should have finished their
studies there. Francis-Xavier, alas, had died. The other
two had fared well, and it was judged expedient to think
of their return. They were to be put as interpreters on two
French naval vessels that were planning to visit Korean
waters, with the intention of complaining about the execution
of the three French nationals in 1839. The vessels
were under the command of Admiral Cécille – a name
that was destined to bring more sorrow than help.
Andrew Kim was to accompany two French priests, one
for Manchuria and one for Korea. The plan had to be
changed. Andrew and the two priests eventually went to
Manchuria in a Chinese junk, arriving there at the end of
October 1842. Andrew and the priest for Korea, Fr
Maistre, began planning to enter Korea disguised as beggars,
but the Vicar Apostolic of Manchuria quashed the
plan as unworkable.
Andrew then planned to go alone. At the end of the
year he got himself to a place on the road to Beijing where
he was likely to meet the winter embassy as it passed
through from Seoul. There were frustrating delays, but he
finally succeeded and met a Christian Korean named
Francis Kim, from whom he learned how the persecution
MARTYRS OF KOREA
had raged, and that there was now a lull. On 24 January
1843 Korean Christians in the embassy said Fr Ferréol
should not attempt to cross the border. Andrew had hairraising
adventures, suffering much from cold and hunger;
but he had to return to his superior. Again they waited for
many months. There was some consolation when, on the
last day of 1843, the Vicar Apostolic of Manchuria
ordained Fr Ferréol as third Vicar Apostolic of Korea. On
17 October 1844 Andrew was ordained to the diaconate.
A fortnight later the bishop, accompanied by Andrew,
reached the Korean border again. They met Francis Kim
as the embassy went through. Francis was insistent that
no foreign missionary should attempt the crossing, but
Andrew went on alone and succeeded in crossing the
frozen river. He left a vivid account in Latin of his journey,
through gullies and alleys, through snow-bound
mountains and over frozen streams, constantly aware that
he might be discovered and questioned. If he were
caught, it would be impossible to hide for long the fact
that that he had illegally left and re-entered the country.
At P’yöngyang he met Charles Hyön and Thomas Yi,
and his journey under their guidance to Seoul was a little
easier. Andrew had brought some money with him
(explaining how he came by it would have been hard if he
had been arrested on the way) and he soon bought a
house in Seoul. He could now move about fairly easily,
and Bishop Ferréol instructed him to investigate sea routes
48
in and out of Korea. He bought a wretched little boat and
gathered an ad hoc crew of inexperienced sailors. In this
craft he and Charles Hyön set sail across the Yellow Sea,
intending to reach Shanghai. A tremendous storm arose.
They cut their masts and entrusted their souls to God.
Although many ships were lost in the Yellow Sea during
that storm, this damaged craft stayed afloat long enough
for them to be rescued by a Cantonese ship that took them
in tow… Even so they encountered pirates. When they discharged
their firearms, the pirates fled.
Eventually they were towed into the anchorage at
Wusung, the port of Shanghai, which was then in the
first stages of becoming an international trading centre,
full of sailing vessels from European nations. The
strange Korean boat and the costume of the Koreans
caused a sensation. Andrew recognised a British ship.
Knowing about the British from his years in Macao,
Hong Kong’s neighbour , he cal led out : ‘ I am a
Korean. I ask your protection!’ The British sailors
responded, and guided him to the Chinese authorities,
who suggested he return to Korea by land. Andrew
was having nothing to do with that idea, which would
have defeated his purpose. With the help of the British
officers he made his way into Shanghai and saw the
British consul, who had been forewarned by Bishop
Ferréol, and found a place for him to stay with a
Christian family.
SAINT ANDREW KIM 49
MARTYRS OF KOREA
A few weeks later Bishop Ferréol himself arrived in
Shanghai, accompanied by Fr Antoine Daveluy, who
was also destined for Korea. On 17 August 1845, the
Vicar Apostolic of Jiangnan – the local bishop – ordained
Andrew priest.
The bishop, Fr Daveluy and Fr Kim prepared to sail
for Korea. They arrived at Kanggyöng on the west coast
on 12 October. A particular joy for Andrew was being
able to see his mother, Ursula, again. As we have seen,
his father Ignatius had been beheaded in 1839. Soon the
two bishops and Andrew were established in Seoul,
where they were now fairly safe so long as they did nothing
to attract attention. The bishop asked Andrew to continue
working at the idea of entering and leaving Korea
by sea. In the spring Andrew went to the west coast of
Hwanghae province, to a group of islands which was
well known as a haunt of Chinese fishermen at that season.
He was apprehended there by the Korean authorities
in July. They took him to their provincial capital at
Haeju before they put the red cord of arrest on him and
took him to Seoul.
His trial took a long time. He made a good impression
on his judges, who admired his manners and his education.
The records hint that they had some hope of dealing
leniently with him, but Admiral Cécille now arrived off
the coast, and sent peremptory messages to the Korean
government about the execution of the three Frenchmen
50
in 1839. Cécille’s behaviour left no hope of pardon for
Andrew, against whom the most serious charge was his
treasonous contacts with Europeans. He was condemned
to death. The execution place was prepared on
the sands of the Han, where Bishop Imbert and his two
priests had been slain seven years earlier. Here Andrew
was brought on 16 September 1846, stripped and prepared
for decapitation. He made a brief speech, declaring
he had contacted foreigners for God’s sake only,
and that he was dying for God. Then he charged all
those present to enter eternal life with him. When all
was ready he asked the soldiers if he was correctly
placed for beheading. One them adjusted the tilt of his
head. The young priest did not move again. His head
fell at the eighth stroke.
Fearing what might happen to the body, the authorities
had it dressed in a purple coat, wrapped in reed mats
and buried at once, together with the head, there on the
execution ground. Christians retrieved the relics forty
days later.
St Andrew is the best-loved of the Korean martyrs. Not
only was he the first Korean priest, only 25 years old and
not yet a year in the priesthood, he was an impressive and
loveable young man. Bishop Ferréol said he loved him like
a son. His judges acknowledged his fine character, and
pitied him for the hard life that had been his lot. It is right
that his name should stand at the head of the canonised.
SAINT ANDREW KIM 51
52 MARTYRS OF KOREA
Eight friends
Three days later Charles Hyön, the catechist to whom
Bishop Imbert had committed the Church, was beheaded
with the gruesome ceremonies of military display on the
sands of the Han. His father, sister, wife and son had
already been martyred. He would have surrendered himself
to martyrdom in 1838, had not the Bishop and the
two French priests dissuaded him. Since then he had led
the Church bravely. He had punctiliously collected
accounts of all the martyrs, amassing the basis of documentation
that would later be used for the canonisation
process. He had been in prison since 16 July, when he
was arrested with four women who happened to be in his
house at the time of the police visit.
The four women were beheaded outside the Little
West Gate the day after Charles was executed on the
sands. Susanna U was a widow of the gentry class. She
was arrested and might have been executed in 1828, but
was released because she was then pregnant. She was
however tortured, despite the unborn child. She had a
friend with her now, Teresa Kim, a widow who worked
as a household servant in Fr Andrew’s household. With
them were another widow, Agatha Yi, who had run away
from home so that she could live as a Christian, and had
been baptised by Fr Pacifico; and Catherine Chöng.
Catherine had been violently beaten by her master when
she would not take part in pagan sacrifices. She ran away
from home and joined the women in Fr Andrew’s house.
She still bore the marks of her beating.
Three men were killed with them. Joseph Im had
been the only non-Christian in his own household, not
well educated, but earning his living as a merchant.
One of his sons had gone with Fr Andrew to contact the
Chinese fishermen off the west coast in June. On learning
that they had been apprehended, Joseph, who had
joined the police in the hope of helping Christians,
went to Haeju to claim his son. Unsurprisingly, he was
himself arrested and taken to Seoul. He was tortured
with particular cruelty, being told at one time that if he
made the slightest sound it would be interpreted as
apostasy. Fr Andrew’s charm worked on him. He suddenly
declared his faith and became the second of the
martyrs to be baptised in prison. (The first was Agatha
Kim in 1838.)
Peter Nam, a member of the capital garrison, was
arrested in July. Although a Christian by 1839, he had
escaped capture, and shortly afterwards fell into sinful
ways. After a while he reformed himself and undertook
severe penances, such as living in an unheated room
throughout the winter. He said only martyrdom could
obliterate his guilt. In prison he carefully surrendered his
military tally as part of his welcome for martyrdom. He
asked his pagan brothers not to visit him in prison, lest
they should break his determination to die.
SAINT ANDREW KIM 53
MARTYRS OF KOREA
The last of the group was Laurence Han, member of
the gentry with a rather solemn mien, but an acknowledged
gift of contemplative prayer. Like many of the
martyrs, he thought Christian belief involved charity of
something like Franciscan prodigality. He often gave
away his clothes. Bishop Imbert had appointed him catechist.
Arrested at the end of August, he was tortured with
particular ingenuity, having his feet cut and crushed with
pottery shards. In spite of this, he refused to be taken to
Seoul on a pony, even though it was impossible for him
to wear shoes. As a result he walked barefoot on his
wounded feet for more than 50 kilometres.
All seven were beaten to death in prison. Some of
them lasted a long time under the blows. When this happened
it was customary for the executioners to ease their
own labours by strangling the victim. This happened to
Peter Nam. It was said that a strange light appeared over
his body during the night of his death. The prison guards
were so moved by this that they did not throw his body
out in the usual way, but gave it careful burial.
A twenty-year lull
After autumn 1846 there was a sudden lull in the execution
of Christians. This must have been because of a
change of heart in the palace. The queen’s family was
now politically less inclined to hate Christians. Then in
1849 the king died suddenly at the age of 22, leaving no
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son to succeed him. The queen who had come to the fore
after the Year of the White Cock was now the senior
dowager. She made one of the most surprising appointments
of the dynasty. She called in from the island of
Kanghwa an uneducated 18-year-old farmer, an outrigger
of the royal clan, whose princely ancestors had been
exiled there 150 years earlier. Since he was utterly unprepared
for the throne, the dowager’s family again took
over the reins of government. Things became easier for
Christians. The new king was grandson of the princess
Song who had been martyred in 1801, and may have had
some latent sympathy for Christianity.
Bishop Ferréol worked secretly in Seoul for eight
years. In 1853 he fell ill and died, worn out by heavy
work and harsh conditions. The man appointed to succeed
him was Siméon Berneux. Berneux had arrived in
the Orient in 1840, when for a few weeks in Macao he
was given care of the two Korean students, the future
martyr Andrew Kim and Thomas Ch’oe. Still in his
twenties he was sent to work in Vietnam, where he
spent two years in prison for his faith. His superiors
transferred him against his will to Manchuria, where he
was to become bishop as Pro-Vicar-Apostolic in 1854,
but hardly had he been ordained, when he was appointed
to Korea. It took nearly two years for him to reach
Seoul. He arrived by a junk from the Yellow Sea in
January 1856.
SAINT ANDREW KIM 55
MARTYRS OF KOREA
He had his own house, but a gentleman and his family
also lived in it, leaving the bishop just one room, in which
he slept, ate his two daily meals and said mass. He could
never go out into the courtyard during the day because
women hawkers and beggars might come in at any time
and his red beard would have given him away as a foreigner.
He dared not open a window, even in summer, and
could never raise his voice above a whisper. Twice a year
he visited his flock, who were mostly very poor and had
tiny houses, inside which it was impossible for him to
stand upright, even for mass. He would arrive at a house
before daybreak and recite the breviary while the catechist
listed those coming for the sacraments. He would have
breakfast, hear confessions and give instruction all day
long. He lay down at night dead tired. Gentlewomen
would come during the night, disguised as poor women,
make their confessions, hear mass at 3 in the morning and
get back home before daylight, for they had to keep their
faith secret from heir husbands. Baptisms, confirmations
and occasionally unction followed the mass. Then he hurried
to the next congregation in another house, arriving
there before dawn. This pattern was repeated daily for two
months every spring and autumn.
1866, The Year of the Red Horse
In 1857 Fr Daveluy was ordained coadjutor bishop. The
church that had begun as a group of gentry was now largely
56
a Church of the poor, but some gentlemen and their families
still belonged. One of these was John Nam, who was a
tutor to the royal household. When the ploughboy king
died leaving no son in 1863, the senior queen dowager of
the day made another bizarre decision. She appointed as
king an 11-year-old boy, whose father was still alive.
There were two precedents for this, however, and the protocol
was for the king’s father to be known as the ‘Great
Prince of the Palace’. He naturally functioned as regent, a
man who was famous for his beautiful ink drawings of
orchids, but proved to be an unpredictable schemer.
Koreans were just becoming aware of the interest
being taken in them by the western powers. European
ships were appearing in Korean waters. Russia was particularly
worrying. Surprisingly, there were three
Christian women in the palace: the Great Prince’s wife,
his eldest daughter, and the boy king’s nanny. These three
discussed the situation with John Nam, who eventually
suggested to the Great Prince that he might use Bishop
Berneux as a contact with the French and British governments
for an alliance against Russia. It seems that the
Prince asked to meet Berneux, but there were mistakes in
protocol when letters were drafted. There was a delay of
ten months, perhaps partly because the missionaries were
hard to contact. The Great Prince was angry and called
the matter off. He also had political debts to the senior
Queen Dowager’s family, which was anti-Christian. He
SAINT ANDREW KIM 57
MARTYRS OF KOREA
asked to meet the two bishops. They were in Seoul by the
end of January 1866, the Year of the Red Horse; but they
already knew that the Prince’s intention now was to arrest
them. Bishop Berneux was arrested on 23 February. The
gory processes that led to execution were gone through
again on the Han River sands on 6 March. The bishop
was 52. With him were executed three French priests, all
in their twenties: Juste de Bretennieres, Pierre Dorie and
Louis Beaulieu. John Nam was executed outside the
Little West Gate the same day. Three days later John
Chön, a flour merchant, and Peter Ch’oe, both of whom
had edited and published Christian books, were beheaded
in the same place.
Another two days later, two Korean laymen were martyred
on the Han River sands with full military ceremonial
and display of their heads. Mark Chöng the catechist was
71. He had been converted after seeing some of the martyrs
of 1839 meet their deaths. Bishop Ferréol made him
chief catechist of Seoul. Alexius U was only 21. He was
something of a prodigy, passing the national examinations
in his middle teens. He had been an ardent missionary in
Hwanghae-do, the Yellow Sea Province just north of
Seoul, and by the age of 18 had brought 100 converts to
Seoul. Arrested in 1865, he had apostatised under torture,
but had returned to the Church and was arrested in the
house of John Chön.
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8,000 MARTYRS
Bishop Daveluy and two more French priests, Luc Huin
and Pierre Aumaitre, whom he had asked to surrender in
the same way that Laurent Imbert had asked Frs Maubant
and Chastan, were to have been executed in the same
place. The palace soothsayers objected that too much
blood was being shed in Seoul and this would have a bad
effect on the king’s wedding, which was to happen that
spring. Bishop Daveluy and the priests had been arrested
with him in the district 150 miles south of Seoul where Fr
Andrew Kim and so many earlier martyrs had been bred,
were taken back there for execution. Decapitation with
display of the heads was performed at Poryöng on Good
Friday, 30 March 1866. Thus Bishop Daveluy, who
became the 5th Vicar Apostolic for Korea when Bishop
Berneux died, held that office for only 22 days. With him
also were martyred Luke Hwang, a catechist who had
helped him with translation work, and another catechist,
Joseph Chang.
Ten other names appear among the canonised for the
Year of the Red Horse. Catechist Peter Yu was beaten to
death in P’yöngyang on 17 February. On the day of
Bishop Daveluy’s death a farmer named Thomas Son was
strangled at Kongju. Seven men were beheaded in Chönju,
the south-western provincial capital, on 13 December:
MARTYRS OF KOREA
Bartholomew Chöng, of the gentry class; farmers Peter
Cho and 20-year-old Peter Chöng; catechists Peter Son
and 20-year-old Peter Han; and Peter Yi. Peter Cho’s 18-
year-old son, Joseph Cho, was beaten to death the day
before. Another catechist, John Yi, was beheaded in the
south-eastern city of Taegu on 21 January 1867.
These names from the 1860s are woefully unrepresentative.
The choice of those canonised in 1984 depended on
the collection of evidence of the standard required for the
canonical process. Not only are there no women among
them, though large numbers of housewives and mothers
were killed, but these saints of the Year of the Red Horse
form only a tiny selection from what are thought to be
have been about 8,000 martyrs who died between 1866
and 1886. Few Churches can muster such a roll.
Persecution continued for several years. Families that
suffered in 1801 and 1839 continued to suffer until the
early 1870s. Among them were a son, grandson and two
great grandsons of Peter Yi who took Chinese books to the
Hermitage group in 1775 – four generations of martyrs in
one family. Long after persecutions ceased, priests continued
to live and work in secret. Only in 1886, when the first
Franco-Korean treaty was signed, did the law relax.
Princess Mary
When Gustave Mutel became Vicar Apostolic in 1891,
the Great Prince of the Palace was still alive. It was no
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longer a crime to be a Christian, and the new bishop was
approached by the Great Prince’s wife, asking for baptism.
This proved impractical because as head of the
palace household she was in charge of preparing food for
the ancestral sacrifices. The situation changed when in
1896 she retired from the headship because of her age
(she was 78). The bishop visited her after dark on 11
October and baptised her as Mary in the house of one of
her palace ladies. On 6 September 1897 he visited her
again for her confession and first Holy Communion. It
was also her last communion, for she died four months
later on 8 January 1898. Her husband, who had started
and organised the greatest of the persecutions, died on 22
February. Some time before he had sent a small gift to
Bishop Mutel, together with an ambiguous message saying
he regretted what he had done to the Christians and
that he had been deceived.
The martyrs’ heritage
In the days of the martyrs there were no separate Korean
words for ‘Catholicism’ and ‘Christianity’. The Chinese
name for Christianity, devised by the great Mateo Ricci
in the 16th century, served for both. It meant, literally,
‘the God Doctrine’. Belief in one almighty and loving
Creator God was indeed the crucial subject on which the
martyrs were most frequently questioned and for which
they were derided during their trials. They died for their
8,000 MARTYRS 61
MARTYRS OF KOREA
belief in God and salvation by the blood of Christ. The
Christian virtues they most prized were humility, love,
and care for the poor.
When the Churches of the Reformation began their
missionary work in Korea after 1882, all of them save the
Anglicans introduced a different word for God and chose
to call their teaching not ‘God Doctrine’ but ‘Jesus
Doctrine’. Thus Korean Protestants came to think of the
Catholic martyrs as having died for a different religion.
Some wise Protestant missionaries, however, expressed
great reverence for the martyrs, and today Korean
Christians all increasingly see themselves as their heirs.
In the 1960s the Catholic Church in Korea agreed to use
the word for God preferred by Protestants.
In 1984 Pope John Paul II visited Korea to celebrate
the second centenary of the baptism of Peter Yi in Beijing
and the birth of the Korean Church. On 6 May at the Han
River sands where St Laurent Imbert, St Andrew Kim
and many others had suffered and died, he canonised 103
martyrs: 3 French bishops, 7 French priests, 46 Korean
men and 47 Korean women. It was the first canonisation
ever performed outside Rome.
The calendar of saints used by the Catholic Church
now contains a commemoration on 20 September of
‘Saint Andrew Kim Taegön, Saint Paul Chöng Hasang,
and their Companions, Martyrs’. They are remembered
at altars all over the world.
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FLOWERING OF THE CHURCH IN KOREA
THE FRUIT OF THE HEROISM OF THE MARTYRS
Pope John Paul II visited South Korea in 1984. On leaving
Seoul Cathedral on Sunday morning, 6th May, the Holy
Father went to Youido Square where he celebrated Mass
and canonized 103 Korean Martyrs in the presence of an
estimated more than half a million people.
Korean Martyrs inscribed in the list of Saints
“Today it is given to me, the Bishop of Rome and
Successor of Saint Peter – In that Apostolic See, to participate
in the jubilee of the Church on Korean soil. I have
already spent several days in your midst as a pilgrim, fulfilling
as Bishop and Pope my service to the sons and
daughters of the beloved Korean nation. Today’s Liturgy
institutes the culminating point of this pastoral service.
For behold: through this liturgy of Canonization the
Blessed Korean Martyrs are inscribed in the list of the
Saints of the Catholic Church. These are true sons and
daughters of your nation and they are joined by a number
of missionaries from other lands. They are your
ancestors, according to the flesh, language, and culture.
At the same time they are your fathers – and mothers in
the faith, a faith to which they bore witness by the shedding
of their blood. From the thirteen-year-old Peter Yu
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MARTYRS OF KOREA
to the seventy-two-year-old Mark Chong, men and
women, clergy and laity, rich and poor, ordinary people
and nobles, many of them descendants of earlier unsung
martyrs they all gladly died for the sake of Christ.
Listen to the last words of Teresa Kwon, one of the
early, martyrs: “Since the Lord of Heaven is the Father of
all mankind and the Lord of all creation, how can you ask
me to betray him? Even in this world anyone who betrays
his own father or mother will not be forgiven. All the
more may I never betray him who is the Father of us all.”
A generation later, Peter Yu’s father Augustine firmly
declares: “Once having known God. I cannot possibly
betray him.” Peter Cho goes even further and says: “Even
supposing that one’s own father committed a crime, still
one cannot disown him as no longer being one’s father.
How then can I say that I do not know the heavenly Lord
Father who is so good?
And what did the seventeen-year-old Agatha Yi say
when she and her younger brother were falsely told that
their parents had betrayed the faith? Whether my parents
betrayed or not is their affair. As for us, we cannot betray
the Lord of heaven whom we have always served.”
Hearing this, six other adult Christians freely delivered
themselves to the magistrates to be martyred. Agatha, her
parents and those other six are all being canonized today.
In addition, there are countless other unknown. humble
martyrs who no less faithfully and bravely served the Lord.
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Like unto Christ
The Korean Martyrs have borne witness to the crucified
and risen Christ. Through the sacrifice of their own lives
they have become like Christ in a very special way. The
words of Saint Paul the Apostle could truly have been
spoken by them: We are “always carrying in the body the
death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be
manifested in our bodies. We are always being given up
to death for Jesus’ sake; so that the life of Jesus may be
manifested in our mortal flesh.” (2 Cor 4:10-11).
The death of the martyrs is similar to the death of
Christ on the Cross, because like his, theirs has become
the beginning of new life. This new life was manifested
not only in themselves – in those who underwent death
for Christ- but it was also extended to others. It became
the leaven of the Church as the living community of disciples
and witnesses to Jesus Christ. “The blood of martyrs
is the seed of Christians”: this phrase from the first
centuries of Christianity is confirmed before our eyes.
Today the Church on Korean soil desires in a solemn
way to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the gift of
the Redemption. It is of this gift that Saint Peter writes:
“You were ransomed… not with perishable things such as
silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (I Pt
1:18-19). To this lofty price, to this price of the
Redemption, your Church desires, on the basis of the witness
of the Korean Martyrs, to add an enduring witness of
faith, hope and charity.
FLOWERING OF THE CHURCH IN KOREA
66 MARTYRS OF KOREA
Through this witness may Jesus Christ be ever more
widely known in your land: the crucified and risen Christ,
Christ, the Way and the Truth and the Life, Christ, true
God: the Son of the living God. Christ, true man: the Son
of the Virgin Mary.”
(Extracts from the Homily of John Paul II at the canonization of the
Korean Martyrs, 6th May 1984)
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103 MARTYRS OF KOREA
CANONISED 6 MAY 1984
No. Name (Age) Notes (Numbers refer to list)
Decapitation with display, Han River sands, Seoul 16 September 1846
1. Kim Taegön/Andrew (25) First Korean priest. Son of 41,
nephew of 57. Gentry class.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 22 September 1839
2. Chöng Hasang/ Paul (44) Catechist. Son of 49, brother of 54.
Gentry class.
Died in the Criminal Court Prison, Seoul 25 November 1838
3. Yi Hoyöng/ Peter (35) Catechist. Brother of 7. Gentry class.
Beaten to death, Police Prison, Seoul 20/21 May 1839
4. Chöng Kukpo/ Protase (40) Apostatised, then gave himself up.
Gentry class.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 24 May 1839
5. Kim Agi/ Agatha (52) Widow. ‘Agi’ means ‘daughter’ and
is not a name.
6. Pak Agi/ Anna (56)
7. Yi/ Agatha (55) Widow. Sister of 3.
8. Kim Öbi/ Magdalene(65) Widow.
9. Yi Kwanghön/ Augustine (52)Catechist. Husband of 26,
father of 58, brother of 21. Gentry.
10. Han Agi/ Barbara (47) Widow.
11. Pak Hüisun/ Lucy (38) Virgin. Sister of 25. Palace servant.
12. Nam Myönghyök/ Damian (37)Catechist. Husband of 29.
13. Kwön Tügin/ Peter (34) Maker of devotional articles.
Died in the Police Prison, Seoul 26-29 May 1839.
14. Chang Söngjip/ Joseph(53) A herbalist.
68 MARTYRS OF KOREA
15. Kim/ Barbara (34) Widow.
16. Yi/ Barbara (14) Granddaughter of 36, niece of 22
and 28. Gentry class.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 20 July 1839.
17. Kim/ Rose (55)
18. Kim Söngim/ Martha (49) Gave herself up.
19. Yi Maeim/ Theresa (51) Sister-in law of 36, aunt of 22 and 28.
Gentry class.
20. Kim Changgüm/ Anna (50) Widow.
21. Yi Kwangnyöl/John (44) Brother of 9, brother-in law of 26,
uncle of 58. Gentry class.
22. Yi Yönghüi/Magdalene (30) Virgin. Daughter of 36, sister of 28,
niece of 19, aunt of 16.
23. Kim/ Lucy (21) Virgin. Gave herself up.
24. Wön Kwiim/ Maria (21) Virgin. Seamstress.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 3 September 1839
25. Pak K’ünagi/ Maria (53) Sister of 11. ‘K’ünagi’ (‘eldest
daughter’) is not a name.
26. Kwön Hüi/ Barbara(45) Wife of 9, mother of 58,
sister-in-law of 21.
27. Pak Hujae/ John (40) Straw shoe maker.
28. Yi Chönghüi/ Barbara (40) Widow. Daughter of 36,
sister of 22, niece of 19, aunt of 16.
29. Yi Yönhüi/ Maria (35) Wife of 12.
30. Kim Hyoju/ Agnes (23) Virgin. Sister of 44.
Died in the Criminal Court Prison, Seoul 12 September 1839
31. Ch’oe Kyönghwan/ Francis (34)Catechist. His son Yangöp (Thomas)
was 2nd Korean priest.
Decapitation with display, Han River sands, Seoul 21 September 1839
32. Laurent Imbert (43) 2nd Vicar Apostolic (French bishop).
MARTYRS OF KOREA 69
33. Pierre Maubant (35) French priest.
34. Jacques Chastan (35) French priest.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 22 September 1839
35. Yu Chin’gil/ Augustine (48) Father of 48. Professional class.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 26 September 1839
36. Hö Kyeim/ Magdalene (66) Mother of 22 and 28.
37. Nam Igwan/ Sebastian (59) Catechist. Husband of 51.
38. Kim/ Julietta (55) Virgin. Palace servant.
39. Chön Kyönghyöp/ Agatha (52)Virgin. Palace servant.
40. Cho Sinch’öl/ Charles (46) Husband of 70, son-in-law of 50 and 64.
41. Kim Chejun/ Ignatius (43) Catechist. Father of 1.
42. Pak Pongson/ Magdalene (43)Widow.
43. Hong Kümju/ Perpetua (35) Widow.
44. Kim Hyoim/ Columba (25) Virgin. Sister of 30.
Died in prison, Seoul September 1839.
45. Kim/ Lucy (70) Nicknamed ‘Hunchback’.
Died in prison, Seoul September-October 1839.
46. Yi/ Catherine (56) Widow. Mother of 47.
47. Cho/ Magdalene (32) Virgin. Daughter of 46.
Strangled in the Police Prison, Seoul 31 October 1839.
48. Yu Taech’öl/ Peter (12) Son of 35. Professional class.
Youngest in the canonised list.
Died in prison, Seoul 23 November 1839
49. Yu/ Cecilia (78) Mother of 2 and 54. Gentry class.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 29 December 1839
50. Ch’oe Ch’anghüp/ Peter (52) Husband of 64, father of 70,
father-in-law of 40. Professional.
51. Cho Chüngi/ Barbara (57) Wife of 37. Gentry class.
52. Han Yöngi/ Magdalene (55) Widow. Mother of 67.
53. Hyön Kyöngnyön/ Benedicta (45)Catechist. Sister of 72.
Seamstress. Professional class.
MARTYRS OF KOREA
54. Chöng Chönghye/ Elisabeth (42)Virgin. Daughter of 49,
sister of 2. Gentry class.
55. Ko Suni/ Barbara (41) Wife of 62.
56. Yi Yöngdök/ Magdalene (27) Virgin. Sister of 66. Gentry class.
Strangled in the Police Prison, Seoul 9 January 1840
57. Kim/ Theresa (44) Aunt of 1.
58. Yi/ Agatha (17) Virgin. Daughter of 9 and 26,
niece of 21.
Strangled in the Police Prison, Seoul 30 January 1840
59. Min Kükka/ Stephen (53) Catechist. Gentry class.
Strangled in the Police Prison, Seoul 23 January 1840
60. Chöng Hwagyöng/ Andrew (33)Catechist.
Beaten to death, Seoul 31 January – 1 February 1840
61. Hö Im/ Paul (45) Soldier.
Beheaded, Tang-kogae, Seoul 31 January 1840
62. Pak Chongwön/ Augustine (48)Catechist. Husband of 55.
Professional class.
63. Hong Pyöngju/ Pete (42) Catechist. Brother of 68. Gentry class.
64. Son Sobyök/ Magdalene (39) Wife of 50, mother of 70.
65. Yi Kyöngi/ Agatha (27) Virgin.
66. Yi Indök/ Maria (22) Virgin. Sister of 56.
67. Kwön Chini/ Agatha (21) Daughter of 52. Apostatised
and recanted.
Beheaded, Tang-kogae, Seoul 1 February 1840
68. Hong Yöngju/ Paul (39) Catechist. Brother of 63.
69. Yi Munu/ John (31) Catechist. Gentry class.
Companion of Fr Maubant.
70. Ch’oe Yöngi/ Barbara (22) Daughter of 50 and 64, wife of 40.
Strangled in prison, Seoul 29 April 1841
71. Kim Söngu/ Antony (46) Catechist.
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MARTYRS OF KOREA 71
Decapitation with display, Han River sands, Seoul 19 September 1846
72. Hyön Söngmun/ Charles (49) Catechist. Professional class.
Strangled or beaten to death in the Police Prison, Seoul 20 September 1846
73. Nam Kyöngmun/ Peter (50) Soldier. Professional class.
74. Han Ihyöng/ Laurence (47) Catechist. Gentry class.
75. U Surim/ Susanna (43) Widow. Gentry class.
76. Im Ch’ibaek/ Joseph (42) Policeman.
77. Kim Imi/ Theresa (35) Virgin.
78. Yi Kannan/ Agatha (32) Widow.
79. Chöng Ch’öryöm/ Catherine (29)
Beaten to death, P’yöngyang 17 February 1866
80. Yu Chöngnyul/ Peter (29) Farmer.
Decapitation with display, Han River sands, Seoul 6 March 1866
81. Siméon Berneux (52) 4th Vicar Apostolic (French bishop)
82. Juste de Bretenières (28) French priest.
83. Pierre Dorie (27) French priest.
84. Louis Beaulieu (26) French priest.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 6 March 1866
85. Nam Chongsam/ John (49) Royal secretary of the 3rd grade.
Beheaded outside Little West Gate, Seoul 9 March 1866
86. Chön Changun/ John (55) Flour merchant.
Published Catholic books.
87. Ch’oe Hyöng/ Peter (52) Published Catholic books.
Decapitation with display, Han River sands, Seoul 11 March 1866
88. Chöng Üibae/ Mark (71) Catechist.
89. U Seyöng/ Alexius (21) Apostatised in P’yöngyang,
then gave himself up in Seoul.
Decapitation with display, Kalmae-mot, Poryöng 30 March 1866
90. Antoine Daveluy (49) 5th Vicar Apostolic (French bishop).
91. Luc Huin (30) French priest.
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92. Pierre Aumaitre (29) French priest.
93. Chang Chugi/ Joseph (63) Catechist.
94. Hwang Söktu/ Luke (53) Catechist. Helped Bishop
Daveluy in translation work.
Strangled, Kongju 30 March 1866
95. Son Chasön/ Thomas (22) Farmer.
Beheaded, Chönju 13 December 1866
96. Chöng Munho/ Bartholomew (65)Gentry class.
97. Cho Hwasö/ Peter (51) Father of 102. Farmer.
98. Son Sönji/ Peter (46) Catechist.
99. Yi Myöngsö/ Peter (45)
100. Han Wönsö/ Peter (Joseph) (20)Catechist. Farmer.
101. Chöng Wönji/ Peter (20) Farmer.
Beaten to death, Chönju 12 December 1886
102. Cho Yunho/ Joseph (18) Son of 97. Farmer.
Beheaded, Taegu 21 January 1867
103. Yi Yunil/ John (43) Catechist.
The first Korean item presented to the British Museum Library is
Additional Manuscript 14054. It is a copy of the Chinese Lord’s Prayer
transcribed in Korean script by Paul Yun who was martyred in 1795.
His cause for canonisation is being promoted by the diocese of Suwön.
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