

The Vatican's Shift of Its Missionary Policy in the Twentieth Century: The Mission of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Manchuria*

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After the “1931 incident” Manchuria became a puppet state controlled by the Japanese government. Manchukuo, as it was known during the Japanese rule, was a key area in the blueprint for extension of the Japanese Empire. Therefore, Japan was interested in both promoting industrialization and colonization of the country recently seized.¹⁾

One of the consequences of the incident of 1931 was that Japan quit the League of Nations, becoming independent of the League's attitude and warnings. However, it is important to highlight that Japan had a positive attitude toward Christian congregations and religious groups in Manchukuo. In the past, the Catholic missionaries had been considered by the Japanese authority as a threat to their national autonomy because of the historical association between Christian priests and European countries. Eventually, I could see the Manchukuo tolerance toward Christian missions, especially Catholics after 1931, which shows a change in the identity of religious missions themselves. It followed that missions were no longer directly linked to the western imperialism nor apparently persecuted.

The aim of this paper is to give a new insight into the understanding of the relative acceptance of the Catholic missions in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. In my opinion, a major change in the missionary policy came from Rome. Therefore, I will focus on the letters *Maximun Ilud* written by Pope Benedict XV and *Rerum Ecclesiae* by Pope Pius XI. Along with the study of these letters I will demonstrate how the message from the Vatican was heard and practiced using the example of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Manchuria (1935–1952) during their first years (1935–1940). The primary source that I will use to study their missionary activity in the region is the correspondence that Assumptionists held with France from 1935 to 1940 which was published in the journals *L'Assomption* and *Lettre à la dispersion*, owned and published by the Congregation.

1. Mission and Colonialism

By the end of the nineteenth century the missionary activity promoted directly by the Vatican aimed mainly at the Christian churches in the Near East and the new communities of immigrants in North America. The missions in heathen places such as those in Africa, Asia, and Oceania were put off in the Roman files and were generally

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promoted by the colonist states.²⁾ The reforms to the Curia executed by Pope Pius X in June 1908 can be considered a major turning point in this situation. These reforms wrapped the activity of the Propaganda Fide and retargeted it to the non-Christian regions, relieving its activity of the management of the missions in North America and in the Near East.³⁾

Moreover, the execution of these reforms resulted in the Superiors of every congregation and religious order gaining more participation in the work of their people. Thus more than ever were they interested in the work of the missions, even when their missionaries were still subordinate to the Propaganda Fide.⁴⁾

Also, the charisma of the first popes of the twentieth century played an important role in the reshaping of the Catholic missions. During the pontificates of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius X, the missions in Africa and Asia grew in the number of manpower as well as in the amount of material help. The open-minded personality of Pope Leo XIII allowed him to have a good relationship with non-Christian authorities such as the empress of China, whom he once thanked for her benevolence toward the foreign missionaries.⁵⁾

However, by this time, the ease with which the faith spread among the non-Christian places depended on the western colonial countries which managed either directly or indirectly a specific region. This meant that the Christian missionaries implicitly formed part of a colonial system. Unfortunately, most of them were not aware of the political role that they were playing.⁶⁾

In China, for instance, the missionary work extended as fast as the colonization. Moreover, the missions became stronger because of the treaties signed between the western countries and the local government. These agreements gave the Church not only protection and tolerance, but also economic and social advantages. In 1912, the Catholic Church in China counted fourteen million members—among them there were 724 native priests—which was double that of the end of the nineteenth century.

The Japanese Constitution of 1889 established freedom of belief, and Pope Leo XIII started a friendly relationship with the imperial court.⁷⁾ The first results of the challenging and intensive missionary work in Japan were seen when in 1891 Rome established the hierarchy in Tokyo.⁸⁾ However, by the end of the century the Catholic Church in the archipelago witnessed how all its hopes and projects could not be carried out, and once again the country found it to be very important to express its own identity by supporting the national religion, Shintoism, while at the same time attacking foreign beliefs.

From my standpoint, the missionary activity under Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius X had a great importance due to the fact that they spread new Christian communities around the world. Nevertheless, those communities were still dependent on the colonial system, thus they were objects of prejudgments and public attacks from nationalistic groups. In the end, the task which the pontiffs had not succeeded in carrying out was the formation of a high-level native clergy which could wield the administration of the local churches and at the same time free the new communities of the harassment of nationalistic groups.

2. Building a Young Church

World War I represented a clear step backward for the missions in non-Christian countries since they had a strong relationship with western countries and during the war most of them could not have impartial behavior.⁹⁾ The war meant a very high price—both material and spiritual—for the church and its missions among the heathen. After peace was signed, a reorientation in the Catholic missions was necessary. Not only did they try to unfasten the missionary labor from the western countries, but they also sought to emancipate the new local Christian communities from the foreign control.¹⁰⁾

During the papacies of Pope Benedict XV and Pope Pius XI, a time of deep and ample change in the overseas missionary activity can be noticed. This period is marked by a new approach to the native Christian communities: it was closer to their interests and its aim was to point toward the creation of churches autonomous from foreign states.

World War I left problems and challenges to be solved by the Church. The situation resulted in a decrease in economic support from Europe and the weakening of missionaries as a consequence of the mandatory physical participation of priests in the war.¹¹⁾

However, the war caused more harm than not in the spiritual sphere. The fact that the western countries, which represented the Christianity overseas, fought against one another gave the local peoples a negative impression, which in turn became the obvious reason for the latter to reject the religion. The Church replied to this new challenge by calling for healthier relationships between the European countries and the missions, trying to free them from the weight of imperialism and colonialism.¹²⁾

Pope Benedict XV made an important step forward by changing the attitude of the Catholic Church toward missions. His work, in the missionary field, is characterized as a major effort to break away from the influence of European powers and to reshape the theology. In his encyclical *Maximum Illud* (1919), the pontiff embraced three topics that are the basic conditions for the progress of the missionary activity: the duties of the mission chiefs; the duties of missionaries; and the duties of the rest of the laymen in the world.¹³⁾

According to *Maximum Illud*, the mission chiefs, such as bishops, vicars, or prefects, are primarily to commit themselves to love the mission and to be devoted to it. Their men are called upon to do hard work trying all the time to create new missionary posts and houses.

[T]he preaching of the gospel can be brought more immediately and more effectively to everyone in an area if more mission stations and posts are established as soon as it is possible to do so. Then, when the time comes to divide the mission, these will be ready to serve as centers for new Vicariates and Prefectures.¹⁴⁾

In addition to that, in order to fulfil this objective, the mission chiefs should work on increasing the number of their collaborators—other missionary institutions—while focusing on consecrated people who might work in schools, orphanages, and elsewhere. With the strong determination to achieve this goal, Pope Benedict XV ad-

dressed the mission chiefs asking them to maintain the best relationship with their missionary neighbors, making it easier to solve any future problems between them.¹⁵⁾

Also, the Pope called for creating more quality institutions which would bring into being more skillful native clergy who could control the local churches. In this sense, the foundation of local seminaries proved to be essential.

We are ordering the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to apply remedies adapted to the various regions of the world, and to see to the founding of seminaries for both individual regions and group of dioceses. Where seminaries already exist, this Congregation will see to it that they are adequately administered. However, the task to which the Congregation is to devote itself with particular care is the supervision of the growth and development of the local clergy in our Vicariates and other missions.¹⁶⁾

Furthermore, the pontiff reminds them about the importance of well prepared missionary corpus where a deep knowledge of the local language was mandatory in order to support further achievements. As far as missionaries are concerned, *Maximum Illud* highlights the necessity of a holy life which is characterized by humble modesty, obedience, and a great trust in God (to facilitate the new tasks that might appear along the way). In other words, the message given by the pontiff is that the missionary clergy are committed to sacrifice their lives to successfully fulfill their duties while spreading “salvation” among all the inhabitants. Furthermore, from the rest of Catholics in the world, Pope Benedict XV demanded a higher compromise with the missions. Above all, he called for their prayers. “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”¹⁷⁾ He then called for their fostering missionary vocations.¹⁸⁾

Concisely, Pope Benedict XV opened the Missionary Church as well as causing the development of missionaries to become the most important issue for the Church. Consequently, next to spreading faith, cultivation and encouragement towards the formation of local churches became equally significant. Now more important than just spreading the faith is to cultivate and encourage the formation of local churches.¹⁹⁾

Pope Pius XI, the successor of Pope Benedict XV, was a good follower of the teachings poured into *Maximum Illud*. He changed the purpose of the missions from the formation of new churches to the emancipation of those new churches, which meant promoting episcopacy around the native priests.²⁰⁾ In the second part of his apostolic letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) he discussed the foundation, consolidation, and emancipation of new Christianities. In addition, Pope Pius XI clearly established the need to have a well prepared native clergy in order to constitute new Churches as well as making religious communities aware of the local wishes and circumstances.²¹⁾

As a matter of fact, the native clergy will prove to be most useful (more useful than some people imagine in extending the Kingdom of Christ) ... for since the native priest, by birth, temper, sentiment, and interests is in close contact with his own people, it is beyond all controversy how valuable he can be in instilling the Faith into the minds of his people. The native priest understands better than any

outsider how to proceed with his own people. Such being the case, he can often gain access to places where a foreign priest would not be permitted to enter.²²⁾

Pope Pius XI stated that the people's Divine right to be led by a clergy of their own race and country is within the tradition of the Apostles.²³⁾ Moreover, with a prophetic vision Pope Pius XI declared:

Let us suppose, for example, that either because of the fortunes of war, or because of certain political happenings in a mission field, the ruling government is changed in that territory and that the new government decrees or requests that the missionaries of a certain nationality be expelled; or let us suppose—something which rarely, if ever, occurs—that the inhabitants of a particular territory, having reached a fairly high degree of civilization and at the same time a corresponding development in civic and social life, and desiring to become free and independent, should drive away from their country the governor, the soldiers, the missionaries of the foreign nation to whose rule they are subject. All this, of course, cannot be done without violence. Everyone can see what great harm would accrue to the Church in that land in the circumstances, unless a native clergy had been spread beforehand throughout the country like a network and were, by consequence, in a position to provide adequately for the population which had been converted to Christ.²⁴⁾

Also, this encyclical calls for increasing the number of regional seminaries. Doing so was the key plan to emancipate the local Christian communities from western powers. Later on, in a letter to the missionaries in China (1926), Pope Pius XI explained a new idea worthy to be considered: adaptation. Hence, in a country with a rich culture, missions cannot oversee the inhabitants' traditions. In this sense, Pope Pius XI gave his authorization to the bishops in Manchuria to allow their people to practice certain Confucian ceremonies.²⁵⁾

The objective of building a Christianity of quality—adaptable and strong enough to settle in the cultural and social realities of the local people—required two principle steps. Primarily, it was to educate a native clergy and episcopacy; and then let them lead their own flock.²⁶⁾

3. The “New Catholic Missionaries” in Manchuria: The Mission of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption

Both Pope Benedict XV and Pope Pius XI gave a new élan to the missions as well as emancipating Christian missionary groups from the European countries and promoting missions to Asia and Africa in Europe and North America. Although both world wars compelled many men to fight for their countries, missionary personnel grew in number, as shown in the chart below. During the period from 1933 to 1952, the number of European missionaries working overseas grew around 33% and that of North American missionaries doubled (Table 1).²⁷⁾

In this time frame context, applying the new church philosophy can be best seen in the missionary activity of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Manchuria.

Table 1: Number of Missionaries per Country: 1933 and 1953

Country	1933	1953
France	3,373	3,505
Belgium	1,106	2,289
Netherlands	941	2,229
Ireland	314	2,001
Italy	1,251	1,332
Germany	954	847
United States	373	829
Spain	860	779
Canada	285	709
England	241	549
Switzerland	159	362

This relatively young congregation, founded in 1850 by Manuel D’Alson, followed the principles and new guidelines that the Vatican had declared in the 1919 and 1926 encyclicals. They set and run well-prepared missions in Europe, America, and Africa. In 1935, after signing an agreement with the Episcopal Vicar of Manchukuo, Monsignor Auguste Gaspais M.E.P., the first group of “Assumptionist missionaries” started their journey toward the distant land of Manchuria in order to strengthen the missions that were already working. Six years later, they could gratifyingly say that not only did they realize the most important issues of the 1935 agreement, but also they began and kept good relations with the Japanese authority in the Manchurian state.²⁸⁾

The mission of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Asia, at least during their early years, achieved three significant objectives. They shaped a new and solid Assumptionist community in Manchuria; they developed an ample net of Christian communities among the natives in the cities as well as in the countryside; finally, they built a regional seminary in the capital of the empire, Xinjing (Chang Chun), which hosted the future priests of the region. At this point, I consider it proper to analyze how these achievements were accomplished, since this is the only way to demonstrate whether the instruction of the popes had real influence on missionary enterprises.

In regional terms, Manchuria should not be confused with any other area where Christian churches attempted to spread the gospel. Manchuria had its unique position in the history of the twentieth century due to its strategic geographical position and its history. We cannot forget that the last Chinese imperial dynasty grew on these lands and overtook the rest of the Chinese territory, forming the Qing Empire in the seventeenth century. Also, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Manchuria was the subject of constant border problems with Russia, which thanks to its very skilful officials could manage to reach the Pacific coast and dominate the south coast of the Amur River (and yet farther) for several years.²⁹⁾ Finally, Japan’s growing interest in the region led to increase in its influence on it, first in Korea and then in Manchuria which, as noted in the introduction, was seized in 1931. As far as the religious sphere is concerned, it was in Manchuria where the long-lasting struggle over the Chinese rites nature came to an end. After the creation of Manchukuo, the Japanese performed the cult of Confucius, which was obligatory to all citizens. In response to that,

the bishops of the area (headed by Monsignor Gaspais) studied the problem and gave their advice to the Pope, who consequently set forth the program of toleration for Manchukuo (1935).³⁰ Overall, from a historical, political, social, and religious standpoint, Manchukuo was a unique land which, by the time of the Assumptionists' arrival, had been going through a process of adjustment.

In order to fulfill the first two achievements of the new missionary guide, the Assumptionists had to count basically on their preparation in the native language, adaptation to the new environment (customs, culture, and particularly harsh weather), and their natural skill to deal with congregations from different countries and cultures. Creating a Christian community in Manchuria was only possible on the condition that a majority of its members could meet these requirements. Thus, the preparation of the missionaries was the key element to the success of the mission according to the new standards of the Vatican.

The Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption, under the tutelage of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (SFMP), decided to begin their education from the very beginning of their mission, that is, the trip from Europe to Asia.³¹ There were two possible ways to travel from Paris to Jilin (Central Manchuria): on the Trans-Siberian train, or by sea on any of the commercial ships that were sailing through Europe to East Asia. The former option had two main advantages: it was economical and shorter in time. So, a second-class ticket cost around 2,000 francs, which was less than half the sea fare, and the total journey lasted on average eleven days, far fewer than the travel by ship, which took more than forty days. In spite of its benefits, this option was abandoned several times and none of the Assumptionist missionaries journeyed on this train on his way to Manchuria.

Therefore, travelling on commercial vessel was the alternative chosen by the Church authorities for the five groups of Assumptionist priests who went to Manchuria. Despite the expensive price and the length of time, travelling using this means of transport allowed the new missionaries to visit different posts where they could have a thorough introduction to the missionary world. Most of all, three missionary posts were highly admired for their organization and size. Such places as the mission of Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Ceylon, the mission of the Society of Foreign Mission of Paris in Singapore, and the mission of the Jesuits in Shanghai were always given a statement of excellence in *L'Assomption* and *Lettre à la dispersion*. At last, analyzing the words of Father Cyrille Parrate, the travel by ship was very important and useful because "mais cette leçon de choses, cette vue directe des personnes et des oeuvres seront on ne peut plus utiles."³²

In the end, travelling by ship also gave them the chance of sharing experiences with missionaries from other congregations. On the ship each Assumptionist shared his daily life with different members of other religious congregations, from priests who were to participate in the mission for the first time to very experienced missionaries. The attitude of the latter towards the former group was open to share their experiences. Father Livier, one of the first Assumptionists to go to Manchuria, wrote about his roommate: "Un séminariste annamite qui, après trois ans au collège de la Propagande, regagne sa patrie pour raison de santé. Nous faisons tout de suite bon ménage avec lui."³³ The cooperation among religious orders included, of course, the one between

the Assumptionists and the Society of Foreign Mission of Paris.

Not only did the SFMP host the new missionaries in Manchuria, but they also supplied them with all the necessary instructions to proceed with their new task. During the first year after arriving in Manchuria, the new priests could not do anything else but learn the local language and assist the SFMP priest in teaching Latin or French in the seminaries of Jilin. While performing their tasks, the neophytes also had the chance to get acquainted with older priests and learn from them. From a more global point of view, sharing experiences with different priests of different congregations on board and during the first months in Manchuria was a school-like experience for the fresh missionaries. “Rien de bien saillant à bord, nous faisons de plus en plus une bonne famille. Les Pères des Missions Etrangères sont charmant.”³⁴⁾

This sort of relationship with different priests of different congregations (and countries) was a new element in the missionary project. Two hundred years earlier, the animosity among religious orders led to the suppression of the Society of Jesus and twenty years earlier—within the frame of World War I—to the open fight between priests of different countries. Therefore, this frank and amicable relationship between the Assumptionists and other congregations can be seen as part of a reform within the missionary Church where, as seen above, the good relations among Christian orders helped for a common aim, Asian conversion.

The requirements toward mastering the language were changing: accomplishing the language course with a minimum grade was enough to get a position in a foreign country. However, during the twentieth century, only the priest who had reached the advanced level in the local language could be provided with an official missionary post. Therefore, during the trip as well as during the first months in Manchuria, the Assumptionists were committed to studying (Mandarin) Chinese in their headquarters in Jilin.

For anyone who has ever tried to learn an Asian language, the first experience of the Assumptionists with the language might appear familiar. During the first months of instruction, despite the hard work and long time studying grammar and vocabulary, the feeling of impotence caused by not being able to speak it or to understand it overwhelms any student. However, I would like to give two examples within the Assumptionist experience that may help one to understand the differences of personality between its members and their attitude while approaching the study of the language:

Dès le lendemain de l'arrivée, on s'est mis au chinois dont un missionnaire a dit qu'il est une langue inventée par le diable pour empêcher l'évangélisation. Mon professeur ne sait pas un traître mot de français ou latin (...) hier, en un quart d'heure, j'ai dit deux choses un peu risquées à mon professeur éberlué. Á l'une des ses questions j'ai voulu repondre: « oui », qui se dit « che », mais je n'y ai pas mis le ton, et mon « che » — horreur ! — a fait échoe au mot héroïque du general Cambronne.

Father Clovis Disdier A.A.³⁵⁾

C'est une langue très harmonieuse à l'entendre parler. La grammaire est ce qu'il y a de plus simple, et c'est cette simplicité qui en fait la difficulté pour un Occi-

dental habitué á des règles précises : pas de déclinaisons, pas de conjugaisons. (...) Je ne dis pas que j'apprends à lire et á écrire, car CECI est une autre question ; il faut d'abord apprendre à parler ; puis, plu tard, je me mettrai à l'étude des caractères.

Father Theobald A.A.³⁶⁾

Not less than four years had passed since the arrival of the first Assumptionist priests and the time when they were able to start to run their first missionary post in Manchuria (which was part of the contract signed in 1935). A good preparation was very important; not to rush and taking as much time as needed in order to start properly such a serious mission was crucial. Also, these four years were used for studying the local culture and building a community of priests. Only after fulfilling these points did the Assumptionists feel ready to run their own missionary post. In this act of spiritual maturity the Assumptionists were again reflecting the spirit of their time. Pope Benedict XV once wrote about the importance of creating new missionary posts, taking good care of the formation of the priest first.³⁷⁾ That is why it took no less than four years to open their first post. Even when they had the chance of doing so in 1938, they postponed it because they did not consider themselves ready for that task. They realized that to run such a steady and lasting mission in Manchuria they needed to go step by step, at their own pace.

Thus, in 1939 they opened their first post, and with a natural emotion they described that moment in one of the congregation's publications.

Dans l'immense territoire de Mission qui nous est réservé nous occupons, à nous tous seuls, un premier district — le premier district assomptioniste — qui nom Schuang Ch'eng. Il est estimé petite, mais d'importance tout de même puisqu'il égale en étendue un département français. ... C'est le P. Austal Anselm qui a eu l'honneur d'être le premier missionnaire assomptioniste, titulaire d'un district en Mandchourie.³⁸⁾

The building of the Regional Seminary of Saint Austin in Xinjing is, perhaps, the Assumptionists' achievement that reflects in the clearest way the spirit of the Catholic missions in the first half of the twentieth century. The long and winding road that the Assumptionists—and the SFMP along with them—had to go through in order to build this seminary can be described in the form of an epic.

Due to the Church's encouragement toward the economic independence of missions, the cost of the construction of the Regional Seminary was, as agreed in the 1935 contract, to be fully covered by the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption. Nonetheless, the Japanese war in China in 1937, the Japanese deployment of troops all over East Asia later on, and the beginning of World War II in 1939 (including the call, from the European countries, for soldiers among the religious orders) set one of the most unfortunate scenarios for the building of a seminary in Manchuria managed by Catholic Europeans.

Regarding the process of planning and building the Regional Seminary in Xinjing, I would like to point out three elements. The first is the constant coordination problems

between Assumptionists and the local authorities related to the required authorization. Second, World War II meant the mobilization of all the French who were overseas including priests. Finally, as a consequence of this conflict, the missionaries were almost deprived of communication with their headquarters in France, which consequently meant they could not receive income from Europe.

When the first group of Assumptionists came to Manchuria, Manchukuo had been an independent state for four years. The Manchurian institutions were not completely developed, and in more than one opportunity they were not well coordinated. This represented a severe problem for proceeding with the construction of the seminary. While the missionary authorities in Paris were quick and efficient at approving the construction budget, architectural drawings, and purchasing the land where the seminary was to be built, the Manchurian authorities (under Japanese tutelage) in the context of their own readjustment process could not properly assist the Assumptionists.

In 1936 the Assumptionists bought the land to build the seminary in Xinjing. The same year, the Superior in France approved of the project and set a deadline to finish the construction by the end of 1938. However, after several difficulties with the required authorizations, on October 22, 1938, *les autorités ne sont plus d'accord sur les autorisations données*, and the government ordered work to stop.³⁹⁾ In order to improve this situation, the Assumptionists once again counted on the help that the FMSP could give them. Monsignor Gaspais required the assistance of one of the most pragmatic and understanding missionaries of the mission in Japan, Father Joly M.E.P.⁴⁰⁾

Father Joly was entrusted with doing whatever was necessary in order to obtain all the long-postponed authorizations. During the construction of the seminary he kept a very close relationship with the Japanese authorities in Xinjing and in Tokyo, allowing him to have a more “fluid” relationship with the Manchurians. As a result, the building of the seminary was restarted and administrative problems decreased. However, the construction of the Seminary of Xinjing had to go through an even more challenging obstacle, the beginning of the war in Europe.

World War II brought about two new problems for the Assumptionists. On the one hand, all the income that the mission could receive from their headquarters in France was reduced, leaving them the remaining 400 francs to finish the seminary. In addition, on September 5, the French consul in Harbin, Mr. Leurquin, ordered the mobilization of eight out of ten Assumptionist missionaries.

The word of Pope Pius XI concerning the importance of having a well-prepared native clergy who could take the control of the local Christian flock during wartime sounded more than prophetic. However the Assumptionists’ mission had not yet fulfilled that objective.⁴¹⁾ Fortunately, nine days later when they were in Tien Tsin, a Chinese city, a new order let the French missionaries stay in their post. *Tous les Français d'Extrême-Orient doivent rester dans leurs foyers jusqu'à nouvel ordre.*⁴²⁾

Regarding the financial problems, as they were unable to cover the construction of the seminary with their own economic means, the Assumptionists had to ask for a loan from those who were supposed to use it, the bishops of all Manchuria. On November 16, seven bishops of Manchuria held a meeting in Xinjing and they agreed to lend 1,500 yen (for each bishop) to the Assumptionists and give 200 yen in advance to each seminary student that they might send to study there.⁴³⁾ In this way, the last

financial problem was left behind.

Finally, on March 13, 1940, the seminary was completed and the Government granted the required final authorization to use it. Father Flavien Senaux, Superior of the Assumptionist community in Manchukuo, wrote to the bishops of the country.

Hsinking, le 3 avril 1940

Excellence,

Les difficultés, qui nous ont obligés à retarder l'ouverture du Grand Séminaire Régional de Hsinking, viennent d'être définitivement levées, grâce à la bienveillance des Autorités locales et au zèle infatigable du Révérend Père Joly, qui s'est montré toujours un intermédiaire actif, souriant et dévoué entre elles et nous.

Grâce au dévouement de chacun, la maison se trouve en état de recevoir les séminaristes. En conséquence j'ai l'honneur et la joie de vous annoncer que la rentrée est définitivement fixée au mercredi 10 avril, jour de la solennité de Saint-Joseph.

Father Flavien Senaux⁴⁴⁾

With the opening of the Seminary of Xinjing one of the most important objectives of Pope Pius XI and Pope Benedict XV's letters was fulfilled. The Seminary in Manchuria allowed for the creation of a native clergy and furthermore let local people run and administer their own religious territory.

4. Final Consideration about Catholic Missionaries and their Relationship with Local Authorities

The importance of the missionary work of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Manchuria was crucial. However, there is one more point worth being underlined. We can see in the letter written by Father Flavien Senaux in April 1940 that he offers thanks for *la bienveillance* of the local authorities. Despite the misunderstanding and conflict in the past, the relationship between the European Catholic missionaries and the Japanese-Manchu authority was rather a good one.

The Japanese not only accepted Catholicism in its territory but also greeted it. Briefly and as the first lines of a more complicated subject which goes beyond the scope of this article, I would like to explain, according the sources studied, that this attitude toward Catholicism was due to two variables, the Japanese vision of the different Christian branches and the service that the missionaries gave the Japanese empire.

After reopening its doors in the mid-nineteenth century and becoming a "modern" state after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Japanese knew more and better about the differences among the assortment of Christian Churches. Thanks mainly to the United States and French diplomacy, Christianity was tolerated in 1880, and in 1889 religious freedom was granted as part of the European-style Constitution.⁴⁵⁾ During the Showa period, the Japanese government could differentiate among different Christian denominations those which could threaten in any way the national security from those which could help the nationalistic government.

The main difference among them could be found with regard to traditions and obe-

dience to a higher authority. Thus, Catholicism enjoyed a better position among other denominations owing to its condition of being a highly hierarchical religion where the principles of discipline and unity among its members suited the spirit of this Asian empire better. Therefore, Protestant denominations were seen as divisional and less truthful.

Catholic missionaries either in Japan or Manchukuo knew about their privileged position. The guides that Pope Pius XI and Pope Benedict XV had given their flock—sending them to work to keep the best relationship with the local political authorities—were important to understand the close relations that missionaries and authorities had in Manchukuo. Not only did the missionaries have a better relationship with the Japanese due to its historical characteristics, but also because of its interest in helping the Manchukuo government.

A very good example of this can be seen in 1938 when the Italian fascist government sent a diplomatic delegation to Manchukuo. The local government and Monsignor Gaspais organized an official reception in the Bishop's house. The Assumptionists helped them write the Italian version of the program and translate the speeches of the local authorities into Italian. This was the first time that the Assumptionists helped the local government, thus it is very well documented. The reception went very well and the Manchukuo government appreciated the Assumptionist collaboration. A small gift from the government was given to the Superior in Manchuria: *d'un délégué spécial, comme tous ceux qui avaient participé à l'organisation, un petit écrivain avec deux boutons de manchette ... Très délicat, n'est-ce pas ?*⁴⁶⁾

Clearly, the relationship between the missionaries and the local government was not an easy one. They went through difficult times, as seen during the building of the Seminary, but I think that those problems were minimal as compared with the difficulties that previous missionaries in the nineteenth century had gone through. Something changed in the Manchukuo/Japanese regarding foreign missionaries. After reading the European sources, I think it is most likely to find an important part of the answer in the changes born in the Vatican.

The instructions of the Vatican in 1919 and 1926 regarding the missions in Asia and Africa can be considered revolutionary. To see the locals as people capable of leading themselves without a foreign tutor and that their representatives are equal to those from the western culture, represented a step forward for the Church, for the local Christian communities, and for the relationships between Asian powers and Christianity in general. The mission of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Manchuria gives an extraordinary example in this concern.

There is still a second part to be studied, the one concerning the Japanese sources. I encourage my Asian colleagues to complete this work from their rich perspectives. The studies concerning religious politics in regard to Christianity, and especially Catholicism, in Manchuria and the rest of the Asian world are beginning. In this concern I hope that this small and general study could contribute to enhance scholarly research in this area.

Notes

- 1) About the Incident of Manchuria and the subsequent Japanese occupation I recommend Louise

- Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Peter Duss ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6, *The Twentieth Century*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Alexander Eckstein, Kang Chao and John Chang, "The Economic Development of Manchuria: The Rise of a Frontier Economy," *Journal of Economic History* 34(1), 1974, 239–264.
- 2) Jakob Baumgartner, "La expansión de las misiones católicas desde León XIII hasta la Segunda Guerra Mundial," J. Hubert y R. Konrad eds., *Manual de la Historia de la Iglesia*, tomo VIII. Ed. Herder, (Barcelona, 1984), 729.
 - 3) The Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, with the double aim of spreading Christianity in the areas where the Christian message had still not arrived and of defending the patrimony of faith in those places where heresy had caused the genuineness of the faith to be questioned. The C.P.F. divided the world in thirteen zones but at the beginning the most important one was Europe and its fight against Protestantism. During the first centuries the sending of missionaries had to be in name of the Church and not in name of a particularly Religious Order, leaving the Superiors of them only with authority upon their ascetic life.
 - 4) Baumgartner, op. cit., 730–733.
 - 5) Ibid., 754.
 - 6) Ibid., 755–780.
 - 7) J. Mutel, *Japón, El fin del Shogunato y el Japón Meiji 1853–1912*, (Barcelona: Vicens-Vives, 1972), 237.
 - 8) By 1891 Japan was divided in four administrative zones, Osaka (2), Nagasaki and Kyūshū. See Johannes Laures S. J., *The Catholic Church in Japan*, (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1970), 201.
 - 9) For instance, take the case of most French priests who left their missionary post to help their country fighting in the war in Europe.
 - 10) Baumgartner, op. cit.
 - 11) Ibid.
 - 12) Ibid., 748.
 - 13) Rene-P. Millot, *Missions d'aujourd'hui*, (Paris: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 1960), 12.
 - 14) *Maximum Illud*. In Internet from the SVD's web site: <http://www.svdcuria.org/public/misdial/encycl/mi-en.htm>. Visited in June 2005.
 - 15) Millot, op. cit., 13; *Maximum Illud*, 27–29.
 - 16) *Maximum Illud*.
 - 17) Mt. 18, 19.
 - 18) Millot, op. cit., 14.
 - 19) Baumgartner, op. cit., 769.
 - 20) Ibid., 733.
 - 21) About the term "Church," when it is written with a capital letter, it means a group of Catholic inhabitants that forms a community with a bishop as its head. In other words, it is Christianity. When it is written without a capital letter, it means the building/place where believers gather.
 - 22) *Rerum Ecclesiae*, 21.
 - 23) Millot, op. cit., 16.
 - 24) *Rerum Ecclesiae*, 22.
 - 25) *Sylogae praecipuorum documentorum recentium summorum Pontificum et S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide*. Baumgartner, op. cit., 776.
 - 26) Ibid., 777–780.
 - 27) Abad Adrien Bouffard, *Perspectives sur le monde*, Millot, op. cit., 25.
 - 28) Unfortunately, the relationship between the puppet government and foreign Christian missions is a topic not well developed. The resources consulted for this paper talk about a situation of freedom to preach for the western missionaries but permanently observed by the local officials.
 - 29) For Russian Chinese relations, I recommend to read Harry Schawrtz, *Tsar, Mandarins, and Commissars*, (London: Lippincott, 1964) and R. K. I. Quested, *Sino-Russian Relations*, (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1984).
 - 30) The Chinese Rites Controversy lasted for more than three hundred years and it is characterized for its high standard of the intellectual and moral forces drawn up in opposing alignment. I recommend

- to see The Catholic Encyclopedia for a complete overview of the problem. William J. McDonald ed., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. III, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).
- 31) It is important to notice that most of the missionaries who went to Manchuria, were young priests under 30 years old, therefore without any previous experience in oversea missions.
 - 32) Letter from Cyrille Parrate published in *L'Assomption*, November 6, 1935, vol. 1936–39, February 1936, 219.
 - 33) Letter from fathers Livier and Austal to theirs classmates in Lormoy. September 29, 1936. Written on L'Aramis. In *Lettre à la Dispersion*, vol. 1936–37, no. 668, 413–414.
 - 34) Letter from father Senaux published in *L'Assomption*, vol. 1936–39, November 1937, 164–165. The Assumptionist also collaborated with the SFMP teaching at the local Seminar of Jilin, where they could join the exam commission: *Pour les examens de fin d'année, les Pères font partie du jury. Pot de tabac et bouffarde confortent les examinateurs et permettent aux élèves du suivre les réactions provoquées par leurs « confidences » : l'émission joyeuse de fumée correspond aux réponses pertinentes, les jets saccadés signifient que celles-ci laissent à désirer !* See Justin Munsch, “*L'Assomption en Mandchourie 1935-1954,*” *Serie Centenaire*, no. 8, Via San Pio V, 55, Rome, 20.
 - 35) *L'Assomption*, vol. 1936–39, February 1938, 219.
 - 36) *L'Assomption*, vol. 1936–39, April 1938, 243–244.
 - 37) *Maximum Illud*.
 - 38) *Lettre à la Dispersion*, vol. 1937–1939, no. 786, 340–341, ABL.
 - 39) Munsch, 29. See also *Lettre à la Dispersion*, vol. 1937–1939, no. 771, 242–243.
 - 40) Father Joly had came to Japan in 1895 and since then he had had a very close relationship with the Japanese authorities in the island.
 - 41) See note 24.
 - 42) *Ibid.*, 45. About the mobilization see also *Lettre à la Dispersion*, vol. 1937–1939, no. 813, 544.
 - 43) About currencies, is worthy to underline that the franc during the late twenties readopted the Gold Bullion Standard and only after the 1929 crisis the French government started to do reforms to its economical system. In 1936 they started to devalue the Franc. In contrast, the Japanese Yen was much stable than the French currency (in 1936 one yen was equivalent to six franc, by 1937 the relation was one to ten). Thus the yen was the option chose for the bishops at the time of lending money. See Jean-Alain Lesourd y Claude Gérard, *Historia Económica Mundial : Moderna y Contemporánea*, trad. Miguel Izard, (Barcelona: Vicens-Vives, 1964), 359–370.
 - 44) See letter in Munsch, 53.
 - 45) J. Mutel, *Japón, El fin del Shogunato y el Japón Meiji 1853–1912*, (Barcelona: Vicens-Vives, 1972), 35–37.
 - 46) Letter of Father Flavien on June 15 1938. In *L'Assomption*, vol. 1936–39, November 1938, 357. Since the translation of the program and the speeches was not considered beforehand, the petition to Father Flavien was made at the last minute.