CHAPTER XVII

THE INDONESIAN MISSIONS

A new era opened for the evangelization of Indonesia when, in 1807, the king of Holland, Louis-Napoleon, granted freedom of worship in the Low Countries, and two Dutch priests expelled from the Cape by England were able to land at Java. In 1826, Propaganda established the Batavia prefecture which was raised to vicariate status in 1842 and had within its jurisdiction all the Dutch possessions.

In actual fact, during the first half of the nineteenth century, apostolic work was almost confined to Java because of the poverty of the missionaries and the restrictions enforced by the general Government which authorized preaching only after the reception of a special permit which could always be cancelled.

The Missions *ad infideles*, properly so-called, began at Borneo, where a shipwrecked man, Cuarteron, who had vowed, if he were saved, to devote himself to the apostolate, became prefect apostolic of Labuan and North Borneo. He recruited no more than two missionaries, Italians, and they abandoned him. After his death in 1879, the English Mill Hill Fathers took over the mission he had founded.

Fr Sanders visited Dutch Borneo in 1851, but the first mission was that founded by the Jesuits in 1883. At Banka, where there were Catholic coolies among the workers in the tin mines, a missionary took up residence in 1853. In the following year, another went to Sumatra. However, the island had no organized mission before the Jesuits established one in 1888. They were succeeded by Capuchins in 1911.

The process was the same in the Celebes. After a period when the apostolate was limited to annual visits by one priest working alone, Manado, the Kei Islands and Macassar had their missions in 1885, 1888 and 1891 respectively.

It was the little islands of Sunda, Flores, Timor which produced the richest harvests. The first visitor, Fr Sanders, found there in 1860 enough Catholics (several thousands) to establish a parish at Laratoeka. In 1862, he received support from the Jesuits, among whom was Fr Le Cocq d'Armandville, who has remained famous for his conversion of fifteen pagan villages. Flores numbered 14,000 Catholics in 1875 and the mission was increasingly successful in the years that followed. And this success was in sharp contrast with the forlorn state of the other islands in the group and especially to the west, Bali and Lombok, where the missionaries were forbidden to land because of Moslem hostility.

After the middle of the nineteenth century these missions received the help of teaching congregations of women: Ursuline Sisters of Venray, Franciscan Sisters of Heythuisen, Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy of Tilburg, Sisters of the Company of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and there were also the Brothers of the Congregation of St Aloysius of Dudenbooth.

Holland did not rest content with sending missionaries only. She supported them through her charitable societies such as the Missionary Association for Dutch East India and by a constant stream of prayer in the Missionary Union of the Clergy modelled on similar societies existing in many Catholic countries.

The division of the original Batavia vicariate began in 1902 and continued at a rapid rate after the Great War. It brought about the opening of seminaries and shortly afterwards, the rise of an Indonesian clergy.