CHAPTER X

THE CHINA MISSIONS

THE SITUATION PRIOR TO THE TREATIES OF TIEN-TSIN (1858) AND PEKIN (1860)

At the beginning of Gregory XVI's pontificate the position of the Chinese Christian communities was still much the same as it had been in about the year 1800, but there had been one change for the better: the missionaries were coming out in slightly larger numbers; and one change for the worse: the hostility of the emperors meant the more rigorous application of the edicts prescribing Christianity. In a word, the Church was still obliged to remain underground.

Legal proceedings were taken against missionaries and Chinese Christians. A Vincentian, Fr Jean Gabriel Perboyre, who arrived in Honan in 1836, was betrayed to the police by a renegade, then tortured for months on end for having refused to renounce his faith and to give information about the Christian communities. He was hanged on September 11th, 1840. He was beatified by Leo XIII.

The missions only acquired legal status after the Opium War had forcibly opened the gates of the empire. The causes of this war are well known. On March 28th, 1839, the governor of Canton ordered that some 20,000 cases of opium which a merchant by the name of Elliot wanted to introduce into China, should be seized and dumped into the sea. The Chinese Government refused to pay the compensation claimed by Elliot and suspended all trade with the English.

After a short campaign China yielded and opened the ports of Canton, Amoy, Hing-Po and Shanghai to British traders (1842). In 1844, France and America in their turn negotiated the treaty of Whampou. The French plenipotentiary, M. de

Lagrenée, succeeded in having an article included in it (23) according to which any Frenchmen venturing to any area outside the five ports indicated in the treaty with England should be taken, without receiving ill-treatment of any kind, to the French consulate in the nearest port. French priests thus found themselves safeguarded by an international agreement. But before freedom to move about and to preach could be secured for missionaries of every nation, a new European intervention was necessary. The circumstance which led to it was the martyrdom of one of the missionaries, Fr Chapdelaine (1856). The freedom in question was written into the treaty of Tien-Tsin (1858) which also contained an article (8) declaring that any missionary in possession of a passport issued by the French Legation at Pekin would be considered as French. Thus France's right of protection was recognized. The general assembly of the bishops of China, which included the Italian prelates, had stated in a letter written to the pope in 1851 that they considered such protection "indispensable".

The treaty of Pekin (1860), negotiated by France, obliged the Chinese Government to restore to the Christians, through the good offices of the French minister to China, the church buildings and those devoted to charitable works which had been previously confiscated. It also granted to the missionaries the right to possess and to buy land for the erection of churches and houses.

This state of affairs which has been called, perhaps too optimistically, "the French protectorate" was displeasing both to the Chinese Government—since it placed under foreign supervision small areas of its territory and the Christians living in them—and to the Holy See, in so far as it re-established, though on a very small scale, and for the benefit of France, a state of affairs which was reminiscent of the former *patronato* system.

This dissatisfaction on the part of both Rome and Pekin might, in favourable circumstances, lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations between them. The opportunity came

in 1885. At the time of the Tonkin expedition when Franco-Chinese relations had become strained, the emperor had made it known that the Chinese Christians and the missionaries, even those who were French, would be safe from violent action of any kind. Leo XIII thanked him and reminded him in a letter dated January 1st, 1885, that the envoys of the Sovereign Pontiff were not recruited from one nation alone. "A fact", he pointed out, "in complete accord with the nature of the Christian religion, which is not made for one people alone but for all, which unites all men in the bonds of brotherhood with no distinction of country or race."

In its reply, the imperial Government made it known that it was willing to accredit a minister to the Holy See and to welcome a nuncio in Pekin. The establishment of direct relations, however, did not take place, as France refused to renounce the benefits she enjoyed under article 8 of the treaty of Tien-Tsin.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FRENCH PROTECTORATE

Throughout the empire the treaties (Whampou, Tien-Tsin, Pekin) improved the situation. When the guarantees of religious freedom secured by them had been included in the treaties China signed with Prussia (1861), Denmark and Holland (1863), Spain (1864), Italy (1866) and Portugal (1887), the Chinese missions did indeed take on the international character Leo XIII was to emphasize.

There was now no longer any need to work underground. Yet the outbreaks of civil war, brigandage, the attacks of xenophobia—those endemic diseases of China—never ceased. One orgy of butchery after another took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, down to the most deadly of them all, that of the Boxers in 1900 which martyred several thousand Chinese Christians.

The Chinese world faced by the missionaries in the second half of the century was almost the same as it had been in the

preceding period. It was shut in on itself, closed to European influences, and all but exclusively agricultural. Attachment to traditional ways, whether in the shape of loyalty to Chinese culture among the educated or of mere superstition among the peasants, kept all its force. Both classes took part in the family or national rites condemned by the Bull *Ex quo singulari.*

The old institutes (the Paris Foreign Missions, the Vincentians) developed the country settlements already established. The newcomers acted in the same way for a long time. Yet some of them showed occasional leanings towards the creation of reductions, the Scheut Fathers, for instance, in Mongolia among the Ordos and the Ala-Shan. These Christian communities which had fully developed thanks to the treaties, satisfied all the spiritual and vital needs of their members. But they were isolated groups, cut off from the national life. How could it be otherwise as long as the Bull *Ex quo singulari* continued to have the force of law?

The increasingly numerous vicariates on which they depended did not lose sight of the need to train a Chinese clergy. They all had preparatory schools in which vocations underwent a testing period, and seminaries leading to the priesthood. The Jesuits, faithful to their traditions, concentrated all their attention on higher education. At Zi-Ka-Wei, they established the College of St Ignatius, then, in 1873, an observatory which soon became famous throughout the world. At Shanghai, they opened in 1903 the Aurora University and at Tien-Tsin, an institute of higher studies. At Pekin, the Fathers of the Divine Word founded two universities.

The following figures show the progress of the Church in China in the nineteenth century. In 1800, the six vicariates numbered 300,000 faithful served by 198 priests, of whom 89 were Chinese. In 1885, the 650,000 Christians were distributed among the 35 vicariates served by 700 foreign missionaries and 273 Chinese priests. In 1900, the number of the faithful had risen to 740,000, distributed among 82 vicariates served by 471 Chinese priests and 904 missionaries.