

**Thai Nationalism and the Catholic Experience,
1909-47**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the Mission of Siam during the period 1909-47, when it was still being administered by the French missionary order, the Missions Étrangères de Paris (M.E.P.).

Under the leadership of Vicar-Apostolic René Perros, the Mission of Siam expanded its missionary efforts for the first time to the north of Thailand and strengthened its reputation and networks in local society through the construction, upgrade, and maintenance of social works such as clinics, hospitals, and schools. However, problems were also encountered. The Mission was badly affected by the economic depression of the 1930s, while some of its administrative practices, in particular the ceding of jurisdiction over the northeast of Thailand to the Mission of Laos, aggravated tensions between the missionaries, the government, and elements of the local community.

The thesis also examines the concurrent development and effects of Thai nationalism during the period 1909-47 on the Mission of Siam. Concepts of Thai national identity underwent major transformations during this period, and its effects on the Church were unpredictable. As the first Pibul government geared itself to seize former Siamese territories from French Indochina, anti-French rhetoric reached its height. At the same time, the move to make Buddhism a *sine qua non* of Thai identity was made. Together, the two factors unleashed a wave of persecution on the Thai Catholic population from 1940-45. Yet, the inconsistencies of the persecution suggest that there was more at stake than just nationalist pride; ulterior local political and economic motives, along with pre-existing tensions between the Catholic and non-Catholic communities also played a part in prolonging the persecutions.

For the Church, the persecution of the 1940s gave it eight martyrs and accelerated the handover of the Missions to the local clergy, thereby spelling the formal end of the Mission. Meanwhile, the state was left, once again, to grapple with what it meant to be a Thai and the consequences of a violated Constitution; consequences that echo, arguably, down to the present day.

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Love takes up where knowledge leaves off.

- St. Thomas Aquinas

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Feast of the Ascension

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List of Abbreviations

B.A.A.	Bangkok Archdiocese Archives
C.B.A.	Collection of Fr. Bruno Arens (O.M.I.)
M.E.P.	Missions Étrangères de Paris
M.E.P.A.	Missions Étrangères de Paris Archives
S.N.M.A.	Sakon Nakhon Mission Archives

Notes on Thai Transliteration and Names

There are several systems for the transliteration of Thai into English, not least the system that was used by the Catholic missionaries' administration during this period. Although not perfect, the thesis will use the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (R.T.G.S.T.) for Thai terms, with the exception of personal and place names for which the thesis will follow the common use rather than a specific system.

In addition, Thai names during this period provide a number of other complications. It is customary (and still the current practice) for Thais to be referred to by their personal instead of their surnames, partly as a consequence of surnames only being introduced in 1913. Thus, Pridi Phanomyong is known as Pridi rather than Phanomyong. It is also customary for the longer names such as Phraya Manopakonnitithada to be shortened: so Phraya Manopakonnitithada becomes Phraya Mano and Phraya Phahonphonphayuhaseha becomes Phraya Phahon. This system also extends to Thai priests in the Catholic Church, where they refer to themselves and others only by their first name: so Fr. Raphael is used as opposed to Fr. Raphael Titra. The thesis will follow this system.

It should also be noted that, under the absolute monarchy, every official on his appointment was accorded an official title that corresponded with his rank, upon the receipt of which it was customary for the official to change his name. Thus, before he received his commission as army captain, Pibul was originally known as Plaek Kittasangka. After he received his commission, he became Luang Pibulsongkhram, where the title *Luang* effectively became a part of his name. This is also the name by which he is still generally known today. These official names have also subsequently evolved into surnames, so descendants of Pibul use "Pibulsongkhram" rather than "Kittasangka" as their surnames.

These official names did not always stick, however. Thus, when Pridi was appointed as an official at the Justice Ministry in 1927, his name was changed to Luang Praditmanutham but his original name was, and continues to be, better known in the contexts of both general reference and academic works.

Notes on Thai Titles

The system of Thai royal and feudal titles is complex. There have been attempts to translate them in relations to the European systems of peerage, but these translations are not perfectly accurate. Here follows a brief explanation of the more common royal titles in descending order:

<i>Chao Fa</i>	This is the most senior royal rank after the king and the queen.
<i>Mom Chao</i> (M.C.),	This title is given to children of a male <i>Chao Fa</i> , marking them out as direct grandchildren of a king.
<i>Mom Rachawong</i> (M.R.)	This title is given to children of male <i>Mom Chao</i> .
<i>Mom Luang</i> (M.L.)	This is the lowest of the royal titles and is bestowed on children of male <i>Mom Rachawong</i> .

There are no further titles after *Mom Luang*, but their descendants may append “na Ayutthaya” to their surnames to denote their royal descent.

In addition, during this period, there were also feudal titles, which were awarded to males only, usually for services in the civil administration or the military. All of these titles were non-hereditary. In descending order, the highest of these ranks was *Chao phraya*, *Phraya*, *Phra*, *Luang*, *Khun* (pronounced with a higher tone),¹ *Muen*, *Pan*, and *Nai*. The awarding of these titles to new recipients was abolished after 1932 but those who had already attained the titles before then were allowed to continue to use them. Thus, in the modern day, the feudal titles are all but obsolete with the exception of *Nai*, which has evolved into the modern-day equivalent of ‘Mister’.²

¹ In the modern-day *Khun* with a lower pronunciation is a commonly used honorific for both sexes.

² There is also a modern female equivalent – *Nang*, which is the equivalent of ‘Mrs.’.

*To the Catholics of Thailand,
Past, Present, and Future.*

I

Introduction

*For all the saints, who from their labours rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

- William How, *For All the Saints*

Had the villagers of Songkhon, a sleepy settlement on the meandering banks of the Mekong, been watching the police station, they would have presumed that they had been witness to a scene of youthful innocence. A young woman, Budsri Cecilia Wongwai, had just delivered a letter and a small package to the Police Sergeant Bunlue Muangkot in charge of the police unit that had recently been sent to the remote region. Observers could rightly have assumed that the young woman was acting on a teenage crush, seeing her skip merrily away from the station. Indeed, to the predominantly Catholic inhabitants of Songkhon, the day was a special one, a most appropriate day to display sentiments of peace to one's neighbours and, indeed, to all mankind. It was Christmas Day, Anno Domini 1940.

Nevertheless, storm clouds had been gathering over the village for the past few months. After a series of violent skirmishes, the government in faraway Bangkok had entered into armed conflict against French Indochina, just across the river from the village. The swift collapse of France in the European war had provided the Bangkok government with an unprecedented opportunity to restore national pride. After decades of Siamese concessions to the colonial powers, constitutionalist Thailand – not absolutist Siam – would now restore national pride by seizing back the lands that belong to it. Never mind that 'The Leader', as the followers of Field Marshal Pibulsongkhram (December 1938-August 1944 and April

1948-September 1957) now liked to call the prime minister, was partly educated in France and took pride on having been born on 14 July, Bastille Day.¹ France and its agents were now all enemies of the state and everyone was urged to faithfully believe in the Leader for the good of the nation.²

For the village, the change in the government's attitude manifested itself mainly in the posting of a police contingent to the village, ostensibly for its protection. There had been some trouble between the villagers and the police, mainly involving women,³ but nothing that would indicate a major outbreak of violence. What was more traumatic for most of the villagers was the departure of their priest, Fr. Paul Figuet on 30 November 1940. Since the priest was French, he was obliged to vacate the area within forty-eight hours.⁴ In the absence of the priest and his sacraments, the remaining pillars of religious leadership were Philip Siphong, a catechist and teacher of the village, and a number of Thai Catholic nuns who resided in the village. Through their instruction and example, the villagers continued steadfastly in their faith in Catholicism and prayer.

The police, all of them Buddhists, may have seen this steadfastness as obstinacy. Some of them may have even seen the villagers' faith as an act of treason. After all, across the country, a group patriotically calling itself the *Khana lueat Thai* (the Thai Blood Group or Organisation) had been burning Catholic churches, assaulting its remaining priests, and threatening Catholic laymen, branding them as Fifth Columnists for the French. For most of the police in the contingent, having

¹ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand: A Story of Intrigue* (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1991), p. 11.

² One of the best-known official slogans formulated by the first Pibul government was "*Chuea Phunam chat phon phai*" ("Obey the Leader and the Nation will prevail").

³ Archbishop Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On et al, *Bunyarasi thang jed haeng Prathet Thai* [The Seven Blessed Martyrs of Thailand] (Khana kamakarn jad ngan chalerm chalong bunyarasi thang jed, Bangkok, 1989), p. 18.

⁴ Archbishop Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On et al, *Bunyarasi thang jed*, pp. 15-16.

such a concentrated group of 'Fifth Columnists' so near the border was a danger that they could have lived without in the uncertain times. They would have been disappointed though, had they thought that the departure of the priest would have led to the diminishing of the villagers' faith. On the contrary, like the early Christians, faith grew stronger under the difficult circumstances and the leadership of Philip Siphong and the sisters.

Therefore, for the good of the villagers and the nation, Catholicism – the religion of the French enemies – had to be wiped out. Indeed, the central government appeared to concur, since certain ministries and local authorities had apparently received 'secret orders' and were gathering Catholics and other religious minorities into long 'meetings', urging the participants to convert to Buddhism, the religion of 'true' Thais. The central government would later go on to proclaim in May 1944 that "Thailand is a nation that worships the Buddhist religion like life itself", implying that those who did not were not Thais.

All of these 'secret orders', meetings, and proclamations were in violation of the 1932 Constitution. Never mind the fact that this very constitution had been the key platform for the 1932 revolution that brought many of the men in government to power in the first place. But the meetings at Songkhon would prove to be a challenge with such a strong leadership. In religious terms, the standing of Philip Siphong rested on his role as the village school's headmaster and catechist, while in political terms he had connections with the *Nai amphoe* (district chief officer)⁵ of

⁵ The Thai provincial administrative system is divided into *monthon* (a collection of *changwat* or provinces), *changwat* (provinces), *amphoe* (also can be *amphur* or districts), *tambons* (sub-districts), and *muban* (villages). A *thesaphiban* (royal commissioner) led the *monthon* while a *Phu wa ratchakan changwat* (in this period they can also be referred to as *khaluang* or provincial governors) led the provinces, *Nai amphoe* (district chief officers) administer the districts, *Kamnans* (sub-district headmen) fulfil the same role in the sub-districts, with *Phuyai Ban* (village headmen) forming the lowest tier of the administration in the villages. With the exception of the *monthon* (which was abolished in 1933), this system of administration is still currently in use.

Mukdahan. Even when the priest was present, Philip Siphong was already a formidable leadership figure. It was thus unlikely that any of the villagers would abandon their faith if Philip Siphong was still in charge. One way or another, the catechist had to be eliminated.

On 16 December 1940, while he was on his way to a supposed meeting with the district chief officer of Mukdahan, Philip Siphong was shot dead in a nearby village. The death of the catechist alerted the villagers that conflicts with the police were no longer a trivial matter. The incident also propelled the nuns into a leadership role that they took on with a vigour that surprised the police. The leader of the police then told the nuns to discard their religious habit and wear normal clothing for the sake of the safety of their fellow villagers. At first, the nuns complied, until they saw the real intention of the police. The intention of the police, it seemed, was to neutralise the sacred aura provided by the habit, thereby undermining the sisters' position in village society. It was not long before the sisters read the motives of the police, saw their broken promises, and once again assumed their habit.

Even with this failure, the police thought that they could now assemble the villagers and urge them to convert. A meeting was called on 23 December 1940, where the head of the police contingent, Nai Bunlue, brandished the 'order' from the government with the addition of the death penalty as the consequence of non-conversion. The police were right to think that the threat would cow most of the villagers; but they did not count on one teenage girl standing up to them, exclaiming that she would never abandon her religion, amidst the urging of concerned villagers

telling her to sit down, since they feared the girl would be shot on the spot.⁶ Nai Bunlue and the police, however, strenuously ignored her and the meeting was adjourned in chaos, with a massive loss of face for the police. The same night, the sisters gathered in a meeting of their own to deliberate the day's events. During the meeting, they had been taken aback by the police's sudden, albeit not entirely unexpected demands, and had made no answer. Together, they came to a decision and drafted the following letter, affixed with their signatures:

To the head of the village of Songkhon, with respect:

This evening you have been given the order to definitely wipe out the name of God, our only life and soul and the only one whom we worship. Two or three days ago you told us that you would not wipe out the name of God, so we willingly abandoned the habits that marked us out as servants of God. This is not the case today. We hereby declare that the Christianity is the only true religion. And so we will answer your question of yesterday evening as to who is willing to continue holding this religion.

Yesterday evening we were not prepared to answer your question, but now we ask you to wipe us out; do not hesitate any longer to follow your orders. We are willing to return our lives to God, our creator. We are unwilling to become the prey of demons. Please proceed and open to us the gates of Heaven so that we can declare that there is no other road to salvation other than the religion of Christ. Come, we have prepared everything. Once we are gone, we shall not forget you. Have pity on our souls and we shall thank you and will not forget you at the End of Days when we shall see each other face to face again. On that day, please be our witness to Him that we have kept His commandments.

We are Agnes, Lucia, Mae Puttha, Nang Budsri, Nang Buakai, Nang Suwan. We ask that we can take the girl Puma with us,⁷ for we love her so much.⁸

⁶ Sakon Nakhon Mission Archives (henceforth S.N.M.A.), Testimony of Agatha Thep, 15 February 1949.

⁷ Of the women who signed the letter, three survived. Nang Buakai became afraid and did not go through with the martyrdom, while Nang Suwan was prevented from following the sisters to the cemetery by her father, who locked her up in his house. Puma (Cecilia Sorn) went with the sisters and, despite having lined up with the rest, was unharmed by the shots of the police. She was taken away by the villagers before the police returned to finish the botched execution.

⁸ There have been many certified photographs, transcripts, and reproductions of the original, undated letter in S.N.M.A., as well as at the Bangkok Archdiocese Archives, (Undated, 58/1/1) made subsequent to the incident and the successful beatification process. However the original appears to have been lost.

This letter was the one that was delivered to the police station by Cecilia Budsri – the first person who stood up when the police asked in a meeting as to who would continue to be Catholic, despite the threats that they had made.⁹ If the villagers who saw her had any misgivings, these were confirmed by Cecilia when she stopped to say goodbye to some of them, saying that she was “going to Heaven” as she skipped away.¹⁰

It was inevitable that the letter would provoke a reaction from the police chief. By the next day, Boxing Day, Cecilia was dead along with two nuns and five other Catholics. She, and the others, had been shot at point-blank range in the local cemetery by the police officers from the same station that she had visited the day before. Far from being a flighty love missive, the letter was a statement of her and the others’ faith in God as well as their categorical refusal to adopt the Buddhist religion, even in the face of violent intimidation. The small package did, however, contain a Christmas present for the police. They were vials of coconut oil – so that the guns of the officers would not jam when they carried out the killings.¹¹

At first the police wanted to execute the women on the banks of the Mekong, presumably so that they could later claim that the women were Laotian spies trying to escape to French Indochina.¹² But the women, as if able to read the intentions of the police, refused to go and insisted that they went to the village cemetery.¹³ They paraded through the village – as if they were going to a feast rather than their own execution. Indeed, as one of them said to a fellow villager, “Today, I didn’t have

⁹ S.N.M.A., Testimony of Agatha Thep of Songkhon, 15 February 1949.

¹⁰ Archbishop Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On et al, *Bunyarasi Thang Jed*, p. 32.

¹¹ S.N.M.A., Testimony of Maria-Joseph Teng, 16 February 1949.

¹² After the execution, Nai Boonleu would claim that the nuns were shot while they were trying to cross the Mekong, S.N.M.A., Testimony of Anthony Buathong, 17 February 1949.

¹³ S.N.M.A., Testimony of Joseph Agad, 17 February 1949.

breakfast because I will feast in Heaven. Pray for me".¹⁴ At the cemetery, the women were lined up, kneeling, resting their hands on a large log, in a final prayer. In spite of the Christmas present from the women, the police guns jammed. Then some bullets missed, leaving one girl unscathed. She would survive to bear witness of the day's atrocities. Two others, Sister Agnes and Maria, were not so lucky; they were seriously wounded and, suffering in agony, they asked the horrified villagers to call the police back to finish what they had started.¹⁵ When the police returned, they shot the fourteen year-old Maria and Sister Agnes a further three times. But Sister Agnes remained alive, and silently re-positioned herself so that the police could shoot her. It was not until the fourth shot that Sister Agnes breathed her last¹⁶ and the police, now completely terrified, fled the scene, shouting instructions at the stunned villagers to bury their victims "like dogs".

In total, seven had been killed at the hands of the police in Songkhon. Philip Siphong was 33 years old when he was assassinated. Sister Agnes Thipsuk was 31, while Sister Lucia Khambang was 23 years old. The oldest of the dead was Agatha Phutta, who was 59. Shockingly, three girls who were barely in their mid-teens were among those executed: Cecilia Budsri was 16, Bibiana Khampai was 15, and the youngest, Maria Porn, was only 14 years old. All were beatified by Pope John Paul II on 22 October 1989.

The murders at Songkhon were undoubtedly the most appalling act against the Catholic Church in Thailand during the suppression of the 1940s. However, they were only one of many events. Across the country, priests and their parishioners were subjected to various forms of harassment and abuse. Some Catholics in the civil service were pressured to either convert to Buddhism or resign. Buddhists were

¹⁴ S.N.M.A., Testimony of Joseph Wong, 17 February 1949.

¹⁵ S.N.M.A., Testimony of Edeal Kosali, 17 February 1949.

¹⁶ S.N.M.A., Testimony of Edeal Kosali, 17 February 1949.

encouraged to be 'patriotic' and boycott Catholic businesses and refrain from having any contact with Catholics. Churches and parish schools were burnt down, confiscated, or vandalised across the country. Priests, both foreign and Thai, were harassed, arrested, and detained on spurious charges. One Thai priest, Fr. Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung, was arrested in January 1941 for ringing bells to celebrate a religious feast day. He was later tried for being a Fifth Columnist and was given a fifteen-year sentence at Bang Kwang Prison in Bangkok. He was to die there on 12 January 1944, but not before converting 68 of his fellow inmates to Catholicism. Fr. Nicolas was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 5 March 2000.

Many who hear the little-known accounts of the anti-Catholic persecution in Thailand for the first time may wonder as to how such an incident could have occurred. The shock may be compounded by the modern perception that Thailand remains a country where the concept of religious tolerance has been practiced to an extraordinarily effective degree, both officially and unofficially. Thailand's portrayal of itself as a Buddhist nation, with its teachings of *metta* or loving kindness and tolerance has become an orientalist stereotype in the eyes of many casual observers of this Southeast Asian nation. Along with the boom in the tourism industry in the last few decades, Thailand has managed, at least until recently, to portray itself to the world as a model of a successful multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation. Indeed, the Tourism Authority of Thailand website markets the country as one that "embraces a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. With its proud history,

tropical climate and renowned hospitality, the Kingdom is a never-ending source of fascination and pleasure for international visitors".¹⁷

This thesis, therefore, aims to place the horror that occurred at Songkhon and other anti-Catholic incidents in the 1940s in the historical context of the development in the Thai political world, notably the different conceptions of Thai identity that was in currency during this period, as well as developments of the Church in Siam/Thailand during the period 1909-47. In Chapter I, the thesis will examine the shifts in Thai identity during this period, from the time of King Vajiravudh (1910-25) to the extreme nationalism that became the currency under the first government Field Marshal Pibulsongkhram (1938-44),¹⁸ and their effects on the Missions where society's views on them changed seemingly overnight from seeing them as useful contributors to society in the 1910s, 1920s, and even up to late 1930s to them being dangerous Fifth Columnists in the early 1940s.

In Chapters II, III, and IV, the thesis will also focus on the general and local developments in the Church in Thailand during this period. Newly available and unpublished primary sources will be drawn upon to illustrate the characters and growth of regional churches in Chapters III and IV, the problems they encountered, and how these may have instigated and affected the course of the persecution in the 1940s. The thesis will argue that, in certain cases, it was the local conditions and the local relationships (or lack thereof) between the Mission and the non-Catholic communities that were more influential on determining the course of the persecution, rather than central policy and that this local factor was the main motivator behind the persecution extending to well beyond the conclusion of the Thai-French war (1940-

¹⁷ Tourism Authority of Thailand, *About Thailand*, <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about/aboutthailand.aspx> [Last Access: 9 March 2007].

¹⁸ Field Marshal Pibulsongkhram (also known as Plaek Pibulsongkhram) was to head two governments. The first was between 1938-44 and the second was between 1948-57. Unless otherwise stated, the thesis will be referring to his first government.

41) and even the Pacific War on 2 September 1945,¹⁹ while Chapter V will illustrate that it was the local government apparatus, rather than central policy, that was instrumental in the execution of the persecution. This inconsistency between central policy and local action will be explained in terms of the dysfunctional relationship between the central government and its local apparatus.

Equally key to understanding the persecution was the public face of the Catholic Missions at the time. The leadership of the Mission of Siam under Vicar-Apostolic Perros (1909-47) was mainly French, although during this period it was moving gradually towards the establishment of an indigenous hierarchy, that is, a Church run completely by an indigenous clergy. Relations between France and Siam had been ambivalent at best since the 1893 Paknam incident,²⁰ but the Missions' association with the French became an obvious liability as tensions mounted between the two countries in the run-up to the Thai-French War, which broke out in November 1940. Nevertheless, the thesis will illustrate in Chapter VI that divisions

¹⁹ Following the deployment of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Emperor Hirohito delivered the Imperial Rescript on Surrender in a public radio address on 15 August 1945, marking the commonly understood end of the Pacific War. However, Japanese fighting continued against Soviet and Chinese forces until early September of the same year. The Allied occupation of Japan began on 28 August 1945 but the Japanese Instrument of Surrender was not signed on the U.S.S. Missouri until 2 September 1945, while Japanese forces in Singapore waited until 12 September 1945 to follow suit.

²⁰ This incident is also known in Thai as *Wikritakarn Ro So 112* (วิกฤตการณ์ ร.ศ. 112) or the Crisis of Year 112 (counting from 1781, the year of the founding of Bangkok). The incident began as a dispute between French Indochina, who wanted to bring the territory of Laos under their sphere of influence, and Siam, which held traditional suzerainty over Laos. In reaction to Bangkok's refusal to accede to their demands, the French sent two gunboats to Bangkok. The two vessels did not have permission to sail up the Chao Phraya River, the main artery of trade between the capital and the outside world, and so came under fire from the fort at Paknam, at the mouth of the river, on 13 July 1893. The French were able to force their way to Bangkok and when the government there still refused to immediately comply with demands for territory, the withdrawal of Siamese garrisons, and the payment of 2 million francs in war indemnities from the fighting at Paknam, the French proceeded to blockade the Chao Phraya. The incident ended with the conclusion of the Franco-Siamese Treaty on 3 October 1893 in which Siam effectively agreed to cede the territories requested by the French and pay the indemnity demanded. The incident remained traumatic for many years after, indicated by the fact that one of the main aims of the Thai-French War (1940-41) was the seizure of these territories that were lost to the French in 1893. For a general background on the incident, see D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2004), pp. 187-89. An English translation of the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 3 October 1893 can be found in W.E.J.H. Tips, *Siam's Struggle for Survival: The 1893 Gunboat Incident at Paknam* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1996), pp. 217-22.

along the lines of national identities were not clear cut. French missionaries in Siam did not always support the cause of their government, while their government did not always fully endorse the work of the missionaries. The same chapter of the thesis will also examine the methods with which national identities, a concept which has been analysed as “constructed” could be exploited for concrete material and social gains.

Finally, in Chapters VII and VIII, the thesis will explore the implications and consequences of the persecution on the future of the Missions in Thailand and the Thai state. For the Church it meant the acceleration of the establishment of an indigenous hierarchy. However, for the state, revisions in the Thai identity were perhaps more a reaction to Cold War realities rather than to the unintended persecutions.

Historical Background of Thailand, 1238-1947

In Thailand's history there has been dissension from time to time, but in general, unity has prevailed.

- King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), 1946-

This section will be a short recapitulation of the main developments and periods in general Thai political history that may be helpful to readers less familiar with the general history of Thailand so that they can put the historical developments of the Catholic Missions as seen through this thesis in their appropriate historical contexts.

The area covered by present-day Thailand has long been inhabited by humans but in orthodox Thai histories, the first unified Thai or Siamese kingdom was the Kingdom of Sukhothai which was founded approximately in 1238. The capital of the kingdom was the city of Sukhothai, which is located in the present-day province of the same name. The Sukhothai period²¹ was to last from 1238 to 1350, although Sukhothai would continue to be ruled by its own dynasty until 1448 when the city was absorbed into the orbit of its southern neighbour, Ayutthaya.

Sukhothai was only one of a number of competing city states in the area.²² In the course of the fifteenth century, the influence of Sukhothai was overshadowed by its southern neighbour, the kingdom of Ayutthaya which was established in 1351. The founding of the city of Ayutthaya by King Uthong (1351-69) marked the start of the beginning of the Ayutthaya period that would endure for several centuries (1351-1767).

²¹ The history of Thailand from the thirteenth century onwards is traditionally divided into four periods corresponding to the capital of the dominating state: the Sukhothai period (c. 1239-1438), the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767), the Thonburi period (1767-82), and the Bangkok or Rattanakosin period (1782-present). It should be noted that there is some overlap between the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya period, reflecting the competition for influence between the two city states at the time. Sub-divisions of the periods are also possible. There were also earlier periods before the Sukhothai period, but they are not relevant to the thesis.

²² D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp. 50-3.

Siam had been conducting overseas trade for sometime, particularly with China, India, and Persia but it was during the Ayutthaya period that Siam made first contact with westerners in the sixteenth century, with the Portuguese being the first, followed rapidly by the Dutch, English, and the French. Catholic missionaries also arrived with the traders and both gained influence at the court of Ayutthaya. However, foreign influence at the court was to cause considerable resentment among the native courtiers and during the reign of King Narai (1656-88), this resentment culminated in the 1688 coup, during which King Petracha (1688-1703) usurped the throne and began the first persecution of Catholics in the history of Siam. Trade with western nations also diminished from this point.

The period was also characterised by wars with neighbouring kingdoms, particularly with those located in present-day Burma. Indeed, the Burmese were to successfully assault Ayutthaya twice: once in 1569, from which Siam was able to recover sovereignty under King Naresuan (1590-1605) and again in 1767 when the whole capital was destroyed and abandoned.

Prior to the destruction of Ayutthaya, one of the city's military generals and his followers were able to break through the Burmese lines and establish a base of operations outside in present-day Chantaburi province in the east of present-day Thailand in 1767. The general was a half-Chinese called Phraya Taksin (b. 1734). He was later able to expel the Burmese occupiers, reunite the Siamese kingdom which had fragmented with the destruction of Ayutthaya, and establish a new capital at Thonburi, on the opposite bank of the river to present-day Bangkok. In the absence of old leadership from Ayutthaya, Phraya Taksin made himself the new king of the Thonburi dynasty of the short-lived Thonburi period (1768-82).

King Taksin was to be the first and only monarch of this dynasty since he was deposed in 1782. Contemporary accounts suggest that he was deposed due to his increasingly erratic behaviour and tyranny. These include his claim that he had gained such mastery over esoteric techniques of Buddhist meditation that he had the ability to fly, punishing Buddhist monks who refused to bow to him, the expulsion of Catholic missionaries for their refusal to participate in Buddhist ceremonies, while some officials, even some of his own wives and sons, were arbitrarily tortured or executed for imaginary crimes.²³

Following the successful rebellion, the general who ordered the execution of King Taksin, Phraya Chakri, ascended the throne as Phra Phuttayotfa (1782-1809) thereby becoming the first king of the present-day Chakri dynasty. During his reign, the capital was moved to present-day Bangkok and thus began the Bangkok or Rattanakosin period (1782-present day). In the nineteenth century, just as pressures from the Burmese subsided, Siam came under new pressure - namely from the western powers who were systematically subduing the traditional 'superpowers' of the region, such as China. Britain was the first to exert its influence during the reign of King Mongkut (1851-68) with the signing of the Bowring treaty on 18 April 1855. The treaty gave Britain trade privileges, which overrode the existing royal monopoly on trade, as well as rights of extra-territoriality. Similar treaties with other western nations soon followed.

In an effort to maintain the nation's independence, Siam initiated a concerted policy of modernisation and administrative reform under King Mongkut, which continued in earnest during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). During his reign, King Chulalongkorn pushed through reforms such as the abolition of

²³ B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History*, pp. 56-60 and D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 127.

slavery and corvée labour and established modern schools as well as a military cadet academy for the training of the members of the newly-established modern civil service and professional armed forces.

Nevertheless, these reforms did not prevent the French from increasing its influence at the expense of Siam. The most notable incident was the 1893 Paknam incident, where the French were able to force the Siamese government to concede to their territorial demands through gunboat diplomacy. The incident led to Siam conceding its suzerainty over Laos and Cambodia to France and northern Malaya and the Shan states in northern Burma to Britain as a counterbalance to French gains. This process was completed by 1907.

Thus, the period the thesis examines begins just as Siam was trying to recover from this catastrophic loss of its territory. For those less familiar with the political developments during this period, the detailed chronology in the appendices of this thesis will be helpful. The following will be merely a summary of the major developments for the benefit of those who are more familiar. In the short-term, the 1893 Paknam incident had a major impact on the policies of the immediate successor of King Chulalongkorn, the Oxford-educated King Vajiravudh (1910-25) but, as events in the 1940s proved, there were also long-term consequences to French aggression.

Nevertheless, during the reign of King Vajiravudh, the incident inspired policies that promoted the national consciousness and modernisation. The monarch achieved this through the dissemination of his writings in a wide range of media from journals to magazines to plays as well as through the creation of national symbols such as a new national flag and the concrete conceptualisation of the institutions that he thought to be lynchpins of Thai society: *Chat*, *Sasana*, and

Mahakasat – Nation, Religion, and Monarchy. In addition, he also expanded educational provisions. In 1911 he used money from the Privy Purse to establish the Royal Pages' School (present-day Vajiravudh School) and founded Chulalongkorn University, the first university in Siam, in 1917. Furthermore, he granted scholarships to nobles and commoners alike to study abroad.

In the international arena, the monarch took Siam into the First World War on the side of the Allies in July 1917, going so far as to send an expeditionary force to France from Siam. The tricolour of the new Siamese flag was to fly alongside that of the victorious Allies at the signing of the Versailles treaty in June 1919, indicating the equality of status that Siam had achieved under King Vajiravudh. Taking advantage of this new status, the monarch took the initiative of re-negotiating the unequal treaties that had been imposed in the reigns of his predecessors. By 1926, all western powers had conditionally given up their fiscal and extraterritorial rights to Siam.

The successor of King Vajiravudh, his brother King Prajadhipok (1925-35) continued these policies. However, his reign was affected by two major events. The first was the Great Depression. The monarch's British military education did not serve him well in dealing with this crisis. Indeed he confessed in February 1932 to a group of military officers that:

The financial war is a very hard one indeed. Even experts contradict one another until they become hoarse... I have never experienced such hardship; therefore if I have made a mistake I really deserve to be excused by the officials and people of Siam.²⁴

Honest as it was, the admission did not inspire confidence. At the same time, there was also an additional problem: what to do with the students on scholarship

²⁴ C. Baker, *A History of Thailand*, p. 118.

who were returning abroad. Government ministries and the armed forces were undergoing severe retrenchment as a result of the economic crisis, as a result some scholarship students felt that their full potential were not being utilised while the dominance of the princes and the aristocracy in the ministries gave rise to further resentment. The situation led to the second major event of the reign: the 1932 revolution.²⁵

The revolution was not the first attempt at toppling absolutism. There had been another abortive attempt in 1912 during the reign of King Vajiravudh but the 1932 attempt was the first successful seizure of power. It had been planned as early as 1927 when a group of seven overseas Thai students had met in Paris to discuss the end of the absolute monarchy. These students were to form the core group of the Promoters – for the ending of the absolute monarchy. Among them was Pridi Phanomyong and Plaek Kittasangka (later Field Marshal Pibulsongkhram) who were to become rivals and instrumental figures in the following decades of Thai history.

Despite the tranquil nature of the revolution, it ushered in a period of political turbulence as rival factions of the Promoters vied for power. There was a successful coup in 1933 headed by Phraya Phahon that deposed Phraya Manopakonnitithada (the first prime minister of Siam's constitutional government) and an unsuccessful rebellion later in the same year led by Prince Bovoradej, while King Prajadhipok abdicated in 1935 in favour of Prince Ananda Mahidol (1935-46) who was King Prajadhipok's ten year-old nephew, studying in Lausanne, Switzerland at the time.

²⁵ There is still some debate as to whether the 1932 revolution was really a 'revolution'. On the one hand, it did fundamentally change the system of government from an absolutist monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. However, the revolution did not originate from the masses. It was carried out by a small number of civilian and military officials. Indeed, the initial public reaction to the coup was muted. Moreover, the way with which some of the Promoters subsequently exercised their power did not differ significantly from the practices of the aristocrats in the absolutist period. These factors have led to some historians, such as Wyatt to argue that the 1932 incident was in fact a standard military coup and that it "can in no sense of the word be accurately described as a revolution, save in its long-term implications" – implications which did not become apparent until much later on. See D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 234.

Ultimately, it was the military that were in the ascendant and their zenith during this period was reached during the first government of Field Marshal Pibulsongkhram (1938-44).

The Pibul government emerged at a time of great international uncertainty. Germany was only a year away from starting the Second World War. Closer to home, Japan was resurgent and was seemingly unstoppable in its conquest of Chinese coastal cities. The seeming invincibility of the Japanese war machine and its subsequent invasion of Thailand in December 1941 pushed the Pibul government to closer co-operation with the Japanese, sealing a military alliance with Japan in 1941 and declaring war on Great Britain and the United States in January 1942.

The success of the German war effort in Europe, in particular, the Fall of France in June 1940, also encouraged the regime to exploit the weakness of the French Indochinese colonies in an effort to regain territories that had been lost during the absolutist era, culminating in the Thai-French War that started in November 1940. The conclusion of the war led to the return of territories that had been conceded to France following the 1893 Paknam incident. It was a triumph for the constitutional regime, and a personal one for Pibul.

Internally, the Pibul government also enacted significant measures, most significantly the Cultural Mandates which, among other things, changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand in June 1939. The name change was a reflection of the government's active policy to reclaim control of the economy, long in the hand of Chinese immigrants, for "Thais". Thus discriminatory laws prohibiting Chinese from entering certain professions from lawyers to umbrella-making were passed, while measures such as the closure of the Chinese schools and the increased

promotion of the use of the Siamese language in schools were designed to integrate ethnic minorities that had been born in Thailand but had hitherto failed to integrate.

As the Second World War drew to a close, resistance to Pibul increased as his earlier association with the Japanese became a liability. Chief among the resistance was Pridi who, by 1944, had become the regent. Apart from organising parliamentary resistance to the Pibul regime, which eventually forced Pibul's resignation in July 1944, he was also the head of the *Seri Thai* (Free Thai) movement in Thailand whose objective was the ending of the Japanese occupation. In the person of Pridi, the Allied command was confronted with the curious situation of a nominal head of state of an enemy country, passing on valuable intelligence. Pridi was to become prime minister in 1946.

The period covered by the thesis thus ended like it began: with Siam (as it was renamed in 1945) trying to find its feet after a major conflict and a new role in the emerging international order. To that end, Siam made peace with the Allies, particularly the French who withdrew their veto of Siam's membership to the United Nations once the territories claimed during the course of the 1940-1 Thai-French War were returned. Siam eventually joined the United Nations as its 55th member in December 1946. Internally, there were also efforts to continue national development. A new constitution was drafted and came into force in 1946 – it was to be the second 'permanent' one and the first to introduce a bi-cameral legislature with a fully elected lower house that would, in turn, elect members of the upper house.²⁶

Yet the country remained unstable as indicated in the mysterious death of King Ananda Mahidol in June 1946, which threw the nation into another political upheaval as the people sought for someone to blame. The period ends with a

²⁶ As of 2009, Thailand has had a total of 17 constitutions and charters since 1932.

military coup against the Pridi-backed regime, with Pibul as the figurehead of the coup. At first, a civilian administration under Khuang Aphaiwong (1947-8) was appointed. However, by April 1948, Pibul had returned to power as the leader of Siam and, in the following year, of a re-named Thailand.

Thus, the period 1909-47, which coincided with the ministry of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, was an important one in terms of the modern political history of Thailand. During this period, Thailand underwent major political changes: from being an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy; from being the subject of unequal treaties, on the verge of formal colonisation, to a nation of equal status and of such confidence that it would end up declaring war on Great Britain and the United States on the side of a resurgent Japan in 1942.

It was in this turbulent environment that the Missions in Siam were trying to operate. Yet, at the same time, it was also during this period that the ideas of Thai nationhood were being formed. What did it really mean to be “Thai”? Was Catholicism included in these ideas, and if so, did these roles change over time?

Nation, Religion, Monarchy, Constitution, and Dictatorship

God forbade it, indeed; but Faustus hath done it: for vain pleasure of twenty-four years hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity. I writ them a bill with mine own blood: the date is expired; the time will come, and he will fetch me.

- Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

In order to see the origin of the poisonous atmosphere that allowed the anti-Catholic persecution to take place in the 1940s, it is necessary to first understand Thai conceptions of national identity and its relationship with religion from the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-25)²⁷ to the time of the persecutions, and the changing role of Buddhism in these formulations. King Vajiravudh was instrumental in the formulation of Thai identity, creating the “three pillars”: *Chat*, *Sasana*, and *Mahakasat* (Nation, Religion, and Monarchy),²⁸ the core of which has endured to this day and is embodied in national symbols such as the present tricolour flag (red, white, and blue) that was first introduced during King Vajiravudh’s reign.

As Vella argued, the relationship between the Thai monarchy and Buddhism was nothing new, where he describes it as being “close since earliest history” and “a symbiotic relationship: the Buddhist Order supported the state, the state supported the order.”²⁹ Indeed, the predecessors of King Vajiravudh had been heavily involved in the practice or reform of Buddhism in Thailand. King Taksin (1767–82)³⁰ was

²⁷ Also known as King Rama VI.

²⁸ It has been argued that King Vajiravudh’s original inspiration was the British Empire’s trinity of God, King, and Country. For example, in Sulak Sivaraksa, ‘The Crisis of Siamese Identity’ in C.J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and its Defenders* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2002), p. 35. However, other European countries had similar concepts. For example, Russia had adopted Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality as its guiding pillars since the reign of Tsar Nicholas I in 1833.

²⁹ W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1978), p. 214.

³⁰ Born in 1734, King Taksin was the sole monarch of the Thonburi Kingdom, which was established following the second fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. In his reign he was responsible for expelling the Burmese occupational forces and re-establishing a re-unified order in Siam. He also found a new capital city at Thonburi (on the opposite side of the Chao Phraya River from Bangkok). The atmosphere at his court in the last years of his reign became strained as the monarch became increasingly obsessed with esoteric methods of Buddhist meditation. He was ousted in a coup d’état

obsessed with Buddhist meditation and arranged for monks with reputations of expertise in this area to regularly instruct him.³¹ On the other hand, King Mongkut or Rama IV (1851-1868), initiated reforms when he was still a monk by establishing a separate order of monkhood – the *Dhammayutika* (“Order adhering to the Dhamma” as opposed to the existing *Mahanikai*, which the contemptuous Mongkut referred to as the “Order of Long-standing habit”).³² The *Dhammayutika* order would continue to be supported by Mongkut when he became king, as well as his successors where, for example *Dhammayutika* monks were appointed to the position of supreme patriarch of the Sangha (the head of the order of Buddhist monks) in Siam.³³

However, what was novel in King Vajiravudh’s case was his use of Buddhism to buttress nationalism.³⁴ This concept was incorporated into visible public symbols, such as the re-designed tricolour flag which was introduced on 28 September 1917, following Siam’s entry into the First World War on the side of the allies.³⁵ From King Vajiravudh’s own words, the white colour on the flag represents “purity and betokens the three gems”³⁶ – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. King Vajiravudh’s views on Buddhism and its centrality to national identity were expressed in various mediums such as plays, speeches, essays, and poems. As Vella has argued, there were four messages that the monarch wished to convey to the public regarding Buddhism. The first was the essential role of the moral citizen, as

and executed in 1782. In the same year, the general who ordered Taksin’s execution, Chao Phraya Chakri, ascended the throne as Phra Phuttayotfa (Rama I), becoming the first king of the present Chakri dynasty. It was during his reign that the capital was moved to present-day Bangkok. See D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp. 122-9

³¹ B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand’s Political History: From the Fall of Ayutthaya to Recent Times* (River Books, Bangkok, 2005), p. 53

³² D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 161.

³³ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p. 66.

³⁴ W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo!*, p. 216.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

informed by Buddhism, as the strength of the state. The second was that a moral state, composed of moral citizens, would be stronger in competition with other, less moral states. The third was the assertion that Buddhism was the best route to morality for Thais. The final message was that Thais had a mission to preserve and protect the Buddhist faith.³⁷

The assertion that Buddhism was the best route to morality for Thais led Vajiravudh to make some unfavourable comparisons between the major world religions and Buddhism, in particular Christianity and Islam. At first, some of the comparisons appear designed to be disrespectful to the religion concerned. The doctrine of the virgin birth was seen as a cover for Mary's pre-marital indiscretions,³⁸ which Buddhism found unnecessary because of the established lineage of the Buddha. Islam was also similarly analysed unfavourably.³⁹ Furthermore, Buddhism's place in Thai society was cemented by its historical place, having arrived and been adopted by the majority before Christianity and Islam. Buddhism was thus the "natural" religion for Thais, just as Christianity was for Western societies. However, these criticisms were not meant to make Buddhists disrespectful of other religions, since King Vajiravudh repeatedly pointed to the similarities between religions and argued that the criticism of the Buddhist religion by clerics from the other religions amounted to a tacit acknowledgement of Buddhism as both a rival and an equal in the competition for the people's faith.⁴⁰

The ultimate goal for King Vajiravudh was thus the buttressing of Buddhism's position in Thai society, and confirming its place in Thai society as the *primus inter pares* among the religions respected by the Thai population. Although

³⁷ Ibid., p. 216.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 220.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 219.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 221.

the points made by King Vajiravudh appear quite emphatic, they were never imposed upon the population through legislation. Indeed, the monarch remained sensitive towards the feelings of the religious minorities of his kingdom,⁴¹ being particularly responsive to the Malay Muslim minority throughout his reign.⁴²

Nevertheless, the line between Buddhism being the “first among equals” and being “the best” was a thin one. For Thai Catholics, it was the shift from Buddhism as the *primus inter pares* to being at the centre of nationhood during the first Pibul government that created an atmosphere that was permissive for the persecutions. When the government, in defining “*khwam pen thai*” (“Thainess”) declared that “Thais love Buddhism more than life itself”,⁴³ the implication was that those who were not Buddhists were also not Thais. The shift was, in part, a reflection of the turbulent political processes of the 1930s, and the systematic failure of one or more of the three pillars (later, four, with the inclusion of the Constitution as the fourth pillar after 1932) to underpin national identity. Nevertheless, much of the ideology with regard to nationhood after 1932, as well as Pibul’s ideology, was built on the foundation laid by King Vajiravudh.

Perhaps the most obvious sign that the Pibul regime aimed to definitively change the face of the country was the change of the country’s name from Siam to Thailand in 1939. In the view of Reynolds and Anderson, it was ostensibly a response to nationalistic aspirations elsewhere in Asia and was an expression of the new ruling elite’s desire to monopolise the nation for Thai speakers and its attempt to

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 197-8.

⁴³ Thamsuk Numnond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok khrang thi song* [Thailand in the Second World War] (Saitham, Bangkok, 2005), p. 100.

“instil pride and equality with the West in the country’s citizenry”.⁴⁴ The triumph of Pibul’s vision of Thai national identity was also a reflection of his, and the military’s, political triumph. Considering the military’s role in the birth of Thai democracy, Pibul’s triumph was arguably inevitable.

In the present day, the political role of the military has come under greater public scrutiny. Nevertheless, given the military’s crucial role in the establishment of the constitutional order, the military’s interference in political affairs up to the present day was perhaps an unavoidable development. The 1932 coup d’état that toppled the absolutist regime under King Prajadhipok (1925-35)⁴⁵ and established the Thai constitutional order would have been impossible without the active support of the military. While by 1927, there were about fifty ‘promoters’ for the end of the absolute monarchy, this group comprised mainly of junior civilian and military officials recently returned from abroad, all of whom wielded little political, never mind military, influence.⁴⁶ Wyatt argued that the eventual success of the coup was contingent on the support of a small number of key senior military men, particularly Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena and Phraya Songsuradet, who already had ambitions of their own.⁴⁷

Unlike the early promoters, these two men were already senior officials by 1932. Phraya Phahon was a colonel and held the post of Deputy Inspector of

⁴⁴ C.J. Reynolds, *National Identity and its Defenders*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Born in 1893, King Prajadhipok or Rama VII was the younger brother of his immediate predecessor, King Vajiravudh. He was educated at Eton and Woolwich Military Academy. After the 1932 coup, the king was to continue his reign as a constitutional monarch until 1935, when he abdicated while he was undergoing medical treatment in England. He was to remain in England until his death in 1941. Like his elder brother, he left no male heir. Subsequently, the crown was passed to his nephew, Prince Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII). See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 371.

⁴⁶ The first meeting of the promoters’ group to end the absolute monarchy took place in Paris, where many of the promoters were studying, took place in February 1927. Seven people were present, including Pibul. Following the successful coup in 1932, the members of this group went on to form the *Khana Rasadon* or People’s Party, which continued to dominate Thai politics until the end of the Second World War. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, pp. 11-3.

⁴⁷ D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2004), p. 234.

Artillery while Phraya Songsuradet held the same military rank, and the post of Director of Education at the Military Academy. Both officers were also popular for different reasons; Phraya Phahon was affable while Phraya Songsuradet was “widely regarded as having the most brilliant military mind of his generation”.⁴⁸ These qualities allowed the two men to greatly influence political developments in the early 1930s. By June 1932, both men were in a strong position to either support or destroy any attempt at a coup. As it happened, both men already resented the dominance of the princes in the ministries, a situation exacerbated by the economic retrenchment imposed on the military in early 1932. Indeed, they were already thinking along the lines of the promoters before they were formally approached. Both were crucial in rallying military support for the 1932 coup, and thus its eventual success.

The importance of military support for the regime was emphasised in a series of dramatic events in 1933. The year was marked by a proroguing of the Assembly following Pridi Phanomyong’s⁴⁹ failed ‘communist’ economic plan, a successful, bloodless coup by the junior military faction in June, and the Bovoradej rebellion in October. Pridi’s economic plans⁵⁰ failed largely because of the military opposition, while the coup was essentially a power-grab by junior military officers from their

⁴⁸ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ Also known as Luang Pradit Manutham. Born in 1900, Pridi gained a doctorate in law and a diploma in political economics from the Sorbonne and was one of the seven who was present at the first meeting of the promoters in Paris in 1927. Following the vehement opposition to his controversial 1933 national economic plan, he was temporarily exiled to France, accused as being communist. He was subsequently cleared in 1934 and returned to take up a variety of government posts: Minister of the Interior, 1934-6, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1936-8, and Minister of Finance 1938-41. He became the regent in 1941 holding the post until 1945, during which he acted as the leader of the Seri Thai movement in Bangkok, the Thai resistance movement aimed at the ending of the Japanese occupation. In November 1947 he fled into exile following a military coup, after which he helped plan the abortive Palace Rebellion in February 1949. Thereafter, he lived in exile, first in China (1949-70) and then Paris, where he died in 1983. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 372.

⁵⁰ The plan had two main proposals. The first was that land was to be sold to the state, which would then raise its productivity through the use of better technology, while all farmers would become civil servants. The second was to decrease the reliance on imports through kick-starting industrial and commercial enterprises by using capital that would be raised through taxation and loans from a new national bank. See C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p. 122.

more senior, conservative counterparts. However, it was the last event, the Bovoradej rebellion that sealed the military faction's place in national government, as well as the ultimate fate of the constitutional regime. The rebellion has generally been branded as a royalist rebellion.⁵¹ However, it would be more accurate to argue that the rebels were an eclectic group of politicians whose ambitions had been thwarted, frustrated, or disappointed by the constitutional government.⁵² Indeed, the second ultimatum sent by Prince Bovoradej⁵³ proclaimed his respect for the constitution and made demands for a reform of military policy and for official appointments to be based on merit rather than political connections.⁵⁴ The royalist streak of the rebellion was only evident in the first ultimatum sent by Phraya Srisith,⁵⁵ which demanded the government's resignation for allegedly encouraging anti-monarchy sentiments.⁵⁶

The demands were thus largely democratic, albeit delivered in the most undemocratic manner. A compromise with the moderates among the rebels may have been possible, but the government's ruthless suppression of the rebellion clearly showed that they were not interested in making compromises. Perhaps they felt too insecure or were too obsessed with preserving political power at all costs.

⁵¹ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p. 120 and B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the Fall of Ayutthaya to Recent Times* (River Books, Bangkok, 2005), p. 264.

⁵² Prince Bovoradej was one of those who were excluded from any role in the Phraya Mano government, even advisory ones, while Phraya Srisith Songkhram's military career had been thwarted by the promoters, see J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 61.

⁵³ Before the 1932 coup, Prince Bovoradej had approached Phraya Phahon to persuade him to stir up discontent in the army in the hope of dislodging the ruling princes. The promoters used this opportunity to spread rumours of the prince's disaffection, so as to distract the police from their own plot, and as a spur for the other promoters to pre-empt any attempt by Prince Bovoradej to seize power for himself. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁴ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ A classmate of Phraya Phahon at the Thai military academy, Phraya Srisith had initially refused to join the promoters. However when the coup was successful, he changed his mind and was excluded. He was appointed director of military operations on 18 June 1933 but was dismissed two days later, which arguably spurred his rebellious intentions. He was killed at the Battle of Hin Lap during the 1933 Bovoradej rebellion. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 376.

⁵⁶ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, pp. 62-3.

Nevertheless, given the fact that the rebellion arose from conflicts of personal political interests, it was politically expedient for the government to portray the rebels as wanting a return of the deeply unpopular and ineffective absolutist regime of the princes. The tactic was a success and the government enjoyed the support of the Bangkok population throughout its fight with the rebels, thereby further buttressing the 'constitutionalist' cause. Furthermore, they also managed to create a new, popular hero of democracy, Luang Pibulsongkhram, the field commander of the government's military counterattack against the rebels.

The role of the king in the rebellion came into question by the victorious government forces. According to their view, the king had been less than enthusiastic in his support of the government. Then again, neither did he offer concrete support for the rebels, even though they were allegedly fighting on his behalf. In a word, the monarch was being criticised for being absolutely constitutional by 'constitutionalists'. The most that could be said of his role was that he was aware of the growing discontent against the constitutional government, but remained nevertheless committed to the constitutional process, as his August 1933 letter to James Baxter, Siam's British financial advisor,⁵⁷ shows:

There are a few diehard absolute monarchists whose idea is to make a coup and wipe out all the revolutionaries. They hope for the King to call on his troops, make war on Bangkok, execute the revolutionaries, and re-assert his personal rule. All of this is sheer madness. There is no turning back. All efforts must be concentrated on making the constitution work.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ James Baxter resigned on 31 July 1935 in protest of the government's inaction over an illicit affair involving the head of the Excise Department, who happened to be a civilian promoter. He later publicly condemned the Siamese government as "morally bankrupt" and expressed hope that Pibul would soon assume power, much to the embarrassment of both the British government and Pibul. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 86, 88.

⁵⁸ D. Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution* (Gunn & Hain, Cambridge Mass., 1981), p. 41.

Two years later, in his abdication statement, the monarch framed the 1933 rebellion in terms of a call for real freedom for the people in the face of the radical policies and internal politics of the People's Party, rather than a conflict between royalists and constitutionalists:

Because the People's Party did not establish real political freedom, and the people had no opportunity to express their opinions before important policy decisions were made, a rebellion broke out, with Thai killing Thai.⁵⁹

From the perspective of the king therefore, the new revolutionary government was nothing more than the continuation of the same absolutist autocracy in another guise. This time with generals and ideologues rather than highborn princes in charge, contrary to the original manifesto of the 1932 coup makers promising a country "governed by the people and for the people".⁶⁰

The events of 1933 were not only indicative of the internal political conflicts between the 1932 coup-makers and their supporters but also of competing visions of the nation's future and the position of the constitution in the new regime. While King Prajadhipok seemed determined to make the constitution work in its original sense of giving the people political rights and freedoms, it seems he was only one of a few. Many within the People's Party saw the constitution merely as a vehicle to gain and preserve their power, at the very least as a method with which to get rid of the previous government by princes. Given the harsh treatment of political prisoners such as Prince Sittiporn⁶¹ and others following the events of 1933, contemporary observers could have been forgiven for thinking that the constitutional regime was

⁵⁹ B. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1984), p. 316.

⁶⁰ D. Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand*, p. 15.

⁶¹ The younger brother of Prince Bovoradej, he was one of the few princes who supported the transition to a constitutional system and continued to work under the constitutional regime as Director-General of Agricultural Research. The sight of this prince of the Chakri dynasty, who had no role in his brother's rebellion, under arrest for political reasons and in chains shocked many.

more concerned with conducting a witch-hunt against their political opponents than expanding the rights and welfare of the people.⁶²

Meanwhile, moderate constitutionalists may have expected the military to withdraw from politics and return to the barracks. On the contrary, the 1932 and 1933 incidents were arguably the key events in cementing the 'natural' place of the military in Thai politics. The pact with the military faction worked in that the constitutional regime was saved, albeit temporarily, but the agreement was a Faustian one. When the Devil came to collect, it was in the form of Pibul and his brand of leader-centred nationalism that effectively rode rough-shod over the constitutional mechanisms that he had helped to save in 1933. Even if Pibul's leadership has been described as 'timid' by dictatorial standards, by the time his government fell from power in 1944, it could be said that the soul of the constitutional regime and the sanctity of the 1932 constitution was entirely lost. In effect, the constitutional democracy had traded its soul, its "eternal joy and felicity", in exchange for its temporary salvation from the ambitions of Prince Bovoradej and his faction.

In terms of national identity, Pibul had certainly staked out his role in the new interpretation of Thai national identity. Superficially, he built on the foundation laid by King Vajiravudh and the post-1932 regime, as one of his speeches puts it:

The Japanese have the Emperor as their mentor. We Thai have nothing. What we have are Nation, Religion, Monarch, and Constitution. Nation is still a vision; Religion is not yet sacred enough; Monarch is just a child whom we can see only in picture and Constitution is merely a notebook. When the country is in trouble we cannot rely on anything. That is why I want you all to follow me – the Prime Minister.⁶³

⁶² J.A. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, p. 73.

⁶³ Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand* (Thammasat University, Bangkok, 1985), p. 88.

Clearly, Pibul wished to be the new centre of national identity, but it is notable that his proclamation was still based on the old royalist and constitutionalist concepts of national identity. The constitutional regime had not done much to alter the formula. Instead, it retained the old formula with the addition of a fourth pillar: the Constitution, indicating its importance to the new regime, both as an intrinsic idea and as a legitimating device. Pibul's formulation thus appears to be the continuation of the trend, where a fifth pillar, the Leader, was being added but with the difference that the other pillars now had to be subservient to this latest addition.

The process of redefining national identity appeared to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Indeed, there was a large degree of continuity and precedence in Pibul's conception and enforcement of Thai identity. The Pibul government's vision of Thai identity was codified in a series of *Ratthaniyom* (Cultural Mandates)⁶⁴ that set out precisely what the state expected from its citizens. These codes were issued in the name of Pibul and were never debated in the Assembly,⁶⁵ and thus their implications may not have been fully realised at the time of their release.

The first of these concerned the changing of the country's name to Thailand. Of the twelve mandates, three were related to the flag and the national and royal anthems (Cultural Mandates 4, 6, and 8). Four focused on the shaping of Thai identity in terms of naming conventions, language, dress, and daily routine (Cultural Mandates 3, 9, 10, and 11). The remaining four were concerned with preserving national interests and nation-building such as through buying Thai-made goods and helping the disadvantaged (Cultural Mandates 2, 5, 7, and 12).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ An alternative translation is "State Convention".

⁶⁵ J.A. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, p. 124.

⁶⁶ Thamsuk Numnond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok khrang thi song*, p. 61.

The Cultural Mandates had a major impact on the ethnic minorities, particularly the Chinese who were also the target of additional legislation due to their dominance of the country's economy. For example, they were banned from taking up certain types of employment and were liable for additional taxes and restrictions on movement.⁶⁷ Yet the targeting of the Chinese was nothing new. King Vajiravudh, for example, had described the Chinese as the "Jews of the East".⁶⁸ However, during the reign of King Vajiravudh, there was a distinction drawn between the Chinese who intermarried with Siamese ethnic groups and eventually settled in Thailand, and those who sought only to do business in Thailand, married exclusively with Chinese nationals, sent remittances home in support of their families or even the Kuomintang or Communist parties, and then returned to China. Whilst the latter became a cause for increasing concern (though never a subject of active legislation) for officials under King Vajiravudh, the former were largely left alone.⁶⁹ Even in the Pibul era, measures against the Chinese were directed at new immigrants rather than long-time settlers, since acting against the latter would probably have meant taking action against a large and influential portion of the population and even some key members of the government, such as Luang Vichitvatakarn.⁷⁰

Pibul's policies vis-à-vis the Chinese were therefore building on the foundations laid by King Vajiravudh. However, the debt of the post-1932 regime to

⁶⁷ Liang Chua Morita, 'Language Shift in the Thai Chinese Community', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 24, 6 (2003), pp. 491-2.

⁶⁸ King Vajiravudh may have been trying to pander to an audience in Europe where, at the time, anti-Semitism and fear of the "Yellow Peril" were gaining ground. Apparently, at the time, racial and religious discrimination was a 'mark of civilisation' that needed to be emulated by Siam, see W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo!*, p. 194.

⁶⁹ It probably did not help that there were no formal procedures for applying for Thai citizenship until 1939.

⁷⁰ Luang Vichitvatakarn was vehemently anti-Chinese in his writings, such as *Nan Chao*, a play which portrayed the Chinese driving the Thais out of their homelands. He also compared the Chinese unfavourably with the Jews, commenting that "the Chinese cannot be compared [to the Jews]; [the Chinese] come to work here but send money back to their country; so we can say that the Chinese are worse than the Jews". Even so, Luang Vichitvatakarn was himself of Chinese descent and was previously known by his Chinese name, Kim Liang, see C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, pp. 130, 288.

the absolutist regime extends beyond the Chinese policy. Indeed, the national concepts of the constitutional regime owed much to the Oxford-educated monarch. As already mentioned, the 'pillars' of the regime were clearly inspired by King Vajiravudh's original three pillars. Furthermore, the concept of issuing the Cultural Mandates itself was inspired by the previous practice of issuing *Phrarachaniyom* (a monarch's opinion of how their subjects should conduct themselves), which was also designed to change citizen's behaviour, in absolutist times.⁷¹ Even the cultural codification and standardisation was arguably an extension of the traditional practice of standardising stories and legends such as the *Mahachat* (the stories about the previous lives of the Buddha) in monarchist times.⁷² The main differences between these earlier decrees and the Cultural Mandates of Pibul were the extent and quantity rather than the principles behind their conception.

While Pibul's vision was built on a foundation prepared by King Vajiravudh, it was not devoid of new ideas. The country's name-change reflected this new element – irredentism. The pan-Thai idea, that Thailand would not be a land for just the Thais inside the borders, but also beyond them, were expressed in the plays of Luang Vichitvatakarn. The British Minister to Thailand at the time, Josiah Crosby,⁷³ noted the implication of this idea:

But the fact that an official change of nomenclature should have been made in coincidence with the launching of the Pan-Thai movement may be interpreted not unfairly as the indication of a desire to familiarise outsiders with the claims of Siam to be regarded as the mother-country of all peoples of the Thai race.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Chai-anan Samudavanija, 'State-identity Creation, State Building and Civil Society, 1939-1989' in C.J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and its Defenders*, p. 52 and J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 124.

⁷² Ibid., p. 58.

⁷³ Sir Josiah Crosby was the British Minister to Siam from 1934-41. He spent the majority of his career in Siam and was able to speak Siamese fluently and cultivate close friendship with those in power. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, p. 94.

⁷⁴ B.J. Terwiel, 'Thai Nationalism and Identity: Popular Themes of the 1930s' in C.J. Reynolds, *National Identity and its Defenders*, p. 115.

The irredentist sentiments had their origins in the 1893 crisis when Siam was humiliated by France and subsequently had to pay indemnities as well as cede territory to the colonial powers. The loss of territory remained an issue in the late 1930s, since according to Josiah Crosby, the irredentist tendency “was first shown in the shape of a Pan-Thai agitation which sprang up at Bangkok after the coup d’état, tacitly encouraged by the Government of Luang Pibul, and aiming at the incorporation of all those territories whose peoples are of Thai extraction”.⁷⁵ These sentiments would eventually lead to the Thai-French War (November 1940-May 1941) and the consequent public questioning of the loyalties of the French-led Missions in Thailand.

The 1893 incident also coloured subsequent Thai attitudes towards not only the French activities in the region, but also the actions of the Allied nations during the Second World War. In 1893 Britain had remained non-committal, despite the British dominance of the Siamese shipping trade.⁷⁶ At the time, the stance of the British Minister in Bangkok, Ernest Satow,⁷⁷ was endorsed by Lord Randolph Churchill, then the Secretary of State. In the opinion of Satow, “the Siamese should not, in my opinion, be led to expect from us more than merely moral support in their relations with other powers. The king should learn that ‘every herring must hang by

⁷⁵ J. Crosby, *Siam: The Crossroads* (Hollis & Carter, London, 1945), p. 111.

⁷⁶ At the time, the external trade of Siam was worth some £4.5 million per annum, 87 percent of the tonnage and 93 percent of the value were in British hands. The French had less than 2 percent of the whole. The blockade therefore would have seriously affected British trade interests in Siam, see P. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb: The French Threat to Siamese Independence, 1858-1907* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1995), p. 121.

⁷⁷ Ernest Satow served as the Minister-Resident of Bangkok from 1885-88. It was not an enjoyable posting due to the malaria he contracted during a journey to Chiang Mai in 1885-6. However, he is perhaps better known for his diplomatic and scholarly work on Japan, where he began his Foreign Service career in 1862, becoming the British Minister in Tokyo in 1895. He also continued to advise the Foreign Office up to his retirement in 1906 as the British Minister in Beijing, where he was involved in the negotiations following the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion. See E. M. Satow, *A Diplomat in Siam* (Kiscadale, Gartmore, 1994), pp. 5-6.

his own head'.⁷⁸ Siam, essentially, was abandoned to its fate until the French blockade of the Chao Phraya River threatened British trading interests, while an annexation of Siam by France would have broken the balance of power in the region.⁷⁹ The French encroachment led to the pushing for the neutralisation of Siam by Britain. On 15 January 1896, a joint Anglo-French declaration was made which guaranteed the independence of the central plain of Siam.⁸⁰

By 1940, however, the situation had reversed. France had fallen to Nazi Germany. Britain remained the lone power in Europe still resisting the Axis, while European colonies in East Asia, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, were under direct threat from Imperial Japan. Despite its non-interventionist history with Thailand, the British government expected the Thai government to stand and fight on its behalf, should the Japanese invade Malaya and Singapore via the Thai southern provinces of Songkhla and Pattani. On the night the Pacific War started, Winston Churchill sent a telegram urging a sacrificial last stand to be made by the Thai armed forces against incoming Japanese forces, promising that British help would be forthcoming:

There is a possibility of an imminent Japanese attack on your country. If you are attacked, defend yourself. The preservation of the full independence and the sovereignty of Thailand is a British interest and we shall regard an attack on you as an attack on ourselves.⁸¹

It was highly doubtful that Pibul took such assurances seriously, given Britain's past history with Thailand, coupled with the fact that the British and her allies had failed to protect countries nearer to home, like Czechoslovakia and

⁷⁸ P. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, p. 242.

⁷⁹ The Siamese concession of Laos to France led to the signing of a treaty between Britain and France, defining the border between British Upper Burma and French Laos in 1896. The two powers did not settle their regional rivalry until after the signing of the Entente Cordiale in 1904.

⁸⁰ P. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 155-67.

⁸¹ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 224.

Poland,⁸² from invasion and occupation. Indeed, if the Thai government had any confidence remaining in the power of the British Empire in Southeast Asia after the successful Japanese invasion of southern Thailand on 8 December 1941, they were literally sunk by the destruction of Force Z⁸³ by Japanese air squadrons on 10 December 1941. The subsequent actions of the Pibul government, in particular its alignment with Japan (which promised and eventually delivered further territorial gains, namely the Shan States and some provinces of Malaya) was perhaps its way of saying “every herring must hang by its own head” to the son of Randolph Churchill. In Thailand itself, it meant that those who did not agree with the irredentists and the ‘Leader’ could easily be smeared as ‘unpatriotic’ or accused of working with the enemy as ‘Fifth Columnists’. The ascendancy of the totalitarian vision, at the expense of the constitutionalist vision, was thus sealed by the developments and opportunities offered by the international situation.

Arguably, Thai democracy under the first Pibul government was once again ensnared in a Faustian pact. The alignment with Japan was as much about Thailand’s survival as a sovereign nation as it was about the expansion of existing interests. It is true that, by doing so, Thailand was saved from the excesses that a Japanese invasion and occupation would have entailed and might have reaped some rewards for their support had the Japanese been ultimately victorious. But that did

⁸² The German invasion of Poland in 1939 did lead to the declaration of war by the British government. However, this would have been of little comfort to the Poles who saw their country divided between the victorious German forces and the complicit Soviet government as according to the secret clauses of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact. They would remain under the influence of the latter until 1989.

⁸³ Force Z comprised of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse – two capital ships of the British navy. The naval detachment sent to Malaya as a deterrent against Japanese invasion. The news of the ships’ destruction shocked the British in Singapore and in Britain itself, while Churchill, in his recollection of the moment he received the news, wrote: “In all the war, I never received a more direct shock... As I turned over and twisted in bed the full horror of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbour, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked”. See F. Owen, *The Fall of Singapore* (Michael Joseph, London, 1960), p. 65.

not mean that there were no political or economic costs. The totalitarian tendencies of the Pibul government had also taken its toll on the Constitution. Despite the provisions for negating legislation that was contrary to the principles of the Constitution,⁸⁴ that piece of paper could not prevail in the face of raw political power.

The drafting of the 1946 Constitution could be seen as an attempt to redress the flaws exposed by Pibul's regime, but it was also an exercise in restoring the Constitution to a central position in the Thai political regime. Of course, it is debatable whether the Constitution really ever held such an exalted position in the first place. However, considering the centrality of the idea of a constitution in the demands of the 1932 coup-makers, its subsequent apotheosis as the fourth pillar of national identity, and its annual celebration (arguably usurping the King's birthday celebrations) in the 1930s, there were certainly some sectors of society who supported constitutionalism. The 1946 effort itself reconfirms the existence of this group. However, ultimately it was a futile exercise. The ultimate test of a constitutional regime is its ability to perform *in extremis*. In the Thai case, it had simply been abandoned by Pibul in favour of political expediency. The 1947 coup that eventually swept Pibul back to power, and to an extent all subsequent coups and constitutional re-drafting, merely served to mark the acknowledgments of political realities.

The development of the pillars of Thai national identity thus reflected the general political circumstances of this period. The eventual focus on Buddhism indicated the weakening of the other pillars of the state and the desire of the Pibul regime to legitimise itself. Indeed, Pibul consciously linked the well-being of

⁸⁴ Section 6, Article 61 of the permanent 1932 Constitution stipulated that "All laws that are in conflict or contradict this constitution are rendered invalid".

Buddhism to the health of the nation, when in 1943 Colonel N. Saranupraphan, the Director of the Religious Department, confirmed that:

His Excellency the Prime Minister ardently wishes to promote and uphold Buddhism so that it will prosper and be esteemed in the highest possible fashion. The reason is...that the Nation and Buddhism cannot be separated.⁸⁵

Moreover, he used Buddhism as a way to distinguish the Thai nation from others, most notably, Catholic Indochina, stating in October 1940 that: "Our Thai brothers in Laos and Cambodia are Buddhists but the French are followers of Catholicism".⁸⁶ Thus under the first Pibul regime religion evolved into an effective marker to distinguish Thais and non-Thais: Thais were Buddhists, non-Thais were not.

The anti-French sentiments also reflected contemporary international developments in the 1940s, historical grievances from the 1890s, as well as the government's emphasis on a chauvinistic Thai identity. The conjunction of the Buddhist emphasis and the anti-French attitude of the government was to have disastrous consequences for the Catholic Missions in Siam. However, before 1940, these developments, while politically momentous, meant very little to the Church. Missionaries did record the passing of major events, such as the 1932 coup d'état, but they also noted that they had had little impact on the activities of the Mission. As the annual report for 1932 stated:

I will only say a little about the sensational development for the country: the 'coup d'état' of 24 June 1932. The absolute monarchy has become constitutional... This revolution was achieved in a surprising calm for those who do not know the mentality of the people of this country. Tranquillity

⁸⁵ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957* (Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1995), pp. 129-30.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

continued to reign in Siam, for the good of the people and the advancement of the reign of the divine Lord!⁸⁷

Indeed, since the Church had enjoyed a renaissance and steady growth under Kings Mongkut (1851-68), Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), Vajiravudh (1910-25), and Prajadhipok (1925-1935), there was little reason for the missionaries to believe that their activities would be affected by a change of regime, especially considering how calm the whole process appeared to be.

However, in little more than a decade, the new regime had changed the name of the country, and arguably much of society as well. By 1942, many Mission stations and parishes had been destroyed, arbitrarily seized, or vandalised. Numerous foreign priests and nuns had taken refuge in French Indochina, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and India, while those who remained were under increasing pressure to convert to Buddhism, a religion not previously known for such militant fundamentalism. Congregations were also being forced to convert, even more so if members were in the civil service and wished to keep their jobs.⁸⁸ Those who did not convert were assaulted or arrested and accused of being unpatriotic Fifth Columnists. The lucky ones escaped with only minor injuries; others were given prison sentences or were executed in cold blood by state agents.

Paradoxically, while Pibul's definition of Thai identity was inclusive in its pan-Thai aspect, so much so that it potentially included those beyond the borders, it was also exclusive in tying this identity to Buddhism.⁸⁹ It was this emphasis on Buddhism as the religious cement for the pan-Thai nation that had the gravest implication for Catholics. Later scholars noted the social implications of an over-

⁸⁷ M.E.P.A., *Compte-Rendu* 1931-32.

⁸⁸ Kobkua Swannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, p. 130.

⁸⁹ Pibul's patronage of Buddhism was to become even more pronounced in his second regime, albeit less militant than in his first government, see Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Cornell Southeast Asia Program, Ithaca, 2007), pp. 66-7.

emphasis on Buddhism where, in the best case, minorities will merely feel alienated from society, as Keyes argued with reference to the southern Malay Muslims:

Insofar as equation of being Thai with being Buddhist is a cornerstone of Thai official thinking, non-Buddhists could be denied access to participation in the national community. It could be predicted that such a policy would lead to increasing alienation...⁹⁰

The argument is echoed by Tambiah: "The constant strain to identify the religion with the state and the Buddhist state, in turn, with a Buddhist society creates perpetual internal cleavages".⁹¹ The worst case scenario is reflected in the Catholic experience of the 1940s although even then, as well as subsequently, they were not the only group to become victims through being perceived as 'un-Thai'.

Together with the regime's emphasis on "Thailand for Thais", the new concept of national identity placed the foreign leadership of the Church in Thailand under increasing pressure. The experiences and eventual survival of the Church during this period was a reflection of this contradiction of intolerance within inclusiveness. In effect, the Church was akin to the company of actors in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who were urged to "hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature", and reflect reality. Like the players, the missionaries acted as mirrors to the regimes they experienced. They inadvertently reflected the virtue of the absolutist regime, as much as they reflected the scorn of the totalitarian regime, and by doing so they showed the very age and body of the times they experienced.

⁹⁰ C.F. Keyes, 'Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand', *Asian Studies*, 30, 3 (1971), p. 567.

⁹¹ S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), p. 521.

What is a Mission?

Come with me and I will make you fishers of people.

- Matthew 4: 19

This thesis mainly examines the development in the Mission of Siam and its relationship with the Thai state. Since, at this stage, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Church in Thailand was divided between different types of Mission, a clarification of these different types might be helpful at this point. In the modern day, the Church in most territories with a high number of resident Catholics will be organised into dioceses and archdioceses – administrative territorial units run by a bishop or an archbishop. However, in cases where there was an insufficient number of Catholics as to warrant the establishment of a diocese or archdiocese or where missionary activities were in their early stages, it is common for the territory to go through four stages of development, best illustrated by the development of the modern-day Diocese of Ratchaburi.

In the first instance, especially in places where missionary prospects are uncertain, a Mission “Sui iuris” may be set up. A Mission “Sui iuris” is effectively an independent mission headed by an Ecclesiastical Superior who may be a regular priest, bishop, archbishop, or a cardinal, although the Superior does not necessarily have to be in residence. These Missions are usually located in remote areas, with few Catholics. Upon its separation from Bangkok, Ratchaburi gained this status in June 1930. The territory was in turn led by Gaétan Pasotti, a priest of the Salesian Order, who was appointed Superior.

If the Mission “Sui iuris” successfully develops by establishing and maintaining a stable Catholic population, as Ratchaburi had done by May 1934, the area of jurisdiction may be re-organised into an apostolic prefecture (or prefecture

apostolic) – the second stage of development. A prefect-apostolic (or apostolic prefect) acts as the administrator of the territory, and is subject only to the Pope. Their authority thus derives from the Pope, rather than directly from their office, as would be the case with diocesan bishops.⁹²

Further development of the apostolic prefecture will be marked by the third stage of development – the elevation to the status of an apostolic vicariate (or vicariate apostolic), headed by a vicar-apostolic (or apostolic vicar). The Prefect-Apostolic of Ratchaburi was thus elevated to this status in April 1941. There is little difference between an apostolic prefecture and an apostolic vicariate in terms of jurisdiction and the exercise of authority. However, in terms of official hierarchy, a vicar-apostolic outranks a prefect-apostolic. Vicars-apostolic are still subject only to the Pope, and are usually appointed to titular sees. The elevation marks the penultimate step to the establishment of a diocese or an archdiocese.

The fourth, and last step, is the establishment of a diocese or an archdiocese. Depending on a number of factors including history, territorial extent, and number of Catholics, a vicariate apostolic may become a suffragan diocese or an archdiocese in its own right, led by either a bishop or archbishop.⁹³ Thus, the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam/Bangkok⁹⁴ was elevated into an archdiocese in December 1965 while the Apostolic Vicariate of Ratchaburi, which had originally derived its territories from Bangkok, was elevated to the status of a diocese but one that was suffragan to the

⁹² Although some prefects-apostolic may refer to themselves as being bishops of their area as a shorthand, in actual fact, technically they were bishops of titular sees only. Thus, Prefect-Apostolic Pasotti of Ratchaburi may have been known informally as the Bishop of Ratchaburi but, in actual fact, he was the Titular Bishop of Barata.

⁹³ Some bishops or archbishops may also be appointed to the position of Cardinal. Thailand's only and current cardinal is Michael Michai Kitbunchu, former Archbishop of Bangkok, who was appointed on 2 February 1983 as Cardinal-priest of San Lorenzo in Panisperna.

⁹⁴ The Apostolic Vicariate of Siam underwent several name changes. In 1841, it became the Apostolic Vicariate of Eastern Siam (Siam Orientale), and in 1924 it became the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok. However, despite these changes it continued to term itself as the Mission of Siam until the early 1940s.

Archdiocese of Bangkok. On the other hand, Tha Rae and Nongsaeng, derived from the Apostolic Vicariate of Laos,⁹⁵ which had separated from the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok in 1899, became an archdiocese in its own right.

The normal progression is thus: mission, apostolic prefecture, apostolic vicariate, and then diocese or archdiocese. There are, however, some exceptions. For example, the first Mission in Siam in 1662 was actually set up as an apostolic vicariate rather than a Mission “*Sui iuris*”. The designation was made possible through the combination of the past missionary efforts of the Portuguese, the needs of the French missionaries to establish their own authority in a formal hierarchy, and what was thought to be a high chance of future success for the Mission, thanks to the positive atmosphere generated by King Narai (1656-88). In the 1940s, due to the pressures being exerted on the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok at the time and the prior existence of a strong Catholic community there, Chantaburi was immediately elevated to the status of an apostolic vicariate. In more recent times, Chiang Mai also skipped the Mission “*Sui iuris*” stage and became an apostolic prefecture in 1959, also because of the earlier and successful missionary efforts conducted by the Mission of Siam. Shortly thereafter, it also leapfrogged the apostolic vicariate stage and became a full diocese in December 1965.

In formal correspondence with the Church authorities, these territories would use their proper titles, whether they were apostolic prefectures, apostolic vicariates, and so on. However, given the variety of statuses and titles and the confusion they might cause for those unfamiliar with the Catholic hierarchy, in day-to-day communications to elements within or outside the Church, it was normal practice for

⁹⁵ The Apostolic Vicariate of Laos had jurisdiction over French-controlled Laos as well as Northeastern Thailand, which was sometimes referred to provocatively as “Western Laos” in missionary correspondence.

these territories to be referred to generally as a Mission and their leader as the “bishop” of the Mission.

Thus, prior to its elevation as a diocese, Ratchaburi was always known as the Mission of Ratchaburi, regardless of its changing status as a Mission “Sui iuris”, apostolic prefecture, or apostolic vicariate. After its elevation to the status of a diocese, the Mission effectively ceased to exist, and today the territory is referred to as the Diocese of Ratchaburi.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ The diocese has undergone some formal name changes since its elevation. Immediately on its elevation as a diocese in 1965, it was known as the Diocese of Bangnokkhwaek. A year later, it became the Diocese of Ratburi, finally settling in 1969 in favour of the current name of the Diocese of Ratchaburi.

Literature Review

But anything shown up by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated is itself a light.

- Ephesians 5: 13-14

Given the small number of Thai Catholics (today, numbering just under 300,000 or around 0.45 percent of the total Thai population), it is not surprising to see that there is little scholarly work directly on this subject. Previous academic works have tended to focus on the Church's activities during the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767) and the accompanying diplomatic activities and their ultimately disastrous consequences in the seventeenth century.⁹⁷ These works form a valuable contribution to the understanding of the history of the Church in Thailand and have shed much light on the activities of various parties and nationalities during the Ayutthaya period. Foreign accounts – mainly French and Dutch but there also exist Portuguese and English sources – form the main sources for these histories, due to the paucity of indigenous material dating from the same period, thanks mainly to the local climate and the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767.

These works are, however, largely irrelevant to the period and focus of this thesis although they are useful in their examination of how previous persecutions in Siam developed. Historians have traditionally placed the blame for the 1688 persecution, which were the first state-endorsed persecutions against Catholicism, on the rise of the French influence at the court of Ayutthaya.⁹⁸ Whilst the French missionaries were responsible for the spectacular diplomatic activities of King Narai

⁹⁷ M. Smithies and L. Bressan, *Siam and the Vatican in the Seventeenth Century* (River Books, Bangkok, 2001).

⁹⁸ See for example F.H. Turpin, *A History of the Kingdom of Siam up to 1770* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1997), p. 71; D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West, 1500-1700* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2002), p. 469; and M. Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses to a Revolution: Siam 1688* (Siam Society, Bangkok, 2004), pp. iii-iv.

(1656-88) that went as far afield as England, France, and the Vatican, as a consequence of which the monarch was given the epithet 'the Great', their meteoric rise at the court disturbed the balance of power between the foreign factions within the court, most notably the Persians, not to mention the Dutch,⁹⁹ the English, and even the Catholic Portuguese.¹⁰⁰

Together with the influence of Constantine Phaulkon, a Greek who rose from being a cabin boy in the English East Indian Company to become the Siamese king's most powerful and trusted minister, the ascendancy of foreign factions upset the native courtiers who became increasingly xenophobic. The crisis occurred in 1688 when Petracha (1688-1703), a childhood friend of King Narai, usurped the throne whilst the king was on his deathbed. Phaulkon was arrested, tortured, and executed, French troops garrisoned at Bangkok were expelled, and all diplomatic ties with the French were cut. As for the Church, although the French bishop and the mainly French Jesuit missionaries were temporarily arrested and Church activities were suppressed, it was never driven out or underground.

Although political meddling can be seen as the main cause of the conflict in the seventeenth century, Robert Costet in his *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*,¹⁰¹ the only general work on the Thai Church to address the persecution of the 1940s, argues that it was Thai nationalism, rather than the actions of the Church that provoked the crisis of the 1940s. A priest of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (M.E.P.),¹⁰² a religious order that played a key role in a large part of Thai Catholic

⁹⁹ Dhiravat na Pombejra, *Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources* (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2001), p. 209.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 171-5.

¹⁰¹ There are two versions of Costet's book. The original is in French: R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission* (Eglises Asie, Paris, 2003) and the translated Thai version, which has some variation: R. Costet, *Prawat kan phoei phrae Khristasana nai Syam lae Lao* [The History of Missionary Activities in Siam and Laos] (Sue muanchon Khatholik Prathet Thai, Bangkok, 2006).

¹⁰² Also known as the Paris Foreign Missions Society.

history and that of much of Asia, his account is sweeping and covers the history of the Thai Catholic Church from its somewhat enigmatic beginnings under the Portuguese and the entry of the M.E.P. during the reign of King Narai up to the 1950s when the Mission was moving to form an indigenous hierarchy. However, the account's vast area of coverage is the work's main weakness. Costet is useful in that he provides a good general overview of the periods involved. Nevertheless, because the book is such a general survey of the history of the mission from the sixteenth century onwards, it is thin on details. It portrays the major events of the persecution such as the arrests of priests and the Songkhon martyrdoms, but it neglects the more localised persecutions and does not explain why some parishes managed to escape relatively unscathed whilst others faced unprecedented harassment and violence.

Costet attributes the persecution to a Thai nationalism that overly emphasised Buddhism as the national religion, and the outbreak of the Thai-French conflict that allowed the authorities to portray French nationals, and thus many Catholic priests (and by implication Catholics in general), as members of an imaginary "Fifth Column",¹⁰³ despite the fact that by that time, the Catholic Missions had entirely withdrawn from all political involvement. Notably, Costet's book was translated into Thai and published in 2006, and was promoted by the Church. As such, it can be regarded as an official version of the history of the Church in Thailand and thus can form a useful basis for comparisons with the "subaltern" histories that will emerge from the more localised historical records.

There is, however, much more material regarding Thai nationalism and its development,¹⁰⁴ particularly its effects on the southern Muslim and Chinese

¹⁰³ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos*, pp. 656-7.

¹⁰⁴ General works on Thai nationalism during this period and its effect on modern-day Thailand include C.J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and its Defenders: Thailand Today*; Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1994); J.A.

communities during this period. General material on Thai nationalism during this period builds on Gellner's and Anderson's idea that the nation was essentially an artificial or 'imagined' construct. Gellner argued that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist",¹⁰⁵ while Anderson agreed that communities constructed by nationalism are very much "imagined"; he argues that they are "limited" and "sovereign".¹⁰⁶ Baker (2005) takes these ideas further by suggesting that the actual process of creating nations or imaginary communities was not so much linear as evolutionary: that there was not one, monopolistic way to 'imagine' a state (though one vision may become dominant over time) but multiple and often opposing ways, internally and externally.¹⁰⁷ Externally, especially for the substantial Chinese ethnic minorities in Thailand, there was also the additional element of Chinese nationalism which, in turn, became split between the factions of the Kuomintang and the Communists,¹⁰⁸ while internally there was a tension in the 1930s between the royal-centric nationalism of King Vajiravudh and the nation-constitution centric vision that was espoused by the post-1932 government.

In addition, even the post-1932 vision had differences. For example, the vision that appeared to have been favoured by Pridi Phanomyong was centred on the people and the constitution, where the constitution sometimes appears as a separate, additional entity. Pibul's more virulent version was centred on the nation and obedience to 'the Leader' as the nation's 'embodiment', with an emphasis on the religion of Buddhism as the focus of unity. Essentially, Pibul had turned to the two

Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*: C. Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, pp. 105-39; and D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, pp. 241-50.

¹⁰⁵ E. Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1972), p. 168.

¹⁰⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, London, 2006), pp. 5-7.

¹⁰⁷ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, pp. 129-31.

pillars of 'Religion' and 'Nation' to safeguard his legitimacy while still maintaining the monarchy and Constitution in nominal existence, but out of politics. Royalist parties would, naturally, emphasise the institution of the King although, again, the degree varied considerably.

The conflict between various conceptions of the nation, and its nature, was also a reflection of wider political disagreements. Nevertheless, in the Thai context, the different versions of the Thai nation were built on the foundations of prior ideas. Thus, characteristics such as King Vajiravudh's three pillars of Nation, Religion, and King continued to be maintained throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The main difference was in the addition or elimination of 'pillars' and emphases, for example the Constitution became the main emphasis as a fourth pillar post-1932, while the Leader superseded the Constitution as an informal fifth pillar after 1938, but was subsequently excised after the fall of the first Pibul government in 1944.¹⁰⁹

On the effects of the differing visions of national identity on specific communities, previous works have focused on the experiences of the Chinese¹¹⁰ and the southern Malay communities.¹¹¹ The work on the Chinese has some relevance, since the Chinese formed a significant proportion of some parish communities. However, the experiences of the southern Malay community are less relevant for the Catholic community, since the differences in the origins of the grievances and issues between the southern Malay community and the Thai government are substantial. First, the Malay community claims sovereignty over a certain territory, whereas the

¹⁰⁹ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 139.

¹¹⁰ Apart from M. Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia: Tribute, Trade, and Influence* (Allen & Unwin, Singapore, 2005), there are also V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (Oxford University Press, London, 1965) and G.W. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1957).

¹¹¹ In addition to Surin Pitsuwan, *op. cit.*, which provides an extensive survey of the literature and bibliography, there is also R. Davies, *Siam in the Malay Peninsula* (Fraser and Neave, Singapore, 1902).

Catholic community has never done so. Second, the Catholic communities are not concentrated in a single area, but are distributed across the country. Third, while loyalty to the Thai state has been a long-running source of internal contention in the case of the southern Malays, the Catholics have never had an issue with this concern, even when they were being actively persecuted. Fourth, the Malays constitute a largely homogenous community, whereas the composition of the Catholics cut across ethnic boundaries. Finally, although Catholics can imagine themselves to belong to a larger 'Catholic world' that exists beyond their border, this is arguably not as strong as the sense of belonging the southern Malays feel as part of a wider 'Malay world' that encompasses Malaysia, Indonesia, and the wider Islamic world. Therefore, whilst the two groups are superficially similar in that they were affected by certain government policies in the 1940s, on closer examination the origins and impact of state policies were quite different.

Further afield, there has also been significant work on the Church and its activities in the region, particularly in countries where Catholics form a minority such as Japan, Korea, and China. This body of literature is useful in forming a basis for further comparative studies. However, since this is not the main objective of the thesis this body of literature, significant as it is, will not be directly useful to this thesis.

Research issues

He who would climb to a lofty height must go by steps, not leaps.

- St. Gregory the Great

Previous works on Thai nationalism during this period have focused on the *Ratthaniyom* and other policy initiatives under Pibul and their effects on the various ethnic minorities, with a particular emphasis on the ethnic Malays and Chinese. Some of these policies, especially the Cultural Mandates, were overtly aimed at specific groups, for example, the Chinese. Although pressure was brought to bear on those in the civil service who adhered to religions other than Buddhism,¹¹² there does not seem to be a consistent government policy specifically targeting Catholics in the general population. Instead, the Church seems to have been the indirect target of several measures that targeted ethnic groups. Thus for this reason, while it is easier to assess government attitudes towards specific ethnic groups, it is harder to do so for the Catholic Church.

A second problem is that the Church did not consist of a single, homogenous ethnic group. Indeed, parish records suggest that the Church and its network was actually a melange of ethnic groups and social classes.¹¹³ As such, one group within the Church, such as the Chinese, may be more affected by new laws than others. In the case of the Chinese, they actually become double minorities – as ethnic Chinese and as Catholics – and this picture can be even more complicated as some Chinese

¹¹² R. Costet, *Prawat kan phoei phrae Khristasana nai Siam lae Laos*, p. 659 and Bangkok Archdiocese Archives (henceforth B.A.A.), Fr. Andre to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 8 May 1942, 30/2/42 and 19 August 1943, 30/2/50.

¹¹³ For example B.A.A., Fr. Colombet's Memorial, 1 September 1945, 31/1/10 sees the establishment of an orphanage trust committee consisting of members of the nobility and Chinese businessmen, whilst B.A.A., Parish Petition, 7 November 1937, 30/1/48 sees the ethnic-Khmer parish battling with local thugs, gamblers, and moonshine distilleries who were tenants on parish land.

were divided between supporters of the Kuomintang and the Communists.¹¹⁴

However, the affected group's affiliation with the Church may have, at the same time, caused the authorities to become more suspicious of the Church.

With regard to the political dimension, the Church had become entangled in a complicated political network through its social networks. Prior to the establishment of the constitutional monarchy, the Church's most significant network was with the aristocracy, the effective administrators of the government ministries. However, the fall of the absolute monarchy meant that these ties were severed. Church sources from the period actually paid little attention to political developments, arguably because whilst the network was useful to the Church when it was faced with problems from local officials and issues, the network had little impact on day-to-day parish life. Nevertheless to the Church leadership, the connections with the aristocrats did allow it to assess the pulse and direction of the government. On the other hand, the failure of the Bovoradej rebellion, given the Church's previous royal connections, arguably eroded the new government's trust in the Church.

In addition, the Church's foreign connection, particularly with the French, complicates the picture. For some decades, collaboration between colonial authorities and the Church was a particular concern of the Vatican. Popes Gregory XVI (1765-1846) and Benedict XV (1854-1922) both issued apostolic letters (*Neminem Profecto* in 1845 and *Maximum Illud* in 1919) stressing the importance of the role of the local clergy in missionary activities and encouraging priests to put their loyalty to the Church before loyalty to their state. Assuming that some of the clergy in Thailand ignored these instructions, they would have been in a difficult

¹¹⁴ M. Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia*, pp. 139-40.

position during this period, considering the split between Vichy France, which was in nominal control of the neighbouring Indochinese colonies, and Free France.

While the Church's network with the government was important, local circumstances and networks were equally vital, if not more so to the survival of individual parishes. As each parish had different ethnic and social compositions, as well as different economic circumstances, they also formed individual local networks, relations, and conflicts. The latter was arguably the determining factor as to which parish suffered persecution. For instance, conflicts over land and rent that may have simmered in the 1930s exploded in the 1940s, as local opportunists sought to settle the conflict conclusively through a timely display of "patriotism" and arbitrary seizure of Church property, seizures that could be excused since the property did not belong to a "patriotic Thai".

The final issue to be examined is that although the Church suffered because of the specific interpretation of Thai identity, it has to be remembered that many of its members were ethnic Thais, and did not remain unaffected by the government's propaganda encouraging a chauvinistic brand of Thai patriotism. As the leadership of the Church up to this time was primarily French, the rise of a militant Thai nationalism may have encouraged Thai priests to demand a greater role in the administration of their Church. However, paradoxically, rather than decreasing the government's suspicions of them by doing so, the Thai priests actually remained targets because of their continuing adherence to Catholicism.

Primary Sources

*We pray for our Mother, the Church upon earth
And bless, sweetest Lady, the land of our birth.*

- Abbe Gagnet

The main sources used for the thesis are located in the Bangkok Archdiocese Archives (B.A.A.). Reflecting the centralised nature of the Church in Thailand at the time, the archives house parish records, which include correspondence, wills, inventories, as well as other miscellaneous documents ranging from share holdings in local companies, newspaper clippings of stories related to parish affairs to timetables and prospectuses of parish schools, from across the country, as well as records of the schools that the Church had established. It also includes the personal correspondences of the René Marie-Joseph Perros (1909-47), the Vicar-Apostolic of Siam at the time of the persecution and those that were written by his predecessors and eventual successor, Louis-August Chorin (1947-65), the last Vicar-Apostolic who oversaw the creation of the first Thai diocese and the transfer of power from foreign bishops to Thai ones.

Furthermore, the B.A.A. holds documents that were used in the beatification processes in 2000 for the case of Blessed Nicholas Kitbamrung. Apart from the documents relating directly to the beatification process itself, including letters, witness testimonies, and summaries of the case and proceedings, a significant part of this collection is Fr. Victor Larqué's unpublished account of the persecution, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, that was assembled in 1984. Fr. Larqué himself was a French M.E.P. priest and a victim of the 1940s persecution, and his account was essentially a collection of various Thai documents from the years 1940 to 1945 with French translations. These documents range widely from parish letters, government

orders, testimonies, and newspaper articles. The purpose of the documents was not so much to analyse the origins or impact of the persecution but to prove that the persecution had taken place, as the first step in the beatification processes of the Songkhon martyrs and of Fr. Nicholas Kitbamrung. One of the conditions for a successful beatification process, especially in cases of martyrdoms, was that *odium fidei* or “hatred of the faithful” must have taken place and was a plausible reason for the martyrdom. The two volumes of documents were crucial in buttressing the 1989 and 2000 beatification cases, and establishing the existence of *odium fidei*.

The sources are also interesting linguistically since they reflect the developments within and outside the Mission. Prior to the 1930s, with few exceptions, the correspondence was overwhelmingly in French, indicating the nature of the Church leadership at the time. The dominant force within the Thai Church at the time was the Missions Étrangères de Paris (M.E.P.). Whilst the M.E.P. itself had priests of nationalities other than French, the majority of the M.E.P. priests active in Thailand were French or had French connections. This dominance is demonstrated by the almost continuous succession of the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam by M.E.P. priests since 1669.¹¹⁵ In effect, the M.E.P. held an almost uninterrupted monopoly on the leadership of the Siamese Church. Notably, all of the Siamese Vicars-Apostolic, including those from outside the M.E.P., were French. In addition, due to the efforts of Vicar-Apostolic Vey (1875-1909), there were also other French religious orders operating in Siam at the time, such as the Order of St. Paul de Chartres and the Brothers of St. Gabriel. Thus, the language used during this period in correspondences and documents essentially reflects the realities of the Church leadership and personnel at the time. The major exceptions to this are some letters

¹¹⁵ There were only two exceptions: Vicar-Apostolic Louis Champion de Cissé (1700-27) and his successor, Vicar-Apostolic Jean-Jacques Tessier de Quéralay (1727-36).

and wills from the parishioners themselves, which are mostly written in Thai, an indication perhaps of an imperfect interface between the shepherd and his flock.

After the 1930s, there is a marked increase in correspondence using a romanised version of Thai with the use of accents, similar to the system that had been introduced to Vietnam. Although this *phasa wat* ('Church language' or Church Thai) was used before this period, there were very few examples of this usage in the correspondence. The change was gradual and could point to transitions in the local leadership of the Church or the adaptation of the predominantly French leadership to local conditions. After all, local conversions and vocations into the priesthood would be impossible if all operations within the Church were conducted in a language that is incomprehensible to the local population. Even so, there are some idiosyncrasies in the correspondence written in Church Thai; for example letters start with a Latin address, months are still written in Latin or French, the majority of the content will be in Church Thai, but the letter itself will be signed off in the French form.

A further aspect that present Thai Catholics would find strange from this period is the fact that, contrary to present practices, the Thai priests were known and signed their correspondence with their given Christian names rather than Thai names. Indeed, amongst Thai lay Catholics as well as within the priesthood, the present normal practice is to address each other with Thai rather than Christian names. Thus, for example, a Thai Fr. Gabriel would be better known to his parishioners as Father Supot and enquiries for a Fr. Gabriel would most likely be met with puzzled expressions from his parishioners. In the present, the few times that the Christian name would be used fleetingly would be in Church ceremonies, such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals or on occasions where there are Vatican officials present.

The 1940s saw another change in the language of correspondence, where documents written in the Thai script proper comes into increasing use. Given the surge of Thai nationalism under Pibul during this period, the development is arguably a reflection of the prevailing circumstances. It is also during this period that the more nationalistic or recalcitrant priests, depending on one's perspective, began to use their Thai names as opposed to their Christian names in correspondence.

The second relevant collection in Thailand is at the Sakon Nakhon Mission Archives (henceforth S.N.M.A.). The collection consists of the documents sent to the Vatican for the 1989 beatification cases involving the Seven Martyrs of Songkhon and again consists of letters, witness testimonies, and summaries of the proceedings. There is a major problem for the treatment of sources from this collection since they have not been formally organised and catalogued.

The third collection is a private one, assembled by Fr. Bruno Arens (henceforth C.B.A.), a priest of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.). The thesis does cite some documents from this collection, but all of the cited documents can be cross-referenced at the Thai National Archives. The usefulness of the Thai National Archives itself, however, is limited since there was no official policy on paper advocating persecution against Catholics. Furthermore, the relevant government policy documents have already been kept by the Mission archives and these, as well as material from other sources, have been drawn upon and incorporated into the two beatification cases. Thus, between the archive documents, beatification documents, and the analyses conducted by secondary sources, the stance of the Thai government at the time can be established. Although the Church faced persecution of varying degrees across the country, it seems that in many cases the acts were perpetrated by criminal and thuggish elements in the local society or

local Thai officials acting in an 'unofficial' capacity. Local networks played a greater role in the persecutions and whilst Thai officials were involved in some of the incidents, the 'unofficial' nature of their involvement makes it less likely that there will be a documentary trail at the centre.

In addition, there are also relevant archives outside Thailand. While a case can be made for the Church being an "imagined community", the bureaucratic nature of this community has made locating documentary evidence much easier than other more nebulous global 'communities'. Thus, in addition to the archives of the Bangkok Archdiocese, there are also the Archives of the Missions Étrangère de Paris in Paris (henceforth M.E.P.A.). The M.E.P. was founded by Bishops François Pallu¹¹⁶ and Pierre Lambert de la Motte,¹¹⁷ both of whom were missionaries to Siam under Pope Alexander VII in the mid-seventeenth century, specifically to deal with missionary activities in Asia. The organisation was also the headquarters of the Vicars-Apostolic of Siam-Thailand and Laos (which also covered northeastern Thailand).

Another potential line of investigation was the Vatican archives, particularly the records of the Propaganda Fide, but the documents from that period are still not open for public viewing.¹¹⁸ However this does not pose a problem for three reasons. First, the Catholic Missions did not have an intimate connection with the Propaganda Fide in day-to-day affairs. Secondly, copies of the more important letters and reports

¹¹⁶ Born in Tours in 1626, during his life Bishop Pallu was to take charge of the territories of Laos, Tonkin, and southwestern China. He also co-founded the General Seminary in Ayutthaya in 1665 with Pierre Lambert de la Motte, which after much peregrination has become the present day General College in Penang. He died in China in 1684.

¹¹⁷ Born in La Boissière in 1624, in 1658 he was appointed as the Vicar-Apostolic of Cochinchina. He was a co-founder of the General Seminary in Ayutthaya in 1665. In 1670, while he was in Tonkin, he created the order of the Amantes de la Croix de Jésus-Christ (the Lovers of the Holy Cross). He died in Ayutthaya in 1679.

¹¹⁸ The most recent opening was for the documents from the pontificate of Pope Pius XI, who reigned from 1922-1939, by the current Pope, Benedict XVI, see Zenit, 'Benedict XVI Opens Archives on Pius XI', 2 July 2006, <http://www.zenit.org/article-16469?l=english> [Last Access: 11 October 2008].

that were sent out have been preserved in the Bangkok-based archives and, in some cases, also at the M.E.P. Archives. Finally, the beatification documents, some of which were drawn from the archives of the Propaganda Fide, cover many of the relevant documents from this source.

Finally, given the wide variety of languages used in the correspondence in these archives, including French, Thai (Church and official), English, Latin, Italian, and Chinese, the quoted sources have all been translated into English by the author for easier reading.

II

Historical Background of the Church in Siam, 1544-1939

*Thou who didst come to bring,
On Thy redeeming wing,
Healing and sight,
Health to the sick in mind,
Sight to the inly blind,
Oh, now to all mankind
Let there be light!*

- John Marriott, *Thou Whose Almighty Word*

Alongside methodological considerations, the previous chapter discussed the historical background, debates and ideas that have been put forward regarding Thai political developments in the 1930s as well as issues pertaining to the construction of Thai national identity and its evolution. However, in this chapter, the focus will shift to charting the general development of Catholic missionary activities in Thailand prior to the 1939.

The Church in Siam, 1544-1909

The Catholic Mission has nothing to do with politics and is focused on doing good deeds and helping others.¹

- Vicar-Apostolic Perros, October 1942

The issues that faced Catholic Missions in Asia throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century were thus diverse. In examining Siam, it can be seen that missionaries there too faced challenges common to the region: an entrenched, complex religious system and occasional persecution. Yet, in Siam they also found

¹ Bangkok Archdiocese Archives (B.A.A.), Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Interior Minister, 22 October 1942, 33/4/61.

many blessings. Until the closing years of the seventeenth century, the monarchs of Ayutthaya, the old capital of Siam, were largely favourable to the Catholic presence. Indeed, under King Narai the Great (1656-88), the missionaries were able to gain unprecedented influence over the court and its foreign policy. Although this influence provoked jealousy among the courtiers and the eventual downfall of the French missionaries, the Catholics were never totally expelled or forced into hiding.

Even as the tide of xenophobia rose and ebbed, so did the Buddhist instinct for tolerating other religions. One monarch may have decreed the expulsion of missionaries, but it usually did not take long before he himself, or his successor, moderated or reversed the decision. While during the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767), much was subject to the individual whims of the monarch, in nineteenth century Bangkok, other considerations also had to be taken seriously, namely the encroachment of the western colonialists. Missionaries were once again useful as initial diplomatic contacts, as well as a source of information on everything from religious beliefs to the latest technological innovation. Nevertheless, as the colonial powers made their presence felt, some saw the missionaries that came with them as a threat to Siamese sovereignty. Yet others, like the monarch, saw in the work of missionaries a chance to ensure the kingdom's integrity through its 'civilisation', even if they would never think of converting to the Christian religion.

Throughout the history of the Church in Siam, no matter how severe the persecution or how friendly the regime, neither sentiment, it seems, would ever die out completely.

The First Missionaries and Court Politics, 1544-1767

Assurez ces Messieurs que je suis ravi des les avoir vus, et que je ferai pour le roi de Siam, mon frère, même avec beaucoup de plaisir, ce qu'il pourra désirer de moi.

- Louis XIV to Siamese Ambassadors, 1684

While Thailand, as a country, is not commonly associated with a strong Catholic presence, Thai Catholic tradition states that the first missionaries to the kingdom, and indeed the region, were Dominican chaplains that arrived in Ayutthaya with the Portuguese traders in the first half of the sixteenth century. Little detail is known concerning this period, due to a lack of documentary evidence, although there are apocryphal stories of a king who converted to Christianity, taking the name of Dom João in 1544.² The reliability of this tale is suspect since there is no firm documentary evidence either on the Siamese or the Catholic side to substantiate it. The earliest documentary source available for this period is a letter written by Friar Fernando di S. Maria dated 26 December 1569.³ The letter describes the favourable treatment that was afforded to the missionaries by the monarch, the ease with which the missionaries learnt the native language, and their community's conflicts with the existing Muslim community and their leaders, who were envious of the sudden rise of Portuguese influence at the court at their political and economic expense.⁴

The tension between the Muslim and Catholics eventually led to an altercation in 1569, during which Fr. Jerónimo da Cruz, a Catholic priest, was killed.

The incident was brought to the knowledge of the royal court, which launched an

² The dates given for this conversion would place it during the reign of King Chairacha (1534-47). Since he was poisoned, court dissatisfaction with his conversion might have been a motive behind the assassination. However, in the light of the lack of evidence and given the standard volatility of Ayutthaya court politics, it is likely that more secular motives were responsible for the monarch's premature demise.

³ Surachai Chumsriphan, 'The Great Role of Jean-Louis Vey, Apostolic Vicar of Siam (1875-1909), in the Church History of Thailand during the Reformation Period of Rama V, the Great (1868-1910)', (PhD Thesis, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1990), p. 72.

⁴ At the time of the Portuguese missionaries' first arrival, the influence of traders from Persia was at its zenith in the court of Ayutthaya.

investigation into the affair. Eventually, the matter was resolved in favour of the Catholics and a death sentence was passed on the Muslim offenders. However, the sentence was commuted at the insistence of the Catholics.⁵ The magnanimous intervention impressed the monarch and enhanced the prestige of the Portuguese in the eyes of the royal court. Politically too, the monarch may have been glad to acquire a faction to balance the Islamic influence at the court. At the same time, the missionaries also began various works that further ingratiated them with the ruler and the local populace. These works included assistance in the construction of city fortifications, provision of basic western medical services, and the establishment of a school. While assisting in the construction of defence works was perhaps rather unorthodox, the provision of medical services and education not only stemmed from western monastic traditions but would also go on to become a longstanding Catholic tradition in Thailand.

Missionary activities continued, in spite of the first fall of Ayutthaya to a Burmese invasion in 1569, and were bolstered with the entry of other religious orders such as the Spanish Franciscans, the first arriving in 1582 and the Jesuits who came as early as 1606. More often than not, their efforts were hampered by the lingering Persian influence rather than by any Buddhist or xenophobic sentiments on the part of the Siamese.⁶ It was under the Jesuits that the Thai Church reached its zenith during the reign of King Narai (1656-88). Missionary activities were promoted in tandem with French diplomatic activities, encouraged in part by the Greek-born advisor, Constantine Phaulkon (also known as Luang Wichayen). Just as the Portuguese were employed as a counterweight to the Persian influence, the French newcomers were seen as an effective counterbalance to the influence of the

⁵ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos*, p. 20.

⁶ D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West, 1500-1700* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2002), p. 13.

established Dutch traders who had become too powerful in the eyes of the court. As a result of the influx of foreigners, this period is one of the best documented in the history of Ayutthaya and could be considered to be the “Golden Age” of missionary activities in the old capital.

Probably valued more for their knowledge in mathematics, architecture, engineering, and astronomy rather than their religion, the Jesuits quickly ingratiated themselves with the monarch. Under their guidance, new forts were built and a new royal residence was constructed at Lopburi, referred to in French accounts as ‘Louvo’, and the construction of an observatory in the same city was commenced. However, the Portuguese did not take their eclipse easily and disputed the French missionaries’ authority and their right to propagate the faith. While their colonial empire was in decline, the Portuguese still clung to their rights under the *Pradroad*, which gave them the right to propagate the Catholic faith in Siam and other areas across the globe. French activities in Ayutthaya were seen to be a breach of this historic right, thus leading to vehement disputes between the Portuguese and French Catholics.⁷ Moreover, there was bitter resentment among Europeans from the Protestant nations who saw the meteoric rise of the French as a direct threat to their religious and economic interests.

In spite of the obstacles thrown up by the Portuguese and the opposition of the Protestants, the French missionaries were able to facilitate the hitherto unprecedented exchanges of diplomatic missions between France, Siam, and the Vatican. Although similar long-distance missions had been dispatched prior to the arrival of the French by Siam and other countries in the region,⁸ this was the first time the Siamese embassies were so well-received. Previous Siamese missions to

⁷ D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West*, p.151.

⁸ For example, the 1613 Japanese mission of Hasekura Tsunenaga, dispatched at the behest of Date Masamune, was received in Spain, France, Italy (the Vatican), the Philippines, and Mexico.

Europe had ended in failure (due to shipwreck)⁹ or were aborted even before they began;¹⁰ those that made it, such as the one to Holland in 1608 proved to be rather low-key. Indeed, thanks to the personalities of the ambassadors, the first Siamese mission that arrived in France followed this depressing precedent.¹¹ The embassies headed by Kosa Pan, however, were entirely different. Unlike their predecessors, Kosa Pan and his team were congenial, curious, and, best of all, unfailingly diplomatic.¹² The French were consequently swept up in a fascination of all things Siamese and, in the fanciful setting of Versailles, dreamt of the news of the King of Siam's conversion to the Catholic religion.¹³

Reality was much more difficult, however, and missionaries on the ground were quick to realise that the conversion of the monarch, even if it could be effected, would be premature, and even dangerous, given the rising level of resentment against Catholic or, perhaps more accurately, French influence at court. Historians have debated whether King Narai ever had the inclination to convert to another religion. At worst he was playing one side against another to his political advantage, and at best he had an enlightened and open mind, since he also received a mission from the

⁹ The first mission dispatched to Portugal and France in 1684 under Ok-khun Chamnan was brought to a premature end off the coast of Madagascar. The ambassador survived and, after many adventures in southern Africa, during which he picked up the Portuguese language, he eventually returned to Siam in 1687. Shortly thereafter, he was dispatched on the 1688 mission to France and the Vatican. See M. Smithies, *A Siamese Embassy Lost in Africa, 1686: The Odyssey of Ok-khun Chamnan* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 1999).

¹⁰ D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West*, p. 25.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 238-68.

¹² Chaumont had written that "these three gentlemen are very gentle, obliging, and good natured, and have a very equable disposition." He, as well as others, also commented on the insatiable curiosity of the ambassadors (which may have irritated some observers), Donneau de Visé commenting in the *Mercure Galant* that "they keep, day by day, an exact record of what they have seen...they even count the trees of the places they visited." See D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West*, p. 354.

¹³ The fantasy of King Narai's conversion was not helped by the ambiguous statements of Kosa Pan, who "thought there would one day be many Christians in the kingdom of Siam". In the meantime, medals were struck in the ambassadors' honour, their portraits painted for a room in Versailles, and their likeness engraved and distributed. They were also often greeted by huge, curious crowds on their travels. At the end of their embassy, the Duke de la Feuillade, the Marshal of France (1625-91), was said to have remarked "that who was not a good Siamese, was not a good Frenchman." See D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West*, pp. 381, 384.

Shah of Iran that aimed at his conversion to Islam in a manner no less favourable than with the French.¹⁴ On the economic front too, there was an unmistakable sense of gilded failure. The trade treaties that were signed by the missions were practically worthless in the face of the royal trade monopoly, which was also the root cause for the decline of Ayutthaya's position as a regional trading entrepôt.

For the French and the Catholics, the storm broke as the king was on his deathbed. Petracha (1688-1703) used the opportunity to seize the throne in a coup supported by a xenophobic court fearful of the growth of foreign influence. Christians were actively persecuted until 1691, when Petracha returned the seminary to Mgr. Laneau. Nevertheless, the persecutions did not stop. Another wave of repression occurred under King Taisra (1709-33) when missionaries were not allowed to preach in Thai or Pali to Thais, Mons, and Lao people, or participate in debates involving or criticising Buddhism.¹⁵ On the economic front, the negative effects of the royal trade monopoly greatly contributed to the decline of foreign trade and the economic importance of Ayutthaya. Despite the early promise of Ayutthaya, the reality provided little incentive for foreigners, be they merchants or missionaries, to bother with the kingdom, when there were richer and easier pickings available in India, the Dutch East Indies, and even China. Indeed, even the M.E.P., which was initially established to propagate the faith in Siam, with the aim of making it a base for the conversion of the rest of Indochina and China, had diverted its missionary efforts directly to Indochina and China, its original mission all but forgotten.

This uneasy situation continued, together with the usual internal court intrigues, until the arrival of the Burmese military expeditions that eventually resulted in the second, and last, fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. In the conflagration that

¹⁴ The full account of the Persian embassy can be found in J. O'Kane (trans.), Muhammad Rabi' ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman* (Routledge, London, 1972).

¹⁵ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, pp. 148-9.

consumed the city before its fall and the looting that occurred afterwards, the seminary and St. Joseph's church, along with the remnants of the Portuguese and other foreign settlements were completely destroyed. The resident bishop was taken as a prisoner to Burma, together with the remainder of the city's population, nobles, and members of the royal family that had been unable to make their escape.

Restoration, Renewal, and Growth, 1767-1899

What you teach us to do is admirable, but what you teach us to believe is foolish.

- King Mongkut (Rama IV)

For both the Thai Catholic Church and Siam, the period that spanned the latter half of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century could be described as a period of restoration, renewal, and growth. Even almost one hundred years later, the Catholic Church was still reeling from the events of 1688 and subsequent persecutions. Although the religious persecution that followed the 1688 usurpation was brief, the climate established by King Petracha and his dynasty was at best tense, and sometimes even reverted to full-scale persecution up to the final destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767.

However, during the counter-strike against the Burmese, the ethnic and religious minorities once again proved their worth, both on the battlefield and off it, leading to an improved situation on the accession of the half-Chinese King Taksin in 1767. However, the situation once again deteriorated in the latter half of the king's reign. It is debatable whether the resurgence of persecution was a result of residual policies from Ayutthaya or from the monarch's over-adherence to quasi-Buddhist principles. The commoner King Taksin, lacking blood-links to the dynasties of Ayutthaya, arguably saw Buddhism and court ceremonies, such as the oath of allegiance ceremony, as the only remaining methods of legitimating himself and his dynasty. However, in religious terms, for the missionaries and their congregation, their participation in these ceremonies was clearly against their beliefs. At the same time, politically, the failure to participate in these ceremonies would apparently signal not only the Christians' denial of the monarch's legitimacy but also a rejection of the Buddhist state being constructed by the monarch. With neither side willing to

compromise, the conflict ultimately resulted in the complete expulsion of foreign missionaries from the kingdom.¹⁶ It would certainly not be the last time state ceremonies would create a rift in the relationship between the Catholic Mission and the state.

The missionaries were not to return until after the death of King Taksin in 1782,¹⁷ during the reign of King Phra Phuttayotfa or Rama I (1782-1809), when the monarch recalled them ostensibly to assist in trade and diplomatic negotiations with foreign powers. A sense of normality, however, was not to return until the reign of King Mongkut or Rama IV (1851-68) who, upon his accession in 1851, rushed to recall all the missionaries that had been expelled during the reign of the previous king. The new king received the missionaries in a solemn audience in February 1852. In marked contrast to his predecessors, the reception was lengthy, cordial, with tea, coffee, and cigars being served to the missionaries. During the audience, the monarch would even declare that: "It is a bad system to persecute religion. I am of the opinion that one should leave everybody free to practice the one he desires to follow".¹⁸ To the missionaries, it appeared as if the Ayutthaya of King Narai was about to return under King Mongkut. The sudden turnaround in the establishment's attitude could be attributed in part to the monarch's previous personal experience with missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, during his time in the Buddhist monkhood. However, there may also have been a more pressing concern for the state, for any further ill-treatment of missionaries could lead to unwelcome intervention by the resurgent European colonial powers.

¹⁶ Nevertheless, Christian bodyguards were to form King Taksin's last line of defence before his forced abdication in March 1782, see B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the Fall of Ayutthaya to Recent Times* (River Books, Bangkok, 2005), pp. 58-9.

¹⁷ The king was ritually executed on 7 April 1782, coincidentally the same date Ayutthaya fell in 1767.

¹⁸ J. Pallegoix, *Descriptions of the Thai Kingdom of Siam: Thailand under King Mongkut* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 2000), p. 402.

By the time King Mongkut came to power, Burma, the perennial enemy of Siam had been systematically neutralised by the British following their success in the First (1824-26) and Second Anglo-Burmese war (1852-53). The French were following not far behind in its empire-building in Southeast Asia with its first incursion into Vietnam occurring in 1858.¹⁹ The shift in the balance of power was highlighted by the defeat of the traditional regional superpower, China, in a series of armed conflicts with British forces (1839-42 and 1856-60) and the forced opening of Japan by Commodore Perry on 14 July 1853. King Mongkut clearly recognised the new political reality, severing tributary ties with the Chinese in favour of a rapprochement with the western powers to prevent the disasters that had befallen Siam's immediate neighbours.

By April 1855, the Bowring Treaty had been signed with Britain, breaking the traditional royal monopoly on trade and guaranteeing extraterritoriality for British subjects. Similar treaties with other western powers soon followed. By the following year, a treaty had been concluded with France that, among other clauses, guaranteed religious freedom to the Siamese and gave the Catholic missionaries the freedom to build schools, seminaries, hospitals and travel freely throughout Siamese territory. Commercially and legally, the treaties were undoubtedly unequal. However, to the missionaries, the treaties officially granted them freedoms that they had not seen in the kingdom since the days of King Narai. Emboldened by the new freedoms, the missionaries went about their work with zeal and by 1872, Siam could boast around 10,000 Catholics, 20 European missionaries, and 8 native priests.²⁰

The later part of the nineteenth century saw an expansion of missionary activities into Laos and the northeast of Thailand under the auspices of Mgr. Jean-

¹⁹ The attack on Da Nang by Charles Rigault de Genouilly was ostensibly to protect the Catholic missionaries from Vietnamese persecution.

²⁰ Surachai Chumsriphan, 'The Great Role of Jean-Louis Vey, Apostolic Vicar of Siam', p. 133.

Louis Vey (1875-1909). Inside Siam, the missionaries concentrated on the conversion of the Chinese ethnic minority, a focus encouraged by the government, since it discouraged the Chinese from joining secret societies, as well as building new schools, including the Assumption College that would produce numerous distinguished Thai leaders in various fields throughout the twentieth century and beyond. One of the notable aspects of Mgr. Vey's ministry was the encouragement of religious orders to come to Siam. His ministry saw the arrival of the sisters of St. Maur and St. Paul de Chartres and the brothers of St. Gabriel. The trend continued under his successor, Vicar-Apostolic Perros (1909-47), with the arrival of three more religious orders: the Ursuline Sisters in 1924, the Carmelites in 1925, the Salesians in 1927. However, unlike the missionary orders that arrived during the ministry of Vicar-Apostolic Vey, these orders were not so distinctively French. The Ursulines and Salesians were founded in Italy, while the Carmelites were originally based on Mount Carmel in the Middle East.

Thus, apart from a potential fracture following the French incursion during the 1893 Paknam crisis,²¹ the Church had managed to regain a secure position, albeit on the back of gunboats. In the light of the belligerence of the French, the position of the Thai Catholic Church, with its overwhelmingly French leadership, was not so different from the situation towards the end of King Narai's reign. The major difference between the early twentieth century and the seventeenth century is that the Church had consciously moved itself away to the periphery of national politics. By the dawn of the twentieth century, it did not have a permanent 'advisor' to the monarch in court, it was not involved in any serious negotiations with outsiders on behalf of Siam but instead seemed to have been content to immerse itself in purely

²¹ There was no immediate fracture between the Catholic Mission and the Siamese government as a result of the 1893 incident but, as will be seen, anti-French sentiments lingered into the twentieth century specifically in areas that were affected by the incursion and the resulting concessions.

missionary work, with the proviso that if they were harassed by local or central authorities, they would not hesitate to call on the protection of the French consulate if they could not first obtain satisfaction from the Siamese authorities.

The Calm before the Storm, 1909-39

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

- Siddhartha Gautama

By the time Vicar-Apostolic Perros began his ministry in 1909, the Mission in Siam appeared secure. The monarchy, as well as the social and business elite, were sponsoring and supporting some missionary endeavours, although perhaps they were doing so under the threat of colonial encroachment. At the same time, the Mission also received some support from the French colonial government in Indochina, even though their interests often did not coincide. The tensions between the Siamese fear of colonialism and the Mission's aim of promoting and integrating the western-style social work of the Mission into the wider Siamese society was a defining factor in the pre-1939 Church.

The Vicar-Apostolic himself probably knew all too much about conflicting loyalties, having grown up in Alsace-Lorraine, an area disputed by France and Germany, before he was assigned to Siam at the age of 23. At the same time, the situation also provided many opportunities to play on the hopes and fears of various parties, to the advantage of the Church. Occasionally, the Church was able to synergise these hopes and fears. For example, the Siamese elite, keen to modernise in the face of the colonial threat, could be induced to support western-style educational initiatives. Meanwhile, French colonial officials who were keen to see the projection of the *gloire de la patrie* in foreign lands could be persuaded to offer generous financial donations to support certain schools that were teaching French language and culture in a state where they could not exert their influence. Thus the Siamese had their modernised institution and the French could be satisfied that they had projected their *gloire*.

Yet this strategy placed the Mission on a precarious balance. The arrangement was perfect when the Mission was able to find a way to bring together the needs and wants of the various parties without overtly taking sides. But what if these interests could not be reconciled? Where would the loyalties of the Mission and its foreign clerics then be? Already before 1939 there were troubling indications. When the First World War broke out in Europe in 1914, the Vicar-Apostolic, along with a number of French priests, were recalled to France to serve as military chaplains. There was little problem with this reassignment at the time, since King Vajiravudh soon declared himself for the Allies. Nevertheless, to suspicious Siamese observers, the situation begged an urgent question: if a crisis occurred between France and Siam, which country would the French missionaries and their congregation support? The question was not only pertinent to the French missionaries but also the various ethnic minorities that made up the congregation of the Mission. Whom would they serve – their country of birth or their adopted country?

The natural, safe answer for the clergy was neither – that they were serving the Catholic Church and, had they limited their social and financial association with their home government, this answer could have been convincing. Yet had they limited their dealings in such a manner, they would have denied the Mission critical support, especially when its members encountered trouble with the local authorities. It was the maintenance of this precarious balance that occupied the minds of the Mission leadership before 1939, all the while trying to keep the Mission and its work operating on an even keel in an increasingly difficult economic climate.

René Marie-Joseph Perros, Bishop of Zoara, Vicar-Apostolic of Siam

...every Catholic, even if they differ in nationalities...are all children of their motherland and must love their country with the highest love.

- Vicar-Apostolic René Perros, *Parish Circular*, Undated

Unlike his more famous predecessors, such as Vicar-Apostolic Pallegoix, there is actually very little material concerning the personal history of the Vicar-Apostolic of Siam during this period, although what is available²² gives rise to some interesting speculation. The Vicar-Apostolic of the Mission of Siam, Bishop René Marie-Joseph Perros would have been acutely aware of the problems of conflicting identities. According to the records of the Missions Étrangères de Paris, he was born on 12 March 1870 at Guewenheim in Haute-Alsace (modern day Haut-Rhin in France). The region of Alsace-Lorraine had always been a point of dispute between France and Prussia/Germany, and scholars of European history are aware that the area was in contestation during the Franco-Prussian War (19 July 1870–10 May 1871) that erupted shortly after the birth of René Perros, and that much of the territory was ultimately lost to Prussia following the defeat of France in that conflict and would not return to French control until the enforcement of the *diktat* of the Treaty of Versailles after the end of the First World War.

The people of Alsace-Lorraine during this period were thus faced with a choice; whether to acknowledge the *de facto* situation of Prussian sovereignty over the area or to retreat into an equally distinctive French identity. The third choice was, of course, to try to live as best as possible with both sides. For the family of René Perros, even though they lived outside the territories annexed to the German Reich in

²² The official biographical information for Vicar-Apostolic Perros, along with that of most M.E.P. missionaries, are now available online (in French) at the website of the M.E.P. Archives. Searches can be made at: <http://www.mepasie.org/?q=archives-des-missions-etrangees-de-paris> [Last Access 29 January 2009].

the area near Belfort, it seems that they too had chosen the path of compromise. Although the Belfort area was already overtly French before the war,²³ distinguishing itself from the rest of Alsace that spoke predominantly German (Alemannic) dialects, some of the German-influenced population also spilled into the French areas, as evidenced by the marriage certificate of René Perros's parents. There are indications that his paternal grandparents (Ludovico and Francisca Petizon) and father (Ludovico Perros) were French, while his maternal grandparents (Joseph and Francisca Walch) and mother (Josephia Rigenbach) were probably part of the Germanic population of Alsace.²⁴

Between Prussia and France, René Perros appeared to have chosen France since he enrolled at the Collège Libre de Lachapelle in the vicinity of Belfort from 1882-87, at the end of which he had graduated with a Bachelor of Letters from the University of Besançon. On 14 September 1887, he entered the seminary of the Missions Étrangères de Paris, and in 1889 was received into the minor orders. His clerical career was interrupted by military service at Belfort from November 1891 to September 1892, after which he resumed his studies at the seminary. On 15 October 1893, he was ordained priest and was assigned to Siam in the same year, leaving for Siam on Christmas Eve 1893, not to return to France until the outbreak of the First World War. On arrival in Siam, he underwent training in the Siamese language and continued to do so, while assisting Fr. Guillou in Nakhon Chaisi. During this period, he also began studying the Chinese language. In 1896, he was named professor of the seminary at Bangchang, where he stayed for ten years, at the end of which he was assigned to the community of Huaphai. However, after only three years in

²³ It was partly due to the overt and traditional French presence in the area as well as the determined resistance of the town of Belfort itself (the town only "fell" when it was ordered to, 21 days after the signing of the Franco-Prussian armistice) that dissuaded the Prussians from annexing the area.

²⁴ B.A.A., Extractus ex Libro Matrimoniali, 29 September 1866, 141/1/15.

Huaphai, he was recalled to the seminary to replace Fr. Matrat, the Superior who had to return to France due to ill-health. This development suggests that the Church leadership valued Fr. Perros's administrative abilities as well as his intellectual capacity, although the length of time he spent in the seminary indicates a contemplative rather than active form of leadership.

In any case, it appeared that Fr. Perros's form of leadership was thought by the Superior General to be just what the Mission needed at that stage of development. Thus, following the death of Vicar-Apostolic Vey on 21 February 1909, Fr. René Perros was appointed to the position of Vicar-Apostolic of Siam in September of the same year, taking the official title of the titular Bishop of Zoara. The consecration ceremony took place in the Holy Rosary Church on 30 January 1910. However, following the outbreak of the First World War, the Vicar-Apostolic was recalled to France where he served as a military chaplain in Belfort until he was granted permission to return to his post in Siam in October 1915. As will be seen later, this period is vital to understanding the Bishop's sense of identity and his relationship to France, his native country, and to Siam, his "country of adoption", and his role as a missionary of the universal Church.

The work of his ministry will be covered in more detail further in the thesis, but for now it should be sufficient to say that he continued to make slow headway in moving the Thai Church from being a purely missionary organisation to one that was run by the indigenous clergy, a process that would be accelerated by the traumatic events of the Second World War. To that effect, between 1910 and 1931 he ordained 34 Siamese priests, including one assigned to the Mission of Laos, and established a new seminary at Sri Racha in January 1935, although it would be some time still before an indigenous cleric would be appointed to head a part of the

Mission, and even longer for an indigenous hierarchy to be established. Furthermore, he assigned Ratchaburi and the southwest of the Mission of Siam to the Italian Salesians under Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti and expanded missionary efforts to Chiang Mai in the north of Siam, which hitherto had been the domain of Protestant missionaries, mainly from the United States.

However, the expansion of the Mission came at a great financial cost and the Mission during his tenure was constantly accosted by financial deficits. This situation appeared to have caused great strain between the Vicar-Apostolic and his procurator, Fr. Louis-Auguste Chorin, prompting the latter to write a letter of complaint to the M.E.P. headquarters in Paris in 1924, alerting the superior to the Mission of Siam's dire financial situation and, by implication, the deficiencies of the Vicar-Apostolic's leadership.²⁵ Nevertheless, the Vicar-Apostolic was able to ride out the storm and continued to hold his position for more than another two decades. Although Perros's relationship with his procurator continued to be cold, Fr. Chorin never again wrote to the M.E.P. regarding Perros. There are indications that some sort of political deal was worked out between Perros and Chorin, where Chorin would be named successor on the retirement of Perros, as long as he did not rock the boat. Indeed, when Chorin was eventually appointed as Vicar-Apostolic after Perros's retirement in July 1947, some of the Mission's priests were taken aback by the unexpected decision. Judging from Perros's correspondence alone, the relationship between the two was cold if not non-existent since the procurator was hardly mentioned. Costet in his historical account wrote that Chorin's eventual

²⁵ M.E.P.A., Chorin to M.E.P. headquarters, Paris, 1924, v. 897/68.

appointment came “as a very great surprise”,²⁶ indicating the high probability that a deal had been made and had been kept very secret.

The anti-Catholic persecution was, of course, the major problem that faced the Mission of Siam during René Perros’s tenure. It is also worth noting that prior to the general persecution, the Vicar-Apostolic was already confronted with problems that stemmed from new Siamese legislation (some of which he interpreted to be aimed at the French) as well as the problem of the slow conversion of the Mission into an indigenous hierarchy. It can be said therefore that by the time of his retirement in 1947, the Vicar-Apostolic had led a challenging life during a tumultuous time. The numerous issues he faced during his ministry will form the main themes of this thesis.

²⁶ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 439.

Population and Ethnicity

Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Despite Vicar-Apostolic Perros's lack of spectacular achievements in comparison with some of his predecessors, he did accomplish significant gains in effecting conversions. Under his rule, the Catholic population continually expanded, with the possible exception of the years 1909-18, when no accurate statistics were collected,²⁷ and 1929-30, when there was a dramatic decrease. The decrease could be attributed to declining global economic conditions, but clearly the more important factor was the creation of the Mission of Ratchaburi in the west of Siam since during this process, the Mission of Siam had ceded control of all the parishes and their property to the Salesians, who were in charge of the new Mission. The transfer also included the obligation to account for the number of Catholics in their area, hence the 'fall' in numbers in the area under the jurisdiction of the Mission of Siam.

Even so, by 1936, the population had surpassed the level of 1929. The figures also mirror the activities of the missionaries during this period. Increases in the 1930s were reflections of the creation of, and investments made into, the new Mission stations in the north. Furthermore these activities appeared to have been little affected by the change to the constitutional regime and subsequent political movements.

What did affect the figures were the movements of the Chinese to and from their homeland. Although the Chinese settled in Siam and had conducted business there for many decades, many of them would return to China upon retirement. Some

²⁷ From the Mission records, the population did not fluctuate at all between the years 1909-18. Clearly, this cannot be accurate and it can be assumed that the Mission did not expect huge fluctuations and so worked from the figure of 24,400. Nevertheless, the trends suggest that even in these years with dubious statistics, the trend was towards growth rather than decline.

would take their families and economic gains with them, but there were also some who would leave their family behind and write them a 'will' distributing goods and assets in Siam to the remaining family.²⁸ For these reasons, the Vicar-Apostolic added a note of caution to his figures, saying that "It is legitimate to conclude that the total known figure is smaller than reality".²⁹ In addition, the figures do not include the Catholics of the northeast which, by the time of Vicar-Apostolic Perros's tenure, was already a part of the Mission of Laos.

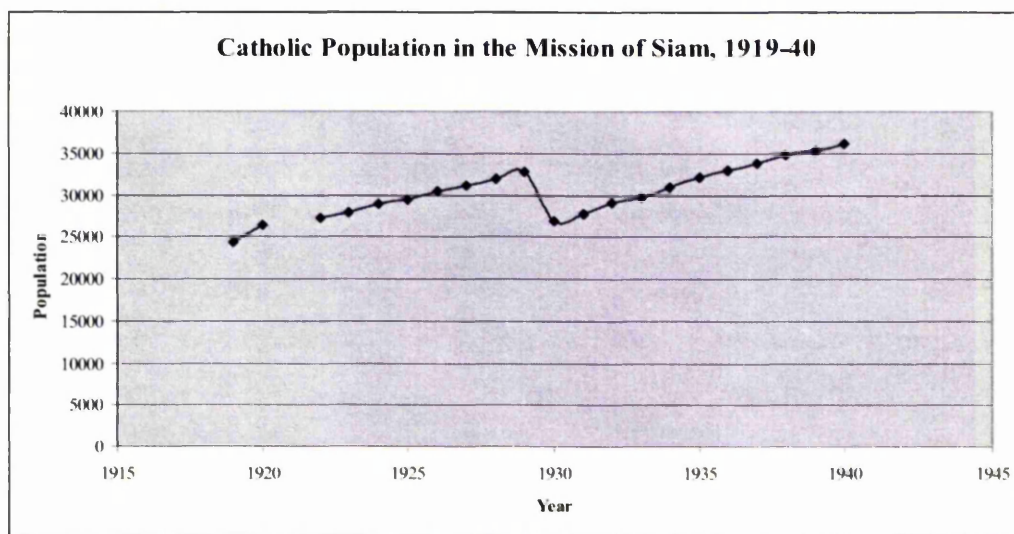


Chart 1. Catholic Population in the Mission of Siam, 1919-40³⁰

How the Catholic population was precisely distributed across the country is unclear, since the annual general reports only give the total figure. Nevertheless, an approximation can be made from a 1929-30 calculation and has been reproduced in Table 1 below. Calculations are still problematic, however, since it is likely that the figures included non-Catholic Christians as well, hence the anomaly of the "Phayab"

²⁸ An example of this is B.A.A., 15 June 1933, 31/4/52. In this will, Hong Zhucun, an elderly Chinese businessman transferred his property in Siam to his family as he retired to China.

²⁹ M.E.P.A., Comptes-Rendus 1920.

³⁰ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix C: Catholic Population in the Mission of Siam, 1917-47.

(in the north) statistics, which account for 15 percent of the total Christian population.

The Catholics did not set up a Mission in the north until the early 1930s.

Nevertheless, the table is helpful since it reflects the general trends of missionary activities. Around 32 percent of the Christian population was located in the central region, while 27 percent were located in the northeast. The other regions with high concentrations were the east with 14 percent of the population, and the west with just under 10 percent. The west would be ceded to the Salesians in 1929-30, while the east was coming under the control of the indigenous clergy.

Location	Population
Bangkok	8725
Ayutthaya	4118
Prachinburi	4250
Chantaburi	2912
Phayab	7338
Phitsanulok	237
Udon	9016
Nakhon Sawan	245
Nakhon Chaisi	2781
Nakhon Ratchasima	4532
Nakhon Si Thammarat	192
Ratchaburi	4839
Pattani	16
Phuket	261
<i>Total</i>	<i>49462</i>

Table 1. Population and Distribution of Christians in Siam, 1929-30³¹

Intriguingly, the statistics also record the presence of Christians in the south. However, in 1923, the Vicar-Apostolic noted had noted that there were no Catholics in Phatthalung province (in the south) or its vicinity, mentioning only that there were missionaries in Perak, which lies in modern-day Malaysia.³² Furthermore, there are no records of the Mission of Siam sending missions to the south during this period,

³¹ B.A.A., Population of Siam by religion (1929-30), 64/1/27.

³² B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to R.P. Shmidt, 27 October 1923, 50/5/53.

unlike its contemporary efforts in the north which were extensively documented. Therefore, it can be assumed that these small communities were either Protestants or were being administered more efficiently by another authority, such as the Mission of Malacca.

Thus, the major points of concentration for the Christian population were in the central region and the northeast. That a significant proportion of Catholics in Siam were under the administration of the Mission of Laos may have given the Siamese authorities cause for concern, especially amidst rumours of Catholics paving the way for further French annexations in the region. The lack of concern on the part of the Missions of Siam and Laos over this issue suggests that the Church authorities regarded divisions of jurisdiction that did not follow national borders as entirely normal. The Church's lack of sensitivity to these national concerns would become a major source of antagonism in the 1930s and 1940s.

Also problematic was the fact that many of the converts were from ethnic minorities, mainly Chinese and Vietnamese, but also other groups as diverse as northern hill-tribes and descendants of Portuguese settlers. When arrangements were being made for the Salesians to take over parishes in Ratchaburi, the Vicar-Apostolic had commented that:

[The Salesians] study the Siamese language with much ardour, but a single language is insufficient for this polyglot country; they are fortunate to have some seminarists from their Institute that have stayed in China and each knowing a Chinese dialect, sufficient to perfect them among the Chinese of Siam.³³

The comment reflects the diverse language skills that were required for missionaries to operate effectively in Siam due to the differences between the local

³³ M.E.P.A., Compte-Rendu 1928.

communities that priests were expected to serve. A concrete example of this diversity is the Bangkok parishes, all of which had different ethnic compositions. The Church of St. Francis Xavier primarily had an Annamese or Annamese descendant congregation, while their counterparts at the Santa Cruz and Holy Rosary Churches were primarily ethnic Chinese. It should be noted here that the Santa Cruz and Holy Rosary Churches had past connections with the Portuguese fathers and a small Portuguese descendant community. Similarly, the Church of the Immaculate Conception was dominated by Khmers or Khmer descendants. To a certain extent, some of this heritage had, even by this early point, been diluted. For example, the language found in Church documents from St. Francis Xavier and Immaculate Conception Churches were in Thai rather than Vietnamese or Khmer. Nevertheless, there was still a consciousness within the parish community that they were descended from a race other than Siamese, although this realisation was no longer expressed explicitly.

In contrast, there are a considerable number of Chinese-language documents that appear in the records of the Santa Cruz and Holy Rosary Churches. Thai or Church-Thai language documents were also signed with Chinese characters. The differences between these four parishes suggest that the degree of integration into Siamese society was different for each ethnic group. The Chinese in particular had or were given prefixes such as “Jin” and “Jek” that announced their ethnicity. Whilst the term “Jek” has devolved into a pejorative term, its regular occurrence in documents drafted by the Church as well as by the parishioners themselves suggests that it was a common term at the time and did not have any offensive implications. Also unique to the Chinese community was their itinerant character, which caused headaches for Mission authorities who wished to keep accurate statistics. For some

in the Siamese government, watching developments in China, it was also perhaps further evidence of the lack of integration and loyalty to their adopted homeland among the Chinese. The fact that the Chinese characteristics were so distinctive in Church life, in contrast to the other ethnic minorities, would support this view. Belonging to the Catholic Church may not have been conducive to integrating into a country with a Buddhist majority. For Chinese Catholics, the question was to what extent were anti-Catholic sentiments simply an extension of anti-Chinese feelings?

While the exact proportion of the ethnic make-up of the overall congregation is unclear, the picture is much more apparent in terms of the clergy, at least after 1930 when the annual reports become much more detailed. In population terms, the number of male clergy was stable throughout the 1930s, averaging around 90-100. The population even saw a net increase before the outbreak of war between Thailand and French Indochina in 1940. The most significant data, however, is the proportion of indigenous to foreign priests in this period.

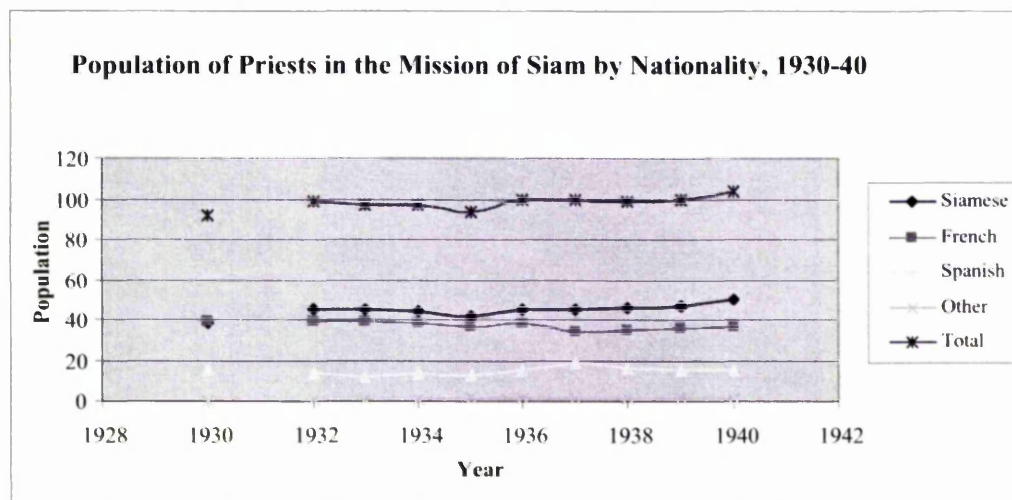


Chart 2. Population of Priests by in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-40³⁴

³⁴ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix D: Population of Priests in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-46.

Despite starting the decade at near parity, the French clergy was being continuously outnumbered by indigenous priests throughout the 1930s. Yet the leadership of the Mission continued to be dominated by members of the French M.E.P. Even if there were internal debates on increasing the role of the indigenous clergy in the running of the Mission and tentative steps taken in that direction, the Mission still had an undeniably French face. Indeed, the presence of the Spanish priests was insufficient to dispel the impression that the Mission was a French institution as opposed to a multi-national organisation.

The disparity between the indigenous and foreign clergy is even more apparent among the female religious orders. In terms of total population, the nuns were more numerous than priests – double if not triple the number of male clergy. Furthermore, the proportion of indigenous nuns had already surpassed the number of nuns from other nationalities by as early as 1930.

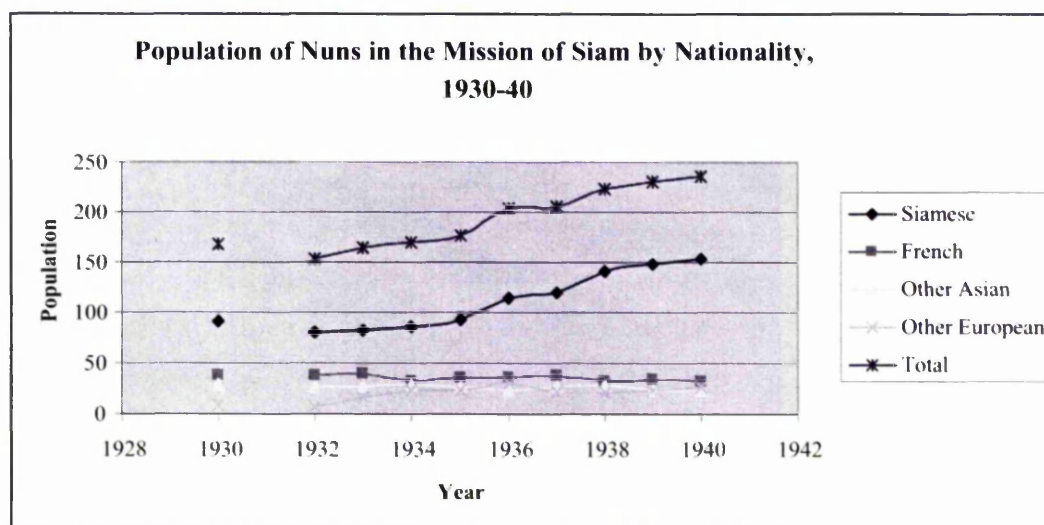


Chart 3. Population of Nuns by Nationality in the Mission of Siam, 1930-40³⁵

³⁵ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix E: Population of Nuns in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-46.

Indeed the disparity continued to increase throughout the decade. Ethnicity was much more varied among the female orders, however. There was a wide representation from European countries including Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy. There were also nuns from the United States and Canada. Other Asian territories were also represented by nuns from Singapore, the Philippines, China, and Vietnam, with the latter making up the largest Asian contingent next to the Siamese.

In the light of the statistical evidence, it is surprising to find that there was no evidence of pressure from below for the French leadership to hand over more roles to the indigenous clergy before the 1940s. It is possible that both the leadership and the indigenous clergy knew that the conditions were not right. Some of the Mission's more prominent schools and hospitals relied on subsidies from various international agencies, from the French colonial government to the Propaganda Fide. Obtaining these subsidies required some adroit diplomatic skill, along with knowledge of languages as well as personal relationships and connections. Although some indigenous priests had been sent to Penang and Rome to be educated in a more international environment,³⁶ some foreign priests did argue that it was premature for the entire Mission to be handed over to the indigenous clergy. Furthermore, the fact that some of the indigenous clergy, particularly those in the eastern parishes, were allowed virtually to run their own affairs may have helped to quell any resentment.

Nevertheless, the demographics and their trends suggest that it would not be long before the dominant role of the French priests and their relevance would come into question. Demographically, therefore, it was inevitable that the M.E.P. would

³⁶ For example, during this period, Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung was sent to Penang, while Joseph Khiamsum Nittayo, the first Bishop (rather than Vicar-Apostolic or Titular Bishop) of Bangkok was sent to Rome.

have to give up control of the Mission of Siam in the near future. The question was when. And how would this transformation would come about? Would it be done willingly or under duress?

Society, Health, and Education

Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as done for the Lord and not for human beings, knowing that the Lord will repay you by making you his heirs.

- Colossians 3: 23-4

Although the Mission did succeed in increasing the population of converts during this period, the increase was modest. In terms of the total national population, even at its peak in 1939, the Catholic population amounted to only 0.4 percent of the total population (around 8 million at the time). In the face of its failure to garner mass conversions, the Mission took a different approach to raise its profile in society and increase its attractiveness. Much of the work in the existing parishes was already complete by the time Vicar-Apostolic Perros came to power. Although the 1930s would see the first Catholic missionary efforts in the northern region, the Mission's priority in its other parishes was already shifting from establishing new institutions to maintaining and expanding core, existing operations.

Evidence is sparse for the 1910s, but annual reports suggest that Mission operations were extensive by the 1920s, although there were minor fluctuations in the number of institutions at the beginning of the decade. Between 1922 and 1923, the number of hospitals was reduced from five to four while pharmacies were reduced from five to one. The pharmacies did not appear to be popular in the first half of the decade – the five initial pharmacies held only 54 consultations between them in one year but by 1929, more than 300 treatments were being handed out at the Mission's one remaining pharmacy. The Mission appeared to be winding down operations in its founding hospitals, which were reduced from seven to four. The number of its orphanages remained stable throughout the 1920s at 24. One notable trend was the fact that female orphans consistently outnumbered male orphans, and

this trend would continue into the 1940s.³⁷ The statistics reflected perhaps the values of contemporary society, particularly that of the Chinese, who generally valued boys over girls.

The economic depression in the 1930s led to the rearrangement of priorities and inevitable cutbacks in services. Orphanages were significantly reduced from 24 in 1928 to 17 in 1930 and then 12 in 1932.³⁸ The existence of foundling hospitals was no longer registered in the annual reports, indicating that the operations may have been discontinued entirely or merged with existing orphanages. Nevertheless, demands for these and other services continued to rise throughout the 1930s. The pharmacy, which was not so popular in the 1920s, was handling more than 1,000 consultations by 1935, peaking at 2,410 consultations in 1939.³⁹ However, the rising demands for its services did not encourage the Mission to expand these provisions any further. Indeed, given the Mission's new venture and commitments to the north during this period, it was financially impossible.

Even at its peak, the Mission's contribution in its social services was modest. Arguably, the Mission's focus had never been on these sectors. Instead, the statistics show that it was the education sector that took up most of the missionaries' efforts and attention. The schools established by the Mission were arguably the most visible symbols of its presence and contribution to wider Siamese society. Leaving aside, for now, the social objectives behind the setting up of these schools, the number of those in the missionary education system was significant. In 1922 alone, there were more than 8,000 pupils studying in Catholic-run schools across the

³⁷ See Appendix G: Orphanages, 1922-46.

³⁸ Another explanation for the reduction could be that they were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Mission of Ratchaburi.

³⁹ See Appendix G: Pharmacies, 1922-46.

country.⁴⁰ This number had increased to more than 10,000 by 1939,⁴¹ in spite of the difficult economic conditions and the fact that some schools had been ceded to the Missions of Ratchaburi and Laos.

The statistics are more confusing for the number of schools and colleges. At face value, it appears as if the Mission was responsible for the administration of over 160 institutions during the 1920s. However, surviving records suggest that the numbers were probably fewer. The discrepancies originate from the way the schools were officially classified and counted in the annual reports. Some schools were co-educational, while others were only for boys or girls. Some schools were reserved for local Catholic parishioners, while others were open to everyone. Naturally, there were schools that could fall into multiple categories – leading to an inability to accurately establish the definitive number of institutions under the Mission's control over certain periods.⁴²

Nevertheless, a glimpse of the nature of these operations can be gleaned from a set of unofficial reports. In 1920 the Mission of Siam was running 37 primary schools for boys and the same number for girls, with an additional 14 schools that were co-educational. Altogether, the schools had a total of 3,557 pupils. By 1927, there were still 37 primary schools for boys but the number of schools for girls had dropped to 32. However, the number of co-educational schools had increased to 19. The total number of pupils attending these schools had also increased to 4,620. The trend of increased enrolment can also be seen in the secondary schools. In 1920, there were three institutions for boys and another three for girls, with a total of 2,660 pupils between them. By 1927, the Mission had opened an additional institution for

⁴⁰ B.A.A., *Prospectus Status Missionis*, 31 July 1922, 62/3 /34.

⁴¹ B.A.A., *Prospectus Status Missionis*, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13.

⁴² The lowest estimate is around 60, while the highest is around 160.

girls and although the number of secondary schools for boys remained the same, the total number of pupils had increased to 3,548.⁴³

The schools in Bangkok, namely Assumption College, St. Gabriel College, and Mater Dei were arguably the best provided for in the country. Certain provinces were also not lacking good schools, the notable examples being Montfort College and Regina Coeli in Chiang Mai and St. Paul's School in Paettru, Chachoengsao province, that were founded on the model of the Bangkok schools by the same religious orders. These schools were arguably 'flagship' schools that illustrated what the Mission was fully capable of. However, conditions and standards in the rest of the schools were more varied. Some responded directly to the needs of the immediate community, in addition to providing the basic curriculum, for example in language tuition, while others taught only the most elementary courses centred on literacy, numeracy, and the Catechism. A typical example of a 'customised' school was the St. Nicolas primary school in Phitsanulok. This school was one of the many that provided Chinese language tuition in addition to the basic curriculum. The school divided pupils into two groups – one followed a Siamese syllabus, while the other had both Siamese and Chinese tuition, with the former group being larger than the latter.⁴⁴ Although the authorities did not seem to appreciate their efforts, the school made great efforts to accommodate government demands in teaching the Siamese language, unlike other schools in the area that operated a purely Chinese curriculum.⁴⁵ Seminaries were also customised for the immediate needs of the Siamese priesthood. The curriculum was heavy on language tuition – Siamese, Latin, and French, with courses in physiology, geography, history, hygiene, mathematics,

⁴³ B.A.A., Unofficial Report to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 26 November 1920 and 21 August 1927, 107/5/7.

⁴⁴ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Ministry of Religious Affairs, 12 May 1933, 79/4/7.

⁴⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Phitsanulok Minister of Religious Affairs, 21 July 1933, 79/4/8.

and science rounding out the course during the week. Saturdays were devoted entirely to ethics.⁴⁶

While the lack of national standard requirements allowed the Mission and other private organisations to respond directly to the needs of the communities they served, it also led to major differences in the achievements of the schools. The discrepancy was reflected in the public examination results of the late 1930s – this was after the government had already initiated its campaign to standardise schools. In 1938, 70 percent or more of pupils in the Mission's 'flagship' schools such as Assumption College, St. Gabriel College, and Mater Dei had managed to pass the state university examinations. In contrast, parish schools such as Santa Cruz did not fare so well, with pass rates ranging from 40 to 60 percent. The lowest achiever among the Mission's schools in Bangkok was St. Mary's, where only 28.6 percent of its pupils managed to pass their exams. In contrast, Suan Kularb, a prestigious state school, achieved a pass rate of 92 percent, despite fielding more candidates than most of the other schools. However, Suan Kularb was an exception rather than the standard since the pass rates at other prestigious schools such as Vajiravudh College and Thepsirin hovered in the 60 percentile – below that of the 'flagship' Mission schools, while ordinary schools such as Suvit and Ratchada Wittaya Sapha had considerably lower pass rates.⁴⁷ Thus, while the standards among the Mission schools varied greatly, it was no more than the variation seen among contemporary state schools. The statistics suggest that while the Mission schools may not have always been the first choice for parents, especially non-Catholic parents, they proved to be attractive alternatives, especially for those who lacked the connections and resources to enter prestigious state institutions.

⁴⁶ B.A.A., Timetable of Holy Redeemer Seminary, Chonburi, Undated, 82/5/21.

⁴⁷ B.A.A., 1937 Public examination results, March 1938, 81/2/27.

The Mission was not always able to get away with the lack of common standards in its curriculum and management. A major concern of the Vicar-Apostolic was the passage of a series of laws that sought to regulate the provisions of private schools. Essentially, the period saw the increasing intrusion of the state into the Catholic private schools in various categories across the country. The interference ranged from the imposition of new taxes to changes in the curriculum. The process had started under the absolute monarchy, as early as 1918. In this case, a law introduced a new tax, payable by all taxpayers between the ages of 18 and 60, which would go to support state schools. For the Mission, the problem was that since they already levied fees for their local schools, parents sending children to Catholic schools would in effect have to pay twice, thereby decreasing the attractiveness of the school to an already impoverished local population.⁴⁸

The solution was either to close the schools down or change the status of the affected schools from private schools to community schools. Apart from involving the establishment of new administrative structures, including a five-member school committee led by the Vicar-Apostolic, the change in status also meant that the schools would have access to public funding, but would no longer be open only to Catholics (suggesting that the ‘flagship’ schools, which were open to all, were meant to be a limited experiment and that the Mission remained concerned with giving its members an exclusively Catholic education). At first the Vicar-Apostolic was hostile to the new law, arguing to the French Minister Plenipotentiary that it gave too much power to the Minister of Education to decide the curriculum – to the detriment of religious teaching, while “the law does not accord to [the Mission] a sufficient delay to keep or find the headmasters for all of our schools [and] our native priests

⁴⁸ M.E.P.A., Compte-Rendu 1922.

are not prepared to take the teaching exams that had not existed previously".⁴⁹ Even so, a few years later, the Vicar-Apostolic could note the new opportunities that had opened up, reporting that: "we have hope that we can further our action and come to obtain catechumens, because already many pagan families prefer to send their children to Christian schools more than any other".⁵⁰ At the same time, the government left ambiguous its attitude to the teaching of religion in school. This attitude remained problematic for some time, and it was only six years later that the Ministry of Education issued the following clarification:

The primary school curriculum is compulsory in accordance with the law pertaining to primary education, thus there are no provisions for the teaching of religion but practical ethics that are relevant to good citizenship should be taught. In the cases where religious principles can be used, it has to be understood that if there are pupils that do not follow that religion in class, they have a right to choose not to attend classes where there are religious teachings involved.⁵¹

The trouble with government regulations did not end there, however. Indeed, it intensified post-1932 as the new regime sought to impose its standards on the private and state education systems. For the Mission schools, the most damaging of these were those pertaining to language requirements and the qualifications of teachers. The Vicar-Apostolic's fear of the Ministry of Education being given too much power was realised in 1935 when he, once again, felt compelled to petition the French Minister regarding the matter. His complaints ranged from the official distribution of books that promoted communism, interference in the school timetable and the teaching of foreign languages, as well as the Ministry's tardiness in approving the opening of a new Catholic school, despite the fact that the Mission had been scrupulous in following government regulations, unlike some of its

⁴⁹ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 16 November 1921, 50/3/45.

⁵⁰ M.E.P.A., *Compte-Rendu* 1922.

⁵¹ B.A.A., Ministry of Education: On Religious Teachings, 1 January 1924, 84/4/2.

competitors.⁵² Pressure intensified in 1938, with the imposition of more bureaucracy and an examination for teachers in the Siamese language. Teachers teaching Siamese now had to take an exam in the language, not only when they first took up a post, but also every time they moved to another school.⁵³ The same year also saw the government favouring English rather than French as the primary foreign language, where French had worryingly become “the object of an inexplicable animosity”,⁵⁴ an attitude that convinced the Vicar-Apostolic that the Siamese government clearly “wanted to eliminate instruction in the French language” from the curriculum.⁵⁵

The intensifying hostility of the constitutional regime towards the Mission’s institutions and France was a real worry for the Vicar-Apostolic. Unlike his counterparts in the Mission of Laos, Vicar-Apostolic Perros was reluctant to appeal to French diplomats on every matter that remotely involved the Siamese authorities, whether local or otherwise. That he should choose to appeal so frequently and emphatically on the subject of the government’s interference in the Mission’s schools suggests that it was indeed a serious matter to him. As the 1930s progressed, the Vicar-Apostolic’s options became increasingly limited. The majority of the indigenous priests had not been prepared for the new restrictions. At the same time, foreign priests who could take advantage of some exceptions, notably the exam in Siamese, were either retiring due to failing health or dying out altogether. The small increase in the number of M.E.P. priests could not cover the shortfall and, as a result, some schools had to be closed since there were no qualified masters or teachers available. Moreover, the government’s interference in the minutiae of the school’s

⁵² B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 4 June 1935, 54/1/37.

⁵³ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 7 January 1938, 54/4/1.

⁵⁴ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 4 April 1938, 54/4/24.

⁵⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 2 June 1938, 54/4/34.

administration, including its timetable and taught subjects, contributed to the erosion of overall standards and thus the schools' attractiveness to the local community.

Ostensibly, the restrictive measures had been introduced as a countermeasure to the proliferation of Chinese schools in Siam.⁵⁶ Since many of the Mission's communities consisted of Chinese ethnic minorities, the measures also had an indirect impact on its schools. Thus, by 1939, whether by intention or not, the government appeared to be targeting the French. For the French missionaries, the perception that they were now targets was underlined by the attitude of some ministers who chose to display their hostility by addressing French diplomats in English, despite having been educated in France. The Vicar-Apostolic saw such actions as an "open declaration of [their] contempt for [the French] language"⁵⁷ but, as subsequent events proved, hostility went deeper than merely linguistic contempt.

The restrictive laws were arguably the first instance of Thai nationalist ideas intruding into the Mission's traditional spheres of interest. Undoubtedly, the restriction on the teaching of languages, in favour of only Siamese and English, was to have far-reaching effects on the development of the nation – although not always in the way the government hoped. In 1940, the parish school of Holy Rosary Church that had formerly been attended mostly by ethnic Chinese had to stop its teaching of the Chinese language, replacing it with English and Siamese classes – with a special nationalistic emphasis on the latter. At the end of year exam, out of 20 Grade 4 (*Prathom 4*) students, there was only one failure in the Siamese language examination. That student was Siamese.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 7 January 1938, 54/4/1.

⁵⁷ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Minister Plenipotentiary of France, 2 June 1938, 54/4/34.

⁵⁸ B.A.A., Holy Rosary (Calvary) Church School Report, 13 September 1940, 31/4/78.

Church Finances

Religion, of course, does bring large profits, but only to those who are content with what they have.

- 1 Timothy 6:6

Naturally, all of the above work had to be maintained and paid for. In general, the Church's financial situation was volatile and corresponded with the national and global economic conditions at the time. There is no information on the Mission's finances in the 1910s, and the first picture given is of a modest surplus in 1922, which continued to grow until the mid-1920s. After 1922 there was a dramatic growth in the Mission's income, although the initial phase was fuelled by loans, mainly from the Bank of Indochina. The Mission appeared to have invested its resources well, and saw its income reaching a peak in 1926 at 682,195 francs.

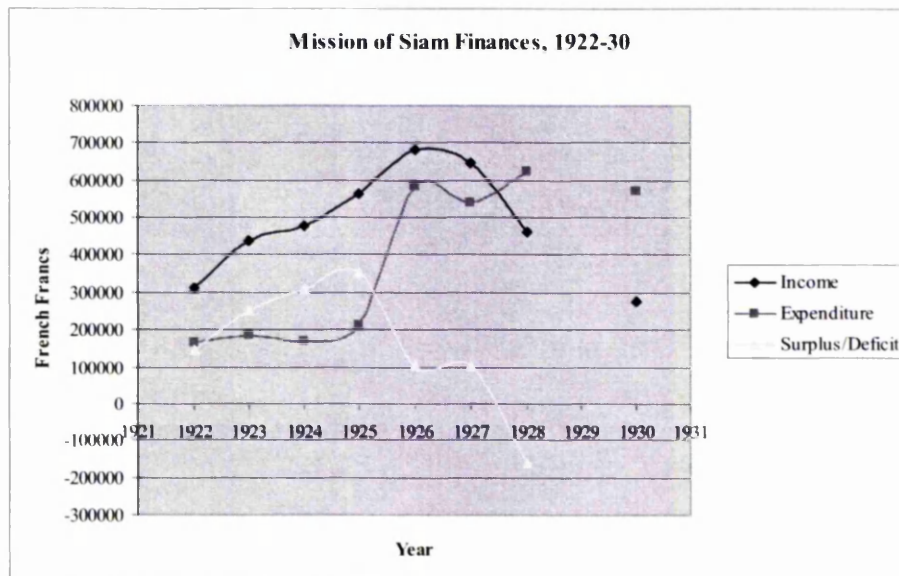


Chart 4. Mission of Siam Finances, 1922-30⁵⁹

Favourable economic conditions did not last because, by 1927, income had declined and by the following year had fallen significantly, albeit not to the level of

⁵⁹ The figures for the year 1929 are unknown: for detailed figures and references, see Appendices G and H.

1922. The Mission experienced its first deficit in 1928 and continued to be in deficit until 1939. The post-1929 descent into deeper deficit was likely the consequence of adverse global economic conditions and the handover of certain assets to the Mission of Ratchaburi.

The outlook was not positive at the beginning of the 1930s. Expenditure still vastly outstripped income, thanks mainly to the Mission's new venture in the north that saw the establishment of many new and expensive institutions – some of which remain in operation today. The nadir was reached in 1932, where the deficit reached an all time high of 396,177 francs. In terms of income, the Mission did not reach the lowest point until 1934 at 168,710 francs, by which point the deficit was coming under control. The Mission was successful in cutting costs and slightly augmenting its income in the following years, although it remained in slight deficit until 1939, when it finally returned a modest surplus of 18,000 francs.

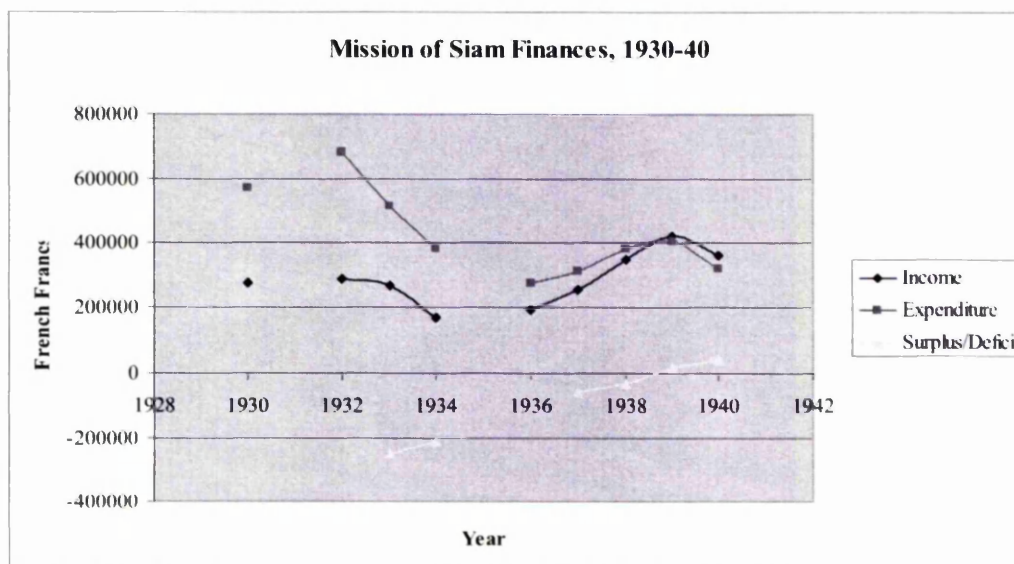


Chart 5. Mission of Siam Finances, 1930-40⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The figures for the years 1931 and 1935 are unknown: for detailed figures and references, see Appendices G and H.

The pattern of the Mission's expenditure during this period is also interesting. Despite its work in education and social provision, the evidence suggests that very little money was being channelled from the central funds directly to this work. It is highly probable that the Mission expected most of its institutions to be independent from central funds after the initial investment. Notably, the Mission had spent nothing on religious provision, presumably because it also expected parishes to be self-supporting after the initial support. However, the same could not be expected for the missionaries themselves and the seminaries which, by their very nature, were not designed to be profitable enterprises. Indeed, the bulk of the Mission's expenditure was dedicated to the upkeep of the missionaries as well as the seminaries. Although some schools and other works did receive subsidies, these were significantly less than the funding allocated to the missionaries and the seminaries.

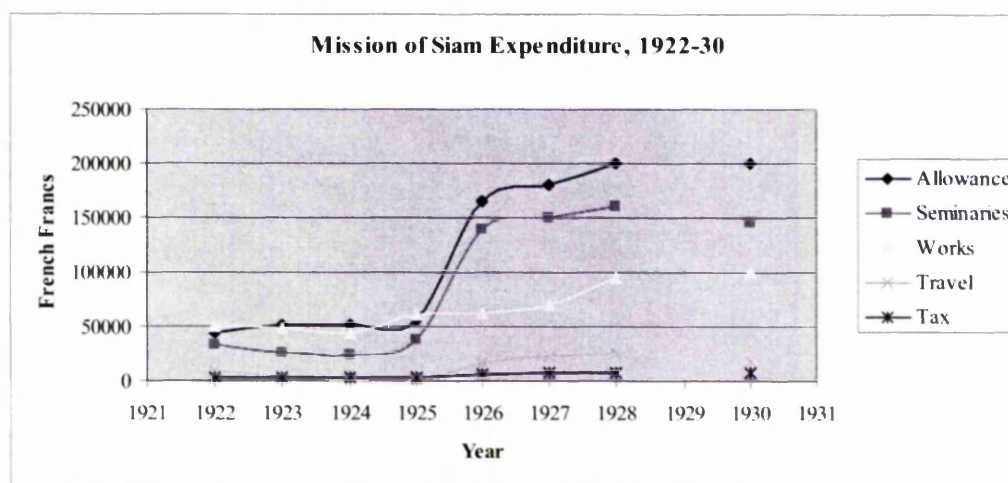


Chart 6. Mission of Siam Expenditure, 1922-30⁶¹

The Mission's allocation for its missionaries, seminaries, and social work took up the majority of its budget. It should be noted though, that there were also

⁶¹ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix I: Mission of Siam Expenditure, 1922-30.

other regular and irregular expenses such as those related to the training of catechists, travelling expenses for missionaries, taxes, repayment of loans, and funds for the maintenance of buildings, but these were not as significant as the allocations listed above. There were, however, some notable exceptions. Between the years 1922 and 1925, the Mission was losing an average of 12,000 francs per year on loan repayments. However this changed in 1926 since the repayments ended and the Mission began a programme of acquisition. Between 1926 and 1932, it had spent a total of around 350,000 francs on acquiring new buildings and assets. Where had the money suddenly come from? Part of the money came from a 1926 business windfall,⁶² but the main factor behind the Mission's long-term increase in income was funding from external sources – particularly from foreign organisations.

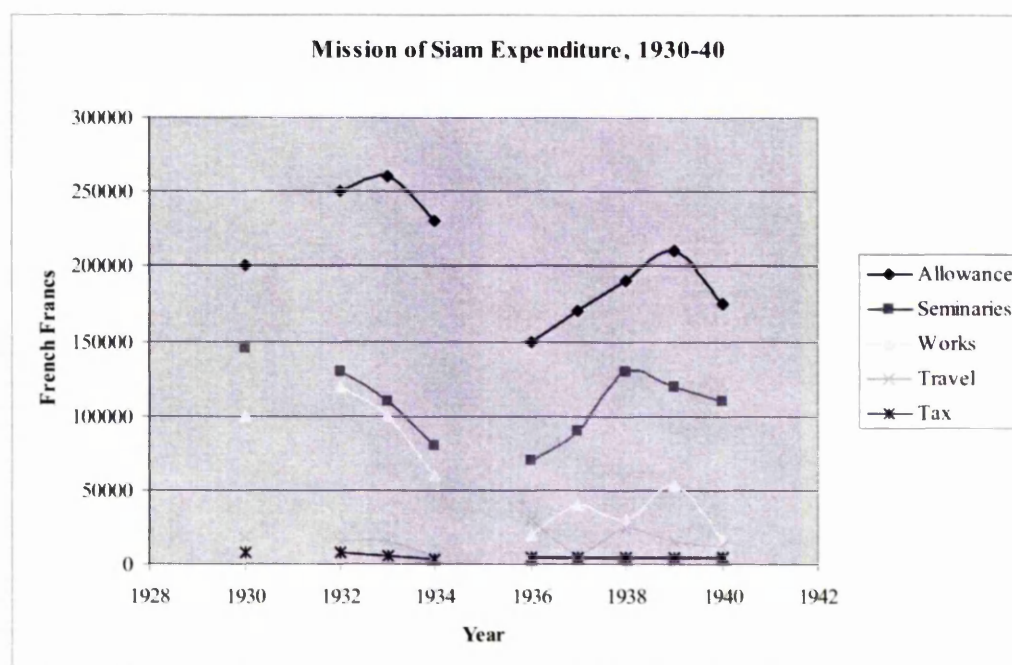


Chart 7. Mission of Siam Expenditure, 1930-40⁶³

⁶² It is unknown what exactly caused the spike, but one possibility is that the Mission had sold some of its shares in various industries, ranging from railways to tin mining. It is also likely that its partnership in the Bo Hae Seng hardware store was performing better than usual, but by itself, this business cannot account for the spike.

⁶³ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix I: Mission of Siam Expenditure (French Francs), 1930-46.

External sources of income would have always been welcomed by the Mission, even without the financial volatility of the 1930s. The question is: just how much did the Vicar-Apostolic rely on this external income, and to what extent did it influence the work and political stance of the Mission?

The Mission derived its income from five major sources: fixed assets, mobile assets, contributions from the Propaganda Fide, contributions from other religious institutions, as well as donations from the faithful and other parties. Although the period 1925-28 saw a significant proportion of the Mission's income derive from its business activities, mainly investment in some local companies such as Bo Hae Seng, a hardware company, and the Mekong Railway Company, the other income sources proved to be more reliable over time.

In addition to its business activities, the Mission also derived income from its fixed assets and donations. However, as Chart 8 below illustrates, the revenue from these sources were unreliable and varied considerably from year to year.

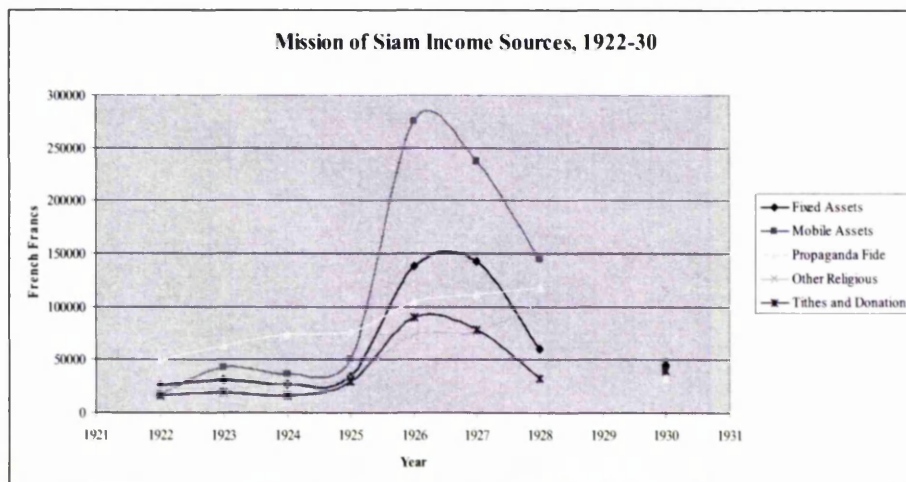


Chart 8. Mission of Siam Income Sources, 1922-30⁶⁴

⁶⁴ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix H: Mission of Siam Income, 1922-47.

In marked contrast to the 1920s, the picture in the 1930s is of a Mission whose income was derived mainly from external sources. The Mission still collected revenue from its fixed and mobile assets but these, by themselves, could not sustain its activities, as indicated by the consistent deficits during this period.

The Mission thus became heavily reliant on income from external sources. Determining the origins of the external income is crucial to understanding the Mission's allegiances and obligations during this period. In the 1940s, the Mission of Siam was accused of being a 'Fifth Column' for the French and one of the methods for confirming whether this allegation was true or not is arguably through the Church's finances. If the clergy were Fifth Columnists, they would have received external subsidies for their 'insurgent' activities.

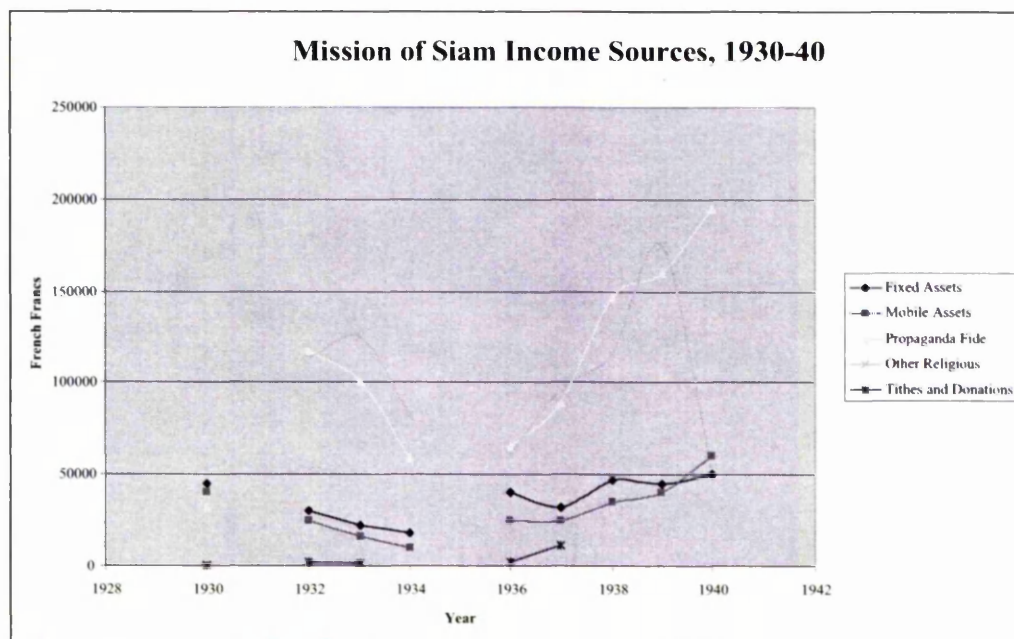


Chart 9. Mission of Siam Income Sources, 1930-40⁶⁵

The Mission of Siam's allegiance to external funding organisations is not so easily fathomed, however, since it received external income from a variety of

⁶⁵ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix H: Mission of Siam Income, 1922-47.

sources. The first sources were organisations that were affiliated with the Church, such as the Propaganda Fide, the Sainte Enfance, and the M.E.P. The second sources were governments, most notably the colonial government of French Indochina. The third sources were private individuals although, unlike the first two, these usually funded the Mission on an occasional rather than a regular basis. Out of all of these, the Propaganda Fide afforded the most in terms of general funding. Subsidies provided by the other groups were normally for a specific purpose only. For example, funding from Sainte Enfance was reserved for children's projects, mainly orphanages, while private donations were usually solicited for a specific cause, such as the construction of a school or the restoration of a church building.

The major obstacle for those arguing that the Mission of Siam had no connection with the French government was the fact that the Mission solicited and received subsidies from the French government in Indochina. The first record of this donation appears in 1927,⁶⁶ and amounted to 1,345 French Indochinese piastres or around 13,450 French francs.⁶⁷ The amount remained constant until 1934,⁶⁸ when the subsidies were calculated and transferred in French francs. The French government in Indochina sent funds to the Mission annually, with the exception of the years 1933, 1936, 1938, and 1943-47.⁶⁹ The trend of the donations suggests that the French colonial government remained consistent in its commitment to the Mission of Siam, in spite of the negative economic conditions. A sense of crisis is palpable in the years 1939 and 1940, when the subsidies increased substantially,

⁶⁶ B.A.A., French Legation to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 15 April 1927, 51/4/19.

⁶⁷ The French Indochinese piastre was on the silver standard until March 1930, when it was pegged to the French franc at the rate of 1 piastre to 10 francs.

⁶⁸ B.A.A., French Legation to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1928, 52/1/3; 1929, 52/2/8; 1930, 52/4/4; 1931, 53/1/16; 1932, 53/2/23; 1933, 53/4/4; 1934, 53/4/42.

⁶⁹ There is a possibility that funds were sent during these years but records have either been lost or destroyed.

amounting to a total of 202,400 francs.⁷⁰ Superficially therefore, the evidence suggests that the Mission of Siam was in the pay of the French Indochinese government and was expected to act in favour of French interests in return. However, this argument becomes problematic under closer examination.

The funding did not come without strings attached because the French Indochinese government imposed conditions where the funding had to be used by specific institutions. Initially in 1927, these institutions were Assumption College and Convent, St. Gabriel's College, St. Joseph's Convent, St. Francis Xavier Convent, and St. Cross Convent. The list did change over time. In 1939, the listed institutions were Assumption College, the Mater Dei Institute, St. Louis Hospital, St. Joseph's School, St. Paul's School (Paetriu), Regina Coeli School (Chiang Mai), and Montfort College (Chiang Mai). Besides these institutions' involvement in education and healthcare, there was an additional common factor among them. They were either run by French-based religious orders or, in the case of the schools, offered tuition in French (alongside other languages).

St. Louis Hospital, for example, had a management board that consisted of the French Minister, the Vicar-Apostolic, the Mission procurator, the hospital's Mother Superior, and one of the hospital's doctors.⁷¹ As a result, with the possible exception of the doctor, the management board would be entirely French. The funding was thus dedicated entirely to 'French' institutions, the ones that would best serve France by spreading its *gloire* in Siam, rather than the running of the whole Mission.

Furthermore, the amount was significantly less than the sums other organisations, such as the Propaganda Fide, were prepared to give. In 1927, the

⁷⁰ B.A.A., French Legation to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1939, 55/1/74-81; 1940, 55/2/47.

⁷¹ B.A.A., P. de Margerie to Fr. Colombet, 27 June 1909, 102/1/7.

contributions of the French Indochinese government amounted to just 12 percent of the amount the Propaganda Fide allocated to the Mission of Siam just for that year. In 1927, the French-Indochina funds were equivalent to only 2 percent of the income of the Mission, while at its maximum in 1939 it equated to around 14 percent of the Mission's total income.⁷² This proportion is considerably less than the Propaganda Fide's contribution. In 1927, the Propaganda Fide subsidies amounted to 17 percent of the Mission's total income, while in 1939 they accounted for some 38 percent. While 1940 saw a significant jump in the French subsidies, where they formed the equivalent of 39 percent of the Mission's income, this was still less than the Propaganda Fide subsidies of that year, which amounted to 54 percent of the Mission's income. The French-Indochina government's generosity appeared to be a one-off, since the proportion fell to around 9 percent of the total income in the following years.

In addition, unlike the French funds, the funding from the Propaganda Fide was general in nature – the Mission was not forced to use it for a specific purpose but could employ it in various projects or use it as part of the missionaries' allowances, as it saw fit. As such, it is arguable that the Mission of Siam was more obliged to the Propaganda Fide than to any other party.

Even so, those who argue that the Propaganda Fide's generosity was born out of some special favour for the Mission of Siam, being located in the only independent territory in Southeast Asia, would be mistaken. Indeed, if anything, the Mission of Siam was rather neglected in contrast to its neighbours. The Propaganda Fide's contribution to the Mission Siam was significantly less than its contribution to some of the other Missions in the region, most notably Cambodia, Korea, and even

⁷² Since the French funding was ear-marked for specific institutions, they did not appear in the general accounts, unlike the subsidies from Propaganda Fide and some of the other Church organisations.

Laos, and even these were not the main foci of the Propaganda Fide. From its spending, the foci of the Propaganda Fide were clearly China and Japan. At best, Southeast Asian Missions were sideshows compared to the achievements of the East Asian Missions and their yet-to-be fulfilled but seemingly limitless potential. The Propaganda Fide's funding seems to reflect the East Asian Mission's progress. From 1923-28, average total Propaganda Fide contributions to Missions in Japan was 778,341 francs per annum, whereas in the same period, average contributions to Siam were only 93,525 francs.

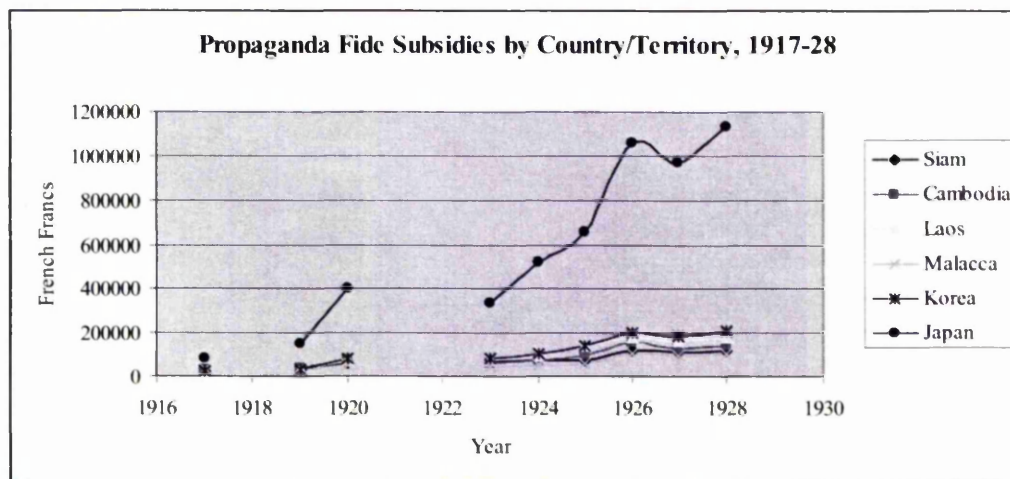


Chart 10. Propaganda Fide Subsidies by Country/Territory, 1917-28⁷³

The conclusion then is that while the Mission appreciated the contributions from the French government of Indochina, they were not crucial to the overall running of the Mission, although they were instrumental in running the Mission's 'French' institutions. Some of these were the Mission's 'flagship' institutions, and their loss would have been a grievous blow to the Mission's prestige and influence, but they certainly did not make up the entirety or even the majority of the Mission's activities. Furthermore, in percentage of income terms, the French subsidies were

⁷³ For detailed figures and references, see Appendix J: Propaganda Fide Subsidies by Country/Territory, 1917-28.

not significant in comparison with other more generous and less restrictive sources.

Technically, it was the 'French' institutions that were obliged to the French-Indochina government rather than the entirety of the Mission.

But nationalistic mobs rarely dwell on such fine technicalities. It seems that it was not how much or how little the Mission received from the French Indochinese government, or indeed the obligations, or lack thereof, that came with the funding that mattered. What really mattered were the implications of accepting funding from such a source in the first place. In the 1920s and even up to the late 1930s, the source of the Mission's funding was not controversial but was indeed useful in maintaining the Mission in difficult economic times. However, by 1940, it had left the Mission of Siam dangerously exposed politically as well as financially.

III

The Church in Siam, 1909-39

*To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.*

- William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

In order to understand the nature of the persecution, it is vital to examine the historical background not only at the macro but also at the micro level. At the macro level, it appeared as if the most difficult challenge facing the Mission of Siam during this period was not the threat of persecution but a severe lack of funding. Nevertheless, superficially, the Mission was secure; its activities were expanding and appreciated by the elite and general society. Furthermore, rather than being disunited by the diverse ethnic composition of its congregation, the Mission's cohesion was reinforced by the common faith in Catholicism. Indeed, there is no record of internal ethnic conflict within the Mission, while authorities did not make ethnicity an issue in its dealings with the Catholic communities.

Historians of the anti-Catholic persecution are thus left in a quandary. Given the apparent secure position of the Church in pre-1939 Siam, the later explosion of random violence against Catholics is surprising. The Mission's position was certainly influential, given the number of its converts and its role in education. But its influence during this period did not in any way impinge on the conduct of daily government business. There is also the problem of inconsistencies in the persecution. As seen in the introductory section, while nuns and teenage girls in the borderlands who had little to do with the Church leadership were subject to horrific violence, the Vicar-Apostolic, who was head of the Mission and resident in the capital, never

came to harm. These discrepancies raise the question whether the most violent anti-Catholic persecution was merely a local phenomenon rather than part of a pan-national movement? If so, would local conditions in pre-persecution times be able to account for the discrepancies in the levels of persecution across the country? Finally, did the activities of the Mission in these areas in any way contribute to encouraging a backlash against them?

This chapter has been divided into five separate sections: Bangkok and the central plain, the west, the north, the east, and the northeast. While this division is somewhat arbitrary, they follow the demarcations used by both the state and the Mission. Furthermore, although some problems such as the shortage of priests and minor conflicts with the local authorities were common to more than one, specific region, each region appeared to have its own unique problems and assets. It is arguable that these factors, which seemed insignificant at the time, acted as 'lenses' during the persecution period, where they came to determine the intensity of the anti-Catholic violence.

Bangkok and the Central Plain

Go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

- Matthew 28:19-20

As the seat of the Mission of Siam's Vicar-Apostolic, Bangkok was the administrative nerve-centre of the Mission, while some of its parish priests were also responsible for outlying parishes in the Central Plain. In general, the parishes in Bangkok were more prosperous in terms of their economic activities and more diverse in their ethnic composition than many of their provincial counterparts. Bangkok proved to be as ethnically diverse as the old capital of Ayutthaya,¹ and the ethnic composition of the city's parishes reflected this reality. Francis Xavier Church, for example, was a haven for ethnic Annamese (Vietnamese) Catholics. Holy Rosary² and Santa Cruz Churches were supported by a predominantly Chinese following with a small minority of Portuguese descendants, whilst the Church of the Immaculate Conception³ had a strong Khmer community. The presence of these ethnic groups was reflected in the priests' correspondence, lists of financial donors, as well as other miscellaneous documents such as wills, catechist documents and correspondence from local authorities. The Chinese, in particular, were easily identifiable by their names. Often they and others who mention them would prefix

¹ During his embassy to Ayutthaya in 1685, the Chevalier de Chaumont noted the presence of "Moors" (Turks, Persians, Moguls, Golcondas, and "those of Bengal"), Malays, Peguans, Laotians, Cochin-Chinese, Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, and even Armenians – see Chevalier de Chaumont (trans. M. Smithies), *Aspects of the Embassy to Siam, 1685* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 1997), pp. 82-6. In addition, de la Loubère also mentions and maps the presence of the Chinese, Macassars, and Japanese communities, see Simon de la Loubère, *The Kingdom of Siam* (Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1969), pp. 6-7 and p. 112.

² Also known as 'Kalahwa' or 'Calvary Church'.

³ Also known as 'Conception Church'.

their names with “Jin” or “Jek”⁴ to indicate their ethnicity. In formal Thai-language documents they would also sign with Chinese characters indicating that the Church accepted these idiosyncrasies.

Much of the strength of these parishes derived from their relatively longer history (rivalled only by the eastern parishes) as well as access to a greater number of facilities, social connections, and opportunities, befitting capital district parishes. Holy Rosary Church, for example, was dominated by members of the Chinese migrant community that was heavily involved in business. On the other hand, Assumption Cathedral acted as an important centre for Catholic expatriates, while its schools attracted a wide range of clientele from the sons of ministers to orphans. Indeed, a major part of the Mission’s ‘influence’ derived from these schools and its healthcare provisions, which were active and visible manifestations of the social benefits of the Catholic Mission. In the words of one French observer, the missionaries were not only working “for the conversion of the souls but also for the development of the minds”.⁵

While Vicar-Apostolic Perros did not break from the longstanding tradition of providing educational facilities in all parishes,⁶ undoubtedly the provision in Bangkok was more lavish. It can be argued that, in the absence of mass conversions, the Catholic presence in Siam during this period, and up to this day, has been built on the twin pillars of education and health. The institutions in Bangkok acted effectively as the shining paragons of this principle. At the same time, the facilities also served to enhance the reputation of the Catholic Church in various quarters of society and gave the Mission access to a network that it otherwise may not have had.

⁴ Usage of the words in the modern day is, at best, politically incorrect, at worst, gravely insulting.

⁵ M. Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2002), p. 147.

⁶ Along with a chapel and a priest's residence, a school would usually be set up in new parishes.

The success of the Bangkok ventures would be instrumental in encouraging similar developments elsewhere during this period, most notably in the north. Thus, while it can be said that the Church had failed in its original mission to effect mass conversions, it had succeeded spectacularly in fulfilling the divine command to “go, therefore, and teach all nations”.

Education, Healthcare, and the Social Network

The Reverend Fathers of the Assumption had brought nothing but good – and great good – to the country.⁷

- King Prajadhipok, 1926

The role of Assumption College in fostering useful social networks is particularly interesting since it highlights the effectiveness of these networks in producing results and, at the same time, suggests that the relationships within these networks were based as much on loyalties to individuals as to institutions. Nowhere is this effectiveness more evident than in the role of Fr. Emile Colombet in the establishment and initial running of the school. Ostensibly, Fr. Colombet was just another parish priest, although his status was confirmed by his appointment in 1907 as pro-vicar apostolic.⁸ Yet, he appeared to have an equal if not superior status vis-à-vis Siamese society than his actual superior. By the time of his death in August 1933, he was a chevalier in the Légion d'Honneur and had also been inducted into the Siamese Order of the White Elephant.⁹ Although Vicar-Apostolic Perros too would eventually receive a decoration from the Légion d'Honneur in 1930,¹⁰ it seems

⁷ 'Assumption College: Notable Royal Visit', *Bangkok Times*, 7 May 1926.

⁸ The position was largely a ceremonial post in normal circumstances, but should the vicar-apostolic become incapacitated or otherwise prevented from carrying out his duties, the pro-vicar apostolic was authorised to take over as caretaker until the situation could be permanently resolved.

⁹ M.E.P.A., Fr. Emile Colombet – Notice Necrologique, *Compte-Rendu* 1933.

¹⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros made Chevalier in Légion d'Honneur, July 1930, 73/1/22.

that he would not integrate so well into Siamese society.¹¹ Most of the time, this was due to differences in character. Vicar-Apostolic Perros took a more meditative and detached approach to problems, while Fr. Colombet was very much pro-active.

Like many of the missionaries of the M.E.P. during this period, Fr. Colombet was immediately dispatched to Siam shortly after he was ordained in 1871, aged 22. While Vicar-Apostolic Perros's background prior to his appointment saw him training in the local languages and his work confined mostly to the seminary with a brief stint in a provincial parish, Fr. Colombet was much more active. On his appointment as resident priest to Assumption Cathedral in 1875, Fr. Colombet observed that the parish lacked a school and so he proceeded to set one up. Against many initial obstacles – he was unable to find instructors and funding – a school was eventually established. In many ways, this school was visionary and, in terms of its language provisions, ahead of its time. The school was to be open to children of all religions and taught standard subjects such as history, geography, physics, chemistry, music, art, and mathematics. Notably, while the college prospectus stated that “moral education” would be provided, there is no mention of a formal course in religious studies. Thus, in spite of priests running the school, the provisions were largely secular. Also remarkable was that, for the first time in Siam, instruction was offered in English and French alongside Siamese.¹² In this regard, the school could be regarded as the first (and, in some ways, superior) incarnation of the ubiquitous International Schools of the present day.

Despite its visionary curriculum, at the beginning of 1885, the parish school had only 80 pupils. However, what happened next is a testament to the power of patronage and networks in Siamese society as well as the elite's interest in modern

¹¹ He did not receive the Siamese honours bestowed on Fr. Colombet.

¹² B.A.A., The Assumption College Bangkok Prospectus, Undated, 73/3/2.

education during this period. Within a few years of the school opening its doors, Fr. Colombet was able to court the interest and patronage of some of the highest personalities in Siamese society. The most prominent of these were members of the royal family and the prince-ministers, whose involvement spurred others to follow their example. Regardless of how the priest had procured their support, the results were clear. In January 1887, Prince Devavongse approved Fr. Colombet's plans to expand the school into a college, the main difference being that the college was open to everyone rather than just to those within the parish jurisdiction. Thus the school was opened to a wider market. Significantly, King Chulalongkorn as well as many princes and officials of the court paid subscriptions to support the plan. The king contributed 4,000 francs, while the queen donated 2,000 francs.¹³ Royal interest in the venture continued in the succeeding generations and was expressed through official visits, such as one made in May 1926, when King Prajadhipok praised and acknowledged the work of the missionaries in Siam and the monarchy's role in encouraging these developments:

[The King] said in reply that the Kings of Siam had always encouraged missionaries, particularly the Assumption College. More particularly King Chulalongkorn and King [Vajiravudh] had always realised the boon that had been conferred on Siam by the establishment of the Assumption College... For the Siamese nation, it was a good thing. His Majesty was pleased that his predecessors had seen fit to encourage missionaries, for the Reverend Fathers of the Assumption had brought nothing but good – and great good – to the country.¹⁴

Although the statement glosses over more troubling aspects in the past relationship between the state and missionaries, the message for the 1920s was clear enough – the monarchy saw the value of the work of the missionaries and was

¹³ M.E.P.A., Fr. Emile Colombet – Notice Necrologique, *Compte-Rendu* 1933.

¹⁴ 'Assumption College: Notable Royal Visit', *Bangkok Times*, 7 May 1926.

willing to encourage their development. It is arguable that what mattered was not so much the scale of the monarch's financial or political contribution to the missionaries' projects, but the fact that the King consented to give in the first place, thereby spurring others to follow. The local press also helped to advertise the cause to the local European expatriate communities, and more donations continued to flow in. When the College had finally completed its expansion in 1889, the number of its pupils had increased to 400. This number was still modest, especially by modern standards, but it would continue to grow throughout this period. By the time of Vicar-Apostolic Perros's appointment in 1909, the school's population was nearing 1,000, and by the time of King Prajadhipok's visit in 1926, numbers stood at around 1,700.¹⁵

The schools were not the only institutions that received royal and general patronage. The Mission's other venture, St. Louis Hospital, was also a subject of royal interest. Prior to its formal opening in 1898,¹⁶ during the time of Vicar-Apostolic Vey, Bangkok still lacked hospitals that could cater to the needs and expectations of the European expatriate community. Although St. Louis Hospital was not the first medical institution to be established in Bangkok, observers were generally impressed with the results:

If one might venture to sum up the general opinion expressed, it might be put that Bangkok was genuinely surprised to find so splendid a hospital opened in its midst. Indeed the new institution is so complete in all its details, and so admirably suited for the purpose, that a good many asked the question 'Is it not too good for Bangkok?'¹⁷

Apart from its facilities, one of the hospital's distinguishing characteristics was its pricing policy. In-patients were ranked into three different tiers and paid

¹⁵ 'Assumption College: Notable Royal Visit', *Bangkok Times*, 7 May 1926.

¹⁶ The hospital had already been operating for some time prior to its formal opening.

¹⁷ B.A.A., 'Other Days in Bangkok', *Bangkok Times*, 16 September 1898, 102/1/15.

according to their “class”. First class patients were Europeans and the “assimilated” – these had to pay 8 baht per night and enjoyed a private room. Second class patients were defined as Eurasians, Chinese, and Siamese. The fees they had to pay were significantly less at 4 baht, and they would also have access to a private room, although if the hospital was full they might have to share with one other patient of the same class. The people in the third class, which included anyone who was too poor to pay the top-tier fees, had to pay only 2 baht per night but were allowed use only of the general ward. The standard of treatment for all tiers was the same, the only differences being the amenities available. The hospital appeared to have been popular; certainly its usefulness was appreciated and it was one of the few works of the Mission that was not shut down entirely during the Second World War. Royal patronage for this institution was usually manifested in the form of donations, such as the 1,000 baht given by the Queen on the occasion of her birthday in 1929.¹⁸

The assistance that Fr. Colombet received is a testament to his personal ability to mobilise Siamese social networks to further the Mission’s interests.¹⁹ It also served to highlight the networks’ utility to the Mission and stimulated the idea of the Church cultivating a network of its own, rather than having to rely on the network of others, and that if, for example, a former pupil became the interior minister, they could appeal directly to him. The question was how could the Church achieve this objective?

Conversions were an obvious and direct method, but this was unreliable since it was rare for Siamese in the higher echelons of society to convert. Even if there

¹⁸ B.A.A., HM’s Privy Purse Department to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 31 December 1929, 102/1/33.

¹⁹ From the available accounts, Fr. Colombet was exceptionally kind. For example, Phraya Anuman Rajdhon, a former pupil of Assumption College, did not mince words when it came to the severity of the discipline meted out by some of the teachers. Nevertheless, he only had kind words for Fr. Colombet and his reasonable and humble personality that probably helped to endear him to the Siamese elite, see Sthirakoses, *Looking Back: Book One* (Chulalongkorn University Press, Bangkok, 1992), p. 320.

were the rare converts from this section of society, some came under heavy family and social pressure to return to their original religion, thereby limiting the utility of the connection. This method was thus problematic and had the potential to backfire on the Mission. However, the success of Assumption College provided the missionaries with an alternative solution. Since it was clear that the Mission would be unable to construct a powerful network through direct conversions, the next best option was to establish a network with those whose views of the Mission and its works would be favourable, even if they would never convert to Catholicism. By the time of Vicar-Apostolic Perros's appointment, the Mission was certainly attuned to the need for the latter network, as can be seen in a 1923 report:

We have, next to the Church of St. Francis-Xavier a College for boys or affluent students. It is urgent that we establish a similar institution for girls. It is by this method that we can reach the high classes of society, who influence everything here.²⁰

The colleges, schools, their alumni societies, and hospitals were ideal vehicles for just such an undertaking. To encourage non-Catholics to apply, the major schools and colleges stressed that they "in no way concentrated on the propagation of religion as the principle plank in its curriculum. The boys were free to follow their own religious upbringing. The Brothers did not encourage criticism of any religion". Curiously, Fr. Colombet is quoted as saying that "Education should be based on *Dharma*".²¹ Notwithstanding the religious freedom, the schools did manage to effect conversions but the numbers were small. During this period the annual figures rarely broke into double digits.

²⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros Report, 8 September 1923, 40/4/11.

²¹ B.A.A., Assumption Cathedral, 1 September 1935, 31/1/10.

The majority of students who attended the Mission's schools were Buddhists rather than Catholics. Yet it could be seen that they formed connections to the school, the Mission, and to each other through the alumni networks. In the case of Assumption College, Fr. Colombet set up the Assumption Alumni Society in 1904 and, by the time of his death in 1933, the network had blossomed. The extent of the network can be seen in a meeting of the Assumption Alumni Society in 1933, at which it was decided that an orphanage would be set up to honour the late founder of Assumption College. The meeting was reported in local newspapers and one speaker at the event was confident that:

Old Assumptionists were scattered all over the Kingdom, and it should be an easy matter if one and all put their shoulders to the wheel to establish an institution [the orphanage]. Old Assumptionists were to be found in all walks of life, but there was no doubt they had sufficient influence to carry their project through.²²

A committee was then set up to oversee the project, and its composition reflected the diversity of the school. Out of thirty members of the committee, there were 1 *Mom Chao*, 13 *Phrayas*, 1 *Phra*, 4 *Luangs*, and 5 Chinese, with members of the European expatriate community and one ordinary Thai rounding off the committee.²³ One year later, the Association was able to solicit donations from virtually all sections of upper class society, ranging from the king (1,000 baht), prime minister (100 baht), and a number of *Chao phrayas* and *Phrayas*, to the French Legation (275 baht) and the Bank of Indochina (205 baht).²⁴

The networks were not solely confined to the Assumption College, however. Indeed, the popularity and success of the Assumption College led to the establishment of other schools along similar lines that proved to be equally popular

²² B.A.A., Fr. Colombet's Memorial, 1 September 1935, 31/1/10.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'The Late Père Colombet', *Bangkok Times*, 16 October 1934.

and, in turn, formed their own networks. St. Gabriel's College in Samsen and the Mater Dei Institute are cases in point. St. Gabriel was a school for boys run by the same religious order as at Assumption College, while the Mater Dei Institute was the female counterpart to Assumption College run by the Ursulines, although its kindergarten section was, and continues to be, mixed. The most famous alumni of the Mater Dei kindergarten during this period were the then-Prince Ananda Mahidol and Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej, the future King Rama VIII (1935-46) and King Rama IX (1946–present) respectively, while St. Gabriel has since produced at least two prime ministers in modern times, although not necessarily with the same political allegiances.²⁵

Despite the close association of the schools with the aristocracy, the schools did not suffer a decline following the 1932 coup. It was clear, however, that the attitudes within and outside the school were changing. The change was epitomised by a student-led strike at Assumption and St. Gabriel Colleges in September 1932. The ring-leaders of the strike were Somchit Joti Dilok, son of Colonel Phraya Aphai Songkhram (who became a cabinet minister in the 1934 government), Charoon Siddhisen, son of Phra Pramod Krayanukich, and Sukri Vasuvat, a nephew of an Assembly member. Three demands were put forward to the directors of the colleges. The first was for a reduction in tuition fees. The second was for the colleges to grant holidays on major Buddhist festivals: one day for *Vesakha Bucha* (the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha), another for *Makha Bucha* (a day traditionally reserved for the veneration of the Buddha on the full moon day of the third lunar month), and three days for *Khao Pansa* (the start of the Rains Retreat, also known as “Buddhist Lent”). The third demand was for the reinstatement of

²⁵ General Surayud Chulanont (1 October 2006-29 January 2008) and Samak Sundaravej (29 January 2008-9 September 2008) being the most recent.

Sakul Samsen, a son of another Assembly member, who had been expelled from the school for wearing a “comical” costume to school.²⁶

Apart from revealing the illustrious clientele of the Colleges, the incident was the first in the history of the school in which religion had become an issue of contention. Indeed, a year earlier, at an Old Boys’ gathering, an alumnus gave a speech that addressed the same matter but with a radically different approach:

This College is a cosmopolitan institution...composed of many nationalities and many creeds. To make the point clearer I wish to say that on one occasion when I came across a statement in the Press that the Saint’s day of one of the Reverend Brothers had been successfully celebrated, and as the said Brother happened to be one of my past teachers, I sent a letter of apology to the effect that I could not be present because I believed that the occasion was related with religion. The said Brother sent me a reply, thanking me and saying that, ‘An Assumptionist has no concern with caste or religion, except the one word *Assumptionist* only’. This is what I consider cosmopolitan.²⁷

Apart from causing a temporary and very public closure of the two Colleges, and striking terror into the hearts of busy parents who had to unexpectedly take back their sons, the boys’ demand for Buddhist holidays was the first sign of a shift in social attitudes. Religion had emerged as an issue of contention. The fact that many of those involved were connected to figures in the new constitutional government probably did not give the Mission much comfort. Not that the members of the government would automatically applaud the actions of their children, even if observers suspected that the students were merely following in the footsteps of their parents, as one newspaper article noted:

Bangkok is keenly interested in this movement on the part of its youth... The members of the People’s Association²⁸ must be particularly pleased that the school-boys are to be taught a very plain lesson, for most people are

²⁶ ‘Schoolboys on Strike’, *Bangkok Times*, 9 September 1932.

²⁷ ‘Assumption College: Old Boys’ Dinner’ in *Bangkok Times*, 30 March 1931.

²⁸ That is, the People’s Party or *Khana Rasadon*.

asking if the strike is not meant as an imitation of the movement that led to the formation of the Association.

The same article also noted that, on learning of the incident, the parent of Sakul Samsen (the student at the centre of the boys' third demand) had "hastened to the Assumption College to inform the Rev. Brothers that he did not side at all with his son... He further approved of the action of the Director in so expelling the youth, whom he really had little use for and did not care to recognise as a son".²⁹ In addition, Vice-Admiral Phraya Rajawangsan,³⁰ the Minister of Defence (1932-3), came in person to express his sympathy for the school directors and to "make a personal enquiry as to when the school would be reopened because he also happens to have a son at the College".³¹ Public opinion at the time was also very much against the actions of the students, and one parent was worried that the students had been too influenced by the recent political disorder:

A compromise never solves a problem; and where there is departure from principle, there must be confusion. Now, there seems to be a departure from principle evidencing itself in the activities of the Government and civil life. What can be the result? Chaos! For without discipline, there can be no efficiency.³²

The opinions of the public and the influential were thus on the side of the Catholic school directors, allowing them to expel the ringleaders and punish the rest as appropriate. Furthermore, in response to the boys' demands, the directors argued publicly that they had already reduced tuition fees in more than 400 cases, while around 70 students paid no fees at all. This figure did not include the 80 boarders

²⁹ B.A.A., Unknown newspaper clipping, Undated, 72/1/50.

³⁰ Born in 1886, Vice-Admiral Phraya Rajawangsan was the chief of staff of the navy in 1932. He became the Siamese Minister in Paris in 1936 and died in 1940. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 373.

³¹ 'That School Strike', *Bangkok Times*, 15 September 1932.

³² 'Correspondence: Schoolboys on Strike', *Bangkok Times*, 11 September 1932.

who did not have to pay anything for their board and lodging, tuition fees, clothes, and books. As for the issue of the Buddhist holidays, they argued that “no objection is ever raised when parents ask for such days off for their sons. But the College cannot give holidays for every nationality”.³³ The crisis was thus resolved but the sudden assertion of Buddhism’s paramount status in what had been largely a secular and cosmopolitan institution was the first sign that all may not have been well in the new order inaugurated by the 1932 revolution.

For the remainder of the 1930s, the Bangkok schools encountered no more trouble from its students. By all accounts, the schools continued to maintain their popularity and networks right up to the outbreak of the Thai-French conflict, in spite of increased interference from the Siamese educational authorities. Indeed, the Siamese government’s later efforts at standardising education resulted in a lowering of standards in many of the Mission’s schools. Reforms made the teaching of Siamese compulsory and imposed tighter restrictions on who was qualified to be headmasters and teachers.

Chinese schools were supposedly the target of the former legislation, but Catholic-run schools were inevitably affected by both, where some teachers were disqualified because of their lack of Siamese language abilities, while the provision of tuition in English was advocated by the government at the expense of other languages such as Chinese and French. The parish schools thus had to be brought into line with the state regulations,³⁴ or closed down altogether.

After Fr. Colombet’s death in 1933, the Catholic Church’s correspondence with figures in the government dwindled significantly, although this development may have had more to do with the change from an absolute to a constitutional

³³ ‘Schoolboys on Strike’, *Bangkok Times*, 9 September 1932.

³⁴ B.A.A., Fr. Ollier to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 11 September 1940, 31/4/77.

monarchy. Even if the 1932 coup had weakened the bond between the Church and the Siamese government, it did not mean that the latter would automatically become hostile to the former. Indeed, the evidence suggests that at this stage the state still valued the Catholic Church's contributions to society. What was lacking was the dynamo of personal relationships. The funeral of Fr. Colombet on 26 August 1933 vividly illustrates this point. In attendance on the day were Prime Minister Phraya Phahon and various government officials, together with members of the diplomatic corps, as well as more than 2,000 other mourners.³⁵

Like many missionaries of the M.E.P. during this period, Fr. Colombet ended up spending more time in his adopted country than the country of his birth, to which he returned only once – and that was for the purpose of soliciting the support of the Brothers of St. Gabriel for his new school, which he obtained. Siam had a place for Fr. Colombet and many like him. Thailand, however, would prove to be a different place. Thus, while the funeral of Fr. Colombet was for a “great Frenchman”, as the M.E.P. obituary put it, it was also the end of an era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the parishes in Bangkok well illustrate the diverse ethnic composition of Catholicism in the capital. This diversity was especially apparent during the early period, fading as communities learnt to integrate into general society or were forcefully integrated as part of a formal government policy, as was the case during the first Pibul government, where the labels such as Thai-Chinese, Thai-Malays, Thai-Vietnamese were abolished in favour of the general catch-all label of “Thai”.³⁶

³⁵ M.E.P.A., Fr. Emile Colombet – Notice Necrologique, Compte-Rendu, 1933.

³⁶ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p. 133.

That the diverse ethnic groups were able to integrate this religion in the early period without any apparent problems indicate that religion at this stage did not clash with these ethnic identities but was arguably to be regarded as a complementary component. The Chinese and the Vietnamese did not stop regarding themselves as Chinese or Vietnamese upon conversion. They were Chinese and Catholic, Vietnamese and Catholic, or Siamese and Catholic where ethnic and religious identities were not mutually exclusive.

Arguably, the Mission played a role in perpetuating these dual identities through their tolerance of this diversity and its willingness to cater for the different needs and idiosyncrasies of the various groups. These special provisions were not unique and can also be observed in other regions, particularly the east. However, in the capital, this aspect was especially distinctive in its treatment of the ethnic Chinese parishes, where the need for Chinese-language education was catered for and where important documents such as wills and contracts were processed either in a mixture of Thai and Chinese or purely in Chinese. These idiosyncrasies were gradually eliminated over time through legislation such as those regarding education (where teaching in the Siamese language became more emphasised) and the aforementioned re-labelling of ethnic minorities.

Furthermore, as can be seen from the establishment of the Assumption College, indirect support (that is, support from those who did not convert) also cut across class boundaries. In Bangkok, the Mission was patronised by both the elite of society, as well as immigrants who may not have had such long-established roots. Elite support at this pre-1932 stage also supports the argument that the nationalism of King Vajiravudh, despite its new Buddhist emphasis, was not imposed on the Missions. Changes in this policy only became apparent after 1932. The student

strike in September 1932 suggests that a more demanding form of nationalism had penetrated the youth but remained unsupported by the elite at the time, as can be observed from the reactions of the students' parents.

Elite support for the work of the Missions was arguably influenced by three factors. The first was the Siamese desire to modernise; the missionary schools and hospitals were effective (although, by no means, the only) vehicles to achieve this objective. The second, and related, factor was the pressure of colonialism. The Siamese government simply could not afford to furnish western powers with an excuse to increase their demands, especially given the role the grievance of missionaries had played in the run up to the Paknam incident in 1893. The final factor to take into consideration was the dynamics of personal relationships, in particular between Fr. Colombet and the prince-ministers of the court. In the light of the subsequent success of Assumption College, the Mission had clearly formed a positive and effective relationship with the ruling classes, which held firm until the coup d'état in 1932.

However, paradoxically, the case of Fr. Colombet and his role in establishing the Assumption College also demonstrates the key weakness of the relationship: the reliance on personal rather than institutional contact. Although, judging from the parents of the rioting boys in the Mission's capital schools, the new post-1932 elite continued to patronise Mission-run institutions (again, emphasising the cross-class appeal of the schools), the relationship between the constitutional government and Vicar-Apostolic Perros clearly had different dynamics from that between Fr. Colombet and the absolutist government. Most notably, the Vicar-Apostolic did not solicit any support, financial or otherwise, on behalf of the works in Bangkok or indeed anywhere else from the Siamese government.

There are a number of factors to take into account in analysing this difference in approach. The first factor could be the Vicar-Apostolic's desire to separate ecclesiastical interests from that of the state, as according to the 1909 Papal encyclical, *Maximum Illud*. However, as Chapter II has shown, the Vicar-Apostolic was not adverse to accepting money from the government of French-Indochina during the 1930s. A second, more plausible factor, is the political turbulence that followed 1932 as well as the global economic depression that continued to affect the country, both of which would make any such campaign for finance from the government difficult. The third, and arguably most compelling factor, was that the Vicar-Apostolic was simply not inclined to get involved with the post-1932 government. As can be seen later in this chapter, in his arrangements for the schools in Chiang Mai, the Vicar-Apostolic preferred to work directly with religious orders rather than the government. This approach is a direct contrast to that of Fr. Colombet, who went first to the influential figures in Siamese society, before soliciting the assistance of the Brothers of St. Gabriel.

However, it cannot be said that the Mission did not attempt to cultivate institutional loyalty. The establishment of the Assumption Alumni Society in 1904 was arguably the first attempt by the Mission to achieve this. The Mission had effectively eliminated the necessity of conversion through the "cosmopolitanism" of the Assumption College. Conversion was no longer a necessary requirement for those wishing to belong to the Catholic network. Undoubtedly, this attitude would have weakened the will to conversion, but on the other hand would expand the Mission's network beyond what it would have been had conversion been the *sine qua non* of admission into the network.

The West

The Catholic Church is not an intruder in any country; nor is she alien to any people. It is only right, then, that those who exercise her sacred ministry should come from every nation, so that their countrymen can look to them for instruction in the law of God and leadership on the way to salvation.

- Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud* (16), 30 November 1919

Despite the Mission of Siam's successes in the fields of health and education, its expanding activities placed both personnel and financial resources under severe strain. The achievements of the Mission during this period came at the price of massive annual deficits, especially from 1929 onwards. The Mission found itself equally stretched when it came to personnel. In some instances, there were simply not enough priests to cover the needs of parishioners in the areas under the Mission's responsibility. Church records during this period are littered with requests from both parish priests and parishioners for Bangkok to send them additional priests, regardless of whether they were residential or itinerant.³⁷ Sometimes, the Vicar-Apostolic would respond positively but, more often than not, there were no priests available. Furthermore, on occasions when priests were sent, sometimes they were found to be 'substandard' and added to local problems.

The Parish of Saint Antoine (Tha Kwien) in Prachinburi in the east of Thailand illustrated the effect of the overstretch. From the late 1920s, Antonia Himinkum, a female parishioner, had been petitioning Bangkok for a resident priest, since the parish was not being served at all. However as late as 1932, no priest had been sent and the petitioner reported that "because the parish is not in your thoughts, [the parishioners] have all returned to their gentile ways. I have been here at Tha

³⁷ The areas that had a shortage of priests were usually administered by itinerant priests who were based in a "central" and accessible parish. For example, the priest at Conception Church in Bangkok was also responsible for some parishes in Ayutthaya. While the parishioners were glad to have access to a priest, the inadequacy of this measure was often expressed.

Kwien for five years, yet you have never thought of me".³⁸ Nevertheless, the eventual arrival of the requested priest caused additional problems. A letter from the same informant dated May 1935 was a litany of the inadequacies of the priest who had been sent. The informant complained that "he would not pay attention during confessions and preferred to live in comfort", and that the priest would "constantly complain about the difficulties and that he did not want to go to Tha Kwien".³⁹ The last letter in the series, dated August of the same year, saw similar complaints but also indications that local frustration was intensifying because of the troublesome priest and his remarks, such as "The teachers at Tha Kwien cannot be trusted", a comment that would have concerned Antonia, who was a teacher at Tha Kwien.⁴⁰ There are no more letters from this parish after this date. Perhaps the tensions there had somehow been resolved or Antonia had moved, or perhaps even returned to "gentile ways" out of frustration.

Whatever the case, from the early 1920s, the Propaganda Fide had realised that the resources of the Mission of Siam were overstretched, and that this was having an adverse effect on current and future projects. At the same time, the Papal encyclical *Maximum Illud* in 1919 expressed concern over the entanglement of various missionary orders with the interests of the European colonial powers. Thus, during his visit in 1923, Monsignor Léocroart, the Apostolic Delegate, suggested the further division of the Mission of Siam to take some of the administrative burden off the M.E.P.⁴¹

The division aimed to fulfil objectives on two levels. On the ideological level, the suggestion was inspired by the Papal encyclical *Maximum Illud* that

³⁸ B.A.A., Antonia Himinkum to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 10 January 1932, 41/2/11.

³⁹ B.A.A., Antonia Himinkum to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 25 May 1935, 41/2/12.

⁴⁰ B.A.A., Antonia Himinkum to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, August 1935, 41/2/13.

⁴¹ The other earlier division was the creation of the Mission of Laos which covered French-controlled Laos as well as the northeast of Siam in 1899.

encouraged the acceptance of religious congregations from nations other than those of the established missionaries. Thus, for example, the French missionaries in Siam were encouraged to accept missionaries from orders based in the United States or Italy, rather than confining themselves solely to the French religious orders. The intended effect was thus the dilution of the French character of the Church in Thailand, in effect making it more "Catholic". At the same time, the division was potentially a step in forming a local hierarchy, which in turn would lead to the ultimate objective of all Missions, a diocese led and maintained by an indigenous clergy.

On a practical level, the divisions would take some of the burden of administration off the Vicar-Apostolic of Bangkok. The new Missions could also request additional funding from the Propaganda Fide and other agencies as separate entities, and be used to test the leadership abilities of the local clergy. If everything turned out well, then the next step to forming a local hierarchy could then be taken, and if not, then the damage to the Bangkok Mission could be limited and contained.

The Mission of Ratchaburi

My political views are those of the Lord's prayer.

- St. John Bosco

Initially there was some resistance from the M.E.P. to the establishment of new Missions in its Southeast Asian territories. The objections, made confidentially in an M.E.P. circular dated to October 1926, were on the grounds that it would contravene various articles and regulations of the missionary society:

I conclude that the Regulations have not been observed, neither in letter nor in spirit, despite the stipulations of Article 19, the Central Administration and

the Superior of the Society have been excluded from the negotiations affecting the territorial status of the Society, with the risk that one day or another we may only learn that our Vicariates have been modified, divided, or even abolished through the newspapers.

The letter also questioned the authority of the Apostolic Delegate in making the suggestion in the first place:

The Nuncio in a Catholic country is not the Pope; even less so is the Apostolic Delegate in a missionary country. His role is clearly delimited by Canon law 265 and the following regulations. He absolutely cannot take the place of the Bishops in the direction of the Mission and its personnel, nor interfere in the administration.⁴²

In sum, certain Missions under the M.E.P. clearly felt that they would lose out if the Apostolic Delegate's suggestions were implemented. It has to be remembered that at this point, outside of Siam, the M.E.P. was also in charge of the majority of the Missions in Southeast Asia. In some cases, such as Vietnam, these Missions were hard-won with the blood of martyrs. Furthermore, should the order allow another order access to its territory, the existing financial and political benefits would have to be divided. Nevertheless, there is no record that Vicar-Apostolic Perros held similar misgivings. Indeed, the Vicar-Apostolic's actions indicate that practical considerations and the suggestion of the Apostolic Delegate had prevailed over the misgivings over the alleged violation of M.E.P. regulations and Canon Law.

Vicar-Apostolic Perros proposed to split the Mission of Siam further into three parts: Chiang Mai, Bangkok, and Ratchaburi-Chumpon,⁴³ with Ratchaburi-Chumpon the first to be created. In accordance with *Maximum Illud*, a religious order that was noticeably non-French was sought to administer the new Ratchaburi

⁴² B.A.A., M.E.P. Circular. Paris, 5 October 1926, 90/1/9.

⁴³ The northeast was already being administered by the Mission of Laos, and the south was technically under the jurisdiction of the Missions of Malacca and Western Burma, although the absence of parishes in the area during this period meant that authority was not exercised.

Mission. By 1926, the Mission of Siam and the Italian Salesian Society (also known as the Salesians of Don Bosco, or the Society of St. Francis de Sales) had come to an agreement, although the new Mission in Ratchaburi would not be formally set up until June 1930. This religious order was young, having been founded by Don John Bosco in Italy and gaining Papal approval only in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, by 1911 the order had expanded worldwide, with communities in China, Tunisia, South Africa, and the United States. Considering the work of the founder of the Salesians in the field of education⁴⁴ and the development of the young, the order seemed an appropriate choice for the Mission of Siam. The key role of education for the Catholic Church in Siam in effecting improvements in its social standing, establishing valuable social connections, and encouraging conversion has been discussed, and its choice of the Salesians suggests that the Mission of Siam wanted the Salesians to take the same approach.

It is also likely that the Vicar-Apostolic took the ethnic make-up of the parishioners into account when making his decision. Many of the parishioners in the Ratchaburi parishes were ethnic Chinese, mainly from the modern day Chinese provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi. As Vicar-Apostolic Perros wrote flatteringly to a Chinese Salesian abbot in 1933:

Here, the Chinese are numerous, they dominate nearly all commercial activities, the majority of the rice mills, and orchards while the Siamese dedicate themselves to the cultivation of rice. The Chinese are the most active (I might also add intelligent) and enterprising part of the population, and most of our converts come from among them. In many of the Churches, the ministry is conducted in Chinese: prayers, teachings, catechism, confessions, etc. either in the Teochiu or Hakka dialects.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ One of Don Bosco's first works was the foundation of a school in Valdocco near Turin.

⁴⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Yang Kiaping, Abbot of Our Lady of Consolation Monastery, Beijing, 8 March 1933, 90/5/2.

Prior to their arrival in Siam, the Salesians had a base in southern China in Swatow,⁴⁶ and some of the first priests of the order in Siam came from another of the order's bases in Macao. The Salesians were thus more than adequately prepared to look after the ethnic Chinese parishioners.⁴⁷ The agreement between the Mission of Siam and the Salesians, signed on 6 December 1926, relieved the Mission of its authority over the existing parishes in nine areas (Bangchang, Mottanoi, Maekhleng, Wat Phleng, Donkrabuang, Banpong, Bangtan, Tha Wa, and Tha Muang), as well as future parishes in the west and southwest of Siam. The only exception was the seminary at Bangchang, which was to remain under the Mission of Siam until a new seminary could be established.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the land value of these parishes alone was worth around 497,500 baht. Thus, even if a 4,400 baht debt in Donkrabuang was factored in, the Salesians appeared to have sufficient means to operate and expand their Mission.

By themselves, the reforms still could not make up for the shortfall in the number of clergy in the territories administered by the Mission of Siam, as shown by the Tha Kwie case, which occurred after the arrival of the Salesians. However, in Ratchaburi itself, the reforms heralded the arrival of an unprecedented number of missionaries. Between 1927 and 1930, a total of 11 priests, 31 seminarians, and 10 brothers arrived to take up their ministries in the new Mission.⁴⁹ The majority were Italians and, despite their unity in Catholicism, the priests and their methods would soon distinguish them from their French counterparts, much to the latter's chagrin.

⁴⁶ Shantou in present day Guangdong province, China.

⁴⁷ The same considerations may also have been made when authority over the northeast, populated mainly by ethnic Laotians, was ceded to the Mission of Laos.

⁴⁸ This was to be the seminary at Sri Racha, which was closed down during the Pacific War, but has since reopened and continues to operate today.

⁴⁹ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 417.

Integration and Conflict

All for God and for His Glory. In whatever you do, think of the Glory of God as your main goal.

- St. John Bosco

As mentioned, the Salesians' record in education and youth development suggested that the order would integrate well into the structures and precedents established by the M.E.P. missionaries. For the most part, the documents indicate that the Salesians were capable of adapting to the challenges of the new Mission and were largely successful in their work, although not to the extent seen in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. During this period, Ratchaburi did not have a 'flagship' school equivalent to Bangkok's Assumption College, St. Gabriel's or the Mater Dei Institute or Chiang Mai's Montfort school, although it continued to maintain the existing parish schools. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of conflict with the local authorities in the correspondence, suggesting that the Salesians were successful at integrating into local society. Indeed, Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti of Ratchaburi was happy with the order's integration and was enthusiastic at the prospect of continuing his work in Siam, writing in 1934:

The dear people of Siam and the government have embraced the work of the Salesians with sympathy and benevolence. These are blessings of the Lord. We have no other desire than to love and to serve the Nation that has accommodated us, that is Siam. *Chai yo!*⁵⁰

At the same time, given the similarities of their focus, it could be argued that the Salesians were potential competitors to the French establishment in the Mission of Siam. However at this stage there is no evidence that the Vicar-Apostolic of Bangkok saw them as such. On the contrary, the documents suggest that Vicar-

⁵⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti to Kiam Sun, 8 October 1934, 44/4/23.

Apostolic Perros's view regarding the Salesians remained positive, although it would undergo a great change following the events of the 1940s. Nevertheless, at this stage, the inter-clerical friction between the two Missions did not arise from competition. Instead, it was caused mainly by mutual mistrust between the Salesians and the established priests. For example, one priest in Nakhon Prathom complained to Vicar-Apostolic Perros in February 1929 that he was being unfairly accused by a Salesian priest of exchanging a piece of land for another that was not of the same value, as well as for taking a "beautiful" chalice from one of the parishes, despite the fact that both the accuser and the accused had never seen this "beautiful" chalice for themselves.⁵¹

In addition, even if the Salesians attracted fewer complaints than priests in other regions, the majority of these complaints were focused on property matters. The focus on property arguably originated from the order's lack of liquid assets. Superficially, substantial assets had been bequeathed to the Salesians upon the division of the Mission but most was tied up in fixed assets, such as land and buildings. Thus it was necessary that the Ratchaburi Mission convert some of these fixed assets into cash for the smooth running of the Mission. However, the process was fraught with difficulties since sales of fixed assets inevitably led to evictions and other uncomfortable disruption. Some of the difficulties could have been ameliorated through formal contracts. The problem was that, in some parishes, binding contracts had not been understood and/or signed by tenants, which inevitably caused problems when the Church wanted to use the land for other purposes. The parish of Wat Phleng was a case in point, where the Salesian's pursuit of liquidity and the absence of contractual understanding led to a potentially

⁵¹ B.A.A., Parish priest of Nonghin, Nakhon Prathom to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 3 February 1929, 39/1/16.

explosive rift that was repaired only after pressure from, not one, but two M.E.P. Vicars-Apostolic.

The parish of Wat Phleng was one of the existing parishes that was transferred to the Salesians. However, tensions increased in early 1932 when abuses by the parish priests went unnoticed by the local Salesian leadership, despite numerous petitions. In the face of inaction, the desperate local parishioners submitted a petition to Mgr. Isidore Dumortier, the Vicar-Apostolic of Saigon,⁵² after having closed down their church in protest. Significantly, Dumortier did not belong to the Salesian Society but was, like Vicar-Apostolic Perros, a member of the M.E.P. Not that this helped the case at all, since Saigon merely referred the case back to Bangkok.

The letter is significant because it showed the extent of distrust that the parishioners had for the local leadership (both Salesian and M.E.P.) and their ability to address the parish's concerns. By bypassing his authority, the parishioners felt that Vicar-Apostolic Perros was unwilling or unable to act when it came to the Salesians. At the same time, they lacked confidence in Mgr. Pasotti's sense of justice, branding his actions up to that point "a disappointment". The complaints centred on the Salesians' "obsession" with managing parish property rather than attending to matters of the soul. According to the petition, since the time the Salesians had taken charge of the parish, "not one soul has been brought to the knowledge of God". It was clear to the parishioners why this was the case:

The only thing that concerns them is money and, failing that, the expulsion of parishioners from Church land that the parishioners had held and cultivated since the time of their grandparents.

⁵² In the Apostolic Vicariate of Occidental Cochinchina.

The parishioners' claims with regard to their forbears and Church lands suggest that, in this case, the Mission and its tenants had very different understandings of the status of the Church lands. The Mission clearly saw that it was within its rights to do anything with the land, as long as it fulfilled its contractual obligations (if any), while its tenants saw that the land had been given to the Mission to provide a livelihood for local parishioners, and that it should not be sold, especially if the sale would lead to the eviction of Catholics. More specifically, the parishioners blamed the incumbent parish priest for the deteriorating situation:

A great number of the faithful at Wat Phleng have been lost because of Fr. Martin (the parish priest of Wat Phleng), who never reflects before he commences his hunts.⁵³ Later, when he recognises his errors, it is too late, the evil is done, but he claims that he had advised the evictees. An example of one of his victims was Nang Lek, who was chased out and with her went six or seven of the faithful.

Therefore, having reached the limit of their tolerance, the parishioners decided to close down their church. Notably they claimed that this action "does not signify a rebellion or a desecration of sacred things or the saints that we venerate, but it is solely to prevent new scandals that have affected the pagans and the children, leading them to hold negative opinions against the Christian religion and contempt of the holy name of God". Discontent at this stage is thus still couched in a purely religious context. However, the petition also stated that "the local authorities were aware of the state of affairs and are impatiently awaiting the sanction of the Catholic Church".⁵⁴ It is unclear from the letter whether the authorities were waiting to act against the priest or the striking parishioners. Regardless, any intervention by the

⁵³ That is, evictions.

⁵⁴ B.A.A., Parish Petition to Mgr. Dumortier, Vicar-Apostolic of Saigon, 16 March 1932, 42/1/18.

local authorities in the matter would have concerned the Church authorities and spurred them to pre-empt such an embarrassing interference.

In the end, Vicar-Apostolic Perros had to press for a solution to the crisis, suggesting none-too-subtly to his Ratchaburi counterpart that "Easter was a good occasion to restore peace" and that it would be best if a priest that spoke Siamese was sent to celebrate Mass at Wat Phleng.⁵⁵ While at pains to stress that his ministry had not been idle in trying to find a solution, it appears that the prodding from Bangkok (and possibly from Saigon as well) was the key to getting Superior Pasotti to appoint a new parish priest to Wat Phleng. The documents do not indicate whether the new priest was successful in solving the problems left by his predecessors, but the absence of further complaints from Wat Phleng suggests that he was successful, at least in not antagonising the parishioners further. Nevertheless, the entire episode is indicative of the problems that attended the division of the Mission during this period, that is, the need for the Mission of Siam still to intervene or mediate the internal affairs of an apparently independent Mission.

By 1939, the once unified Mission of Siam found itself split into three and, potentially, four parts, given the plans for Chiang Mai. Ratchaburi, the latest of the divisions, was on the whole remarkably trouble-free. The new arrivals rapidly integrated into local society, even if their actions caused minor conflicts between clerics from different religious orders as well as parishioners. Nevertheless the complaints from existing priests during this period were tempered by the fact that the Salesians had been introduced into an area that was not high on the M.E.P.'s priorities. Throughout this period, the M.E.P.'s expansion efforts were focused more

⁵⁵ B.A.A., Report from Vicar-Apostolic to Mgr. Dreyer, Apostolic Delegate, 1 April 1932, 42/1/19.

on the north, with its competing Protestant missionaries, rather than the west or the south. Thus the risk of inter-order 'competition' was minimal.

Yet the separation of the two Missions was also a cause of confusion, some of which proved to be useful during the first half of the Second World War, in light of the fact that much of the anti-Catholic sentiment was couched in anti-French rhetoric. The extent of the confusion can be seen in a Siamese newspaper article which implied that the Mission was undergoing a schism rather than a purely administrative division. The article stated that the Propaganda Fide had instructed the Mission of Siam to divide into two, one governed "purely by Italians" that would "report directly to the Bishop of Rome" and the other "mixed", and would continue to be under Vicar-Apostolic Perros's direction.⁵⁶ In actual fact, both remained directly answerable to the Pope. With regard to the Siamese state, its official recognition of the new Mission and its rights came only in January 1933. The late recognition came about not because of any antipathy on the part of the constitutional government (which, in the event, extended the same rights held by the Mission of Siam to the Mission of Ratchaburi)⁵⁷ but mainly due to the late submission of the request, as well as the political turmoil surrounding the 1932 revolution and its aftermath.

Nevertheless, judging from its actions in the 1940s, the Thai government understood the division to be more than just an administrative reorganisation. Indeed, this perception would have been encouraged by the presence of the Italian leadership that differed from the more familiar French leaders who had been the public face of the Missions of Siam and Laos for several centuries, as well as the noticeable lack of antagonism from the Salesians. Even if the haphazard *ménage* of

⁵⁶ B.A.A., The Roman Catholics to Divide into Two, August 1930, 44/4/5.

⁵⁷ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Superior of M.E.P., 15 January 1933, 44/4/16.

the division still required intervention from Bangkok, the interventions were made in a purely internal manner, with no involvement of either the local or central government. However, as will be seen, the northeast, that had been divided much earlier from the Mission of Siam would present a very different, and more troubling, picture.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be seen that even at this early stage, the Italian identity of this area was already so distinctive that the authorities and the media were already treating the new community as a separate entity from the old French Mission that was based in Bangkok. This outcome was precisely what the papal encyclical, *Maximum Illud*, intended. The identity of a part of the Mission was now distinguishable from the French, who had long dominated missionary efforts in the country in the preceding centuries. After the entry of the Italian Salesians, missionary efforts in Siam therefore could no longer be termed as exclusively 'French'.

Nevertheless, the division did not occur without difficulties. Some problems that should have been localised still required the intervention of the Mission of Siam to solve. In the case of the west, the problems that occurred during this period could arguably be categorised as teething problems. In contrast, as Chapter IV will illustrate, the situation of the Mission in the northeast would reveal fundamental flaws in this system of arbitrarily dividing missionary jurisdictions, especially when these divisions did not conform to national borders.

Externally, the new Mission did not encounter any serious trouble. However, like in the east, internally there were conflicts among the clergy and between the

clergy and the Catholic communities they served. That much of these disputes were about property issues illustrate how Mission property could easily form the centre of local disputes and conflicts, even in peaceful times. It was thus unsurprising that in more economically and politically turbulent times the Missions' properties became instigators of conflicts.

The North

So success is assured. Chiang Mai cannot but become a prosperous mission.

- Mission Report on Chiang Mai, 21 July, 1931

Since their arrival in Siam during the reign of King Narai in the seventeenth century, French missionaries had put themselves at the forefront of missionary activities. While it is true that the Portuguese arrived in Siam first and technically had jurisdiction over the area under the Treaty of Tordesillas, by the 1660s, the Portuguese had long ceased to be a force for significant economic and missionary activities in Siam. Even so, the remaining Portuguese priests belonging to the Goan chapters of the Dominicans and Jesuits continued to resist the *de facto* French supremacy.⁵⁸ Notwithstanding the legalistic quibbles of the Portuguese faction, it can be argued that during their centuries of activity in Siam, French missionaries encountered little in terms of real competition from other Catholic orders and Christian denominations for converts.

However, just as the French missionaries had managed to re-establish themselves in Bangkok, competition arrived in force in the form of Protestant missionaries from various denominations and countries. The first of these that came to the notice of Mission authorities was Karl Gützlaff, a German doctor, and Jacob Tomlin, an Englishman, who were sent to Siam by the London Missionary Society via Singapore in 1828. According to the Vicar-Apostolic of Bangkok at the time (Mgr. Esprit Marie Florens, 1811-34), the two had caused quite a stir by 1929:

We have here a biblist and a doctor of medicine, whom they say is German. They have been giving out a great number of books to the Chinese. One suspects that the number of conversions is being counted by the number of

⁵⁸ D. van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West*, pp. 159-63.

books that have been distributed. I have seen with my eyes that this is without a doubt impossible [i.e. that a person's acceptance of the Protestant missionaries' books meant a conversion]. The good books have been used to make cones for the sweets that the Chinese sell to the public.

The Vicar-Apostolic noted that the king was almost inclined to expel these unfamiliar missionaries, but was persuaded to leave them alone.⁵⁹ The two European missionaries were followed by their mainly American counterparts; the Baptists arrived in 1833, the missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the following year,⁶⁰ the Presbyterians in 1840, and the missionaries of the American Missionary Association in 1851.⁶¹ In their work, the Protestants encountered problems and experiences similar to the Catholic missionaries. For example, the first convert of the Presbyterians in Siam was a Chinese in 1849, while they managed to obtain their first Siamese convert only in 1860 – twenty years after their arrival.⁶²

The approach that the Protestant missionaries took in the face of the failure to effect mass conversion was also similar to that taken by the Catholic missionaries: they devoted themselves to the provision of healthcare and education. Thus, the similarity in approach placed the newcomers in direct competition with the established Catholic missionaries. However, since the Catholic position was already well-entrenched in Bangkok, there was little need for the Catholic Mission to fear

⁵⁹ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 206.

⁶⁰ Dr. Dan Beach Bradley was initially affiliated with this group when he first arrived in Bangkok in 1835. By January 1848 he became associated with the American Missionary Association. Dr. Bradley's missionary efforts were not effective in producing conversions and his legacy lie more in the fields of medicine and printing. In the former field, he was the first to introduce smallpox vaccination to Siam in 1838, while in the latter area he was the founder of Siam's first newspaper, the *Bangkok Recorder* in 1844, an almanac, the *Bangkok Calendar* from 1859, and the printer of Siam's first printed book in Siamese in 1835, whose subject was the Ten Commandments. See Sinlapachai Chanchaloem, *Mo Bradley kab Kring Siam* [Doctor Bradley and Siam] (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1994), pp. 83-88 and Sukanya Sudbanthat, *Mo Bradley kab karn nangsue phim haeng Kring Siam* [Doctor Bradley and the Newspapers of Siam] (Matichon, Bangkok, 1994), pp. 21, 46-51.

⁶¹ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 352.

⁶² R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 353.

competition there. The primary concern in the capital was that some of the more radical Protestants might provoke an official backlash against all Christian denominations by their aggressive methods but, in the end, this fear did not come to pass because the mainstream Protestant denominations became as adept as the Catholics at reading and responding to the sensitivities of Siamese society.

However, the position of Catholicism was different in the north of Siam. Unlike Bangkok, the Mission of Siam had no established presence there prior to the arrival of the Protestants. More importantly, it was one of the Protestant posts outside Bangkok that met with some semblance of success, having established itself in Chiang Mai in 1868 and later expanded to neighbouring provinces such as Lampang (1880), Lamphun (1891), and Phrae (1893). The Protestant missionaries of the Chiang Mai post had first distinguished themselves through the distribution of quinine, used for the treatment of malaria, but later developed to provide educational services as well as a more formal healthcare system in the form of a hospital by 1901. Thus, when the Mission of Siam decided to expand its activities to the north in the 1930s, they found not virgin territory, as in the past, but a well-established Protestant presence that was already conducting similar activities to the Catholic missions elsewhere in the country.

Establishing a Presence

Among the native Protestants, who compose a good part of the population, there is at present a very decided movement towards Catholicism.

- Vicar-Apostolic Perros, July 1933

The Mission was not totally unaware of the developments in the north and had known of the expansion of the Protestant missions in that area. The Mission had

sent two priests to the area to ascertain the situation in 1843, but nothing concrete came of this enterprise. In addition, the limited financial and personnel resources of the Church had been used up in the establishment of the Mission of Laos in the late nineteenth century. Thus, it was only during the ministry of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, beginning in 1909, that the plan for a post in northern Siam returned to the attention of the Mission and, once again, became financially feasible.

The first real sign of the Mission's intention to expand to the north during this period was the sending of two priests to Chiang Mai to reconnoitre the area again in 1914. Following their positive report, some land was brought along the river in Chiang Mai, but further plans were suspended at the outbreak of the First World War when the Vicar-Apostolic, along with a number of other French priests, was recalled to France. The conclusion of the First World War did not guarantee the continuation of the scheme for Chiang Mai. Indeed, efforts were still hampered by the lack of personnel and financial resources and it was only in 1930, ironically in the midst of a global economic depression, that the first real effort was made to establish a Catholic presence in Chiang Mai.

The pre-existence of hospitals and schools built and run according to a European model in the area meant that the Mission could not afford to take the standard approach of establishing a chapel, a small parish school, and possibly a few other facilities, since these would not stand out from the competition. The Mission clearly required something more outstanding, and was more than willing to seek loans and run up deficits and even personal debts in pursuit of this goal. For example, the Vicar-Apostolic would contract a personal debt of 12,500 baht in order to buy land and two large houses in Chiang Mai, one for the use of a priest and the

other to be used as a religious house for indigenous nuns or priests.⁶³ In addition, Vicar-Apostolic Perros was able to secure an interest-free loan for 200,000 baht from the M.E.P. in November 1931 for the purpose of establishing a college in Chiang Mai.⁶⁴ The College was to be Montfort College, another distinguished Catholic educational institution that would survive into the twenty-first century.⁶⁵

On the personnel front, the Vicar-Apostolic approached 'safe' religious orders that already had a record of success in Bangkok in running educational institutions, such as the Brothers of St. Gabriel and the Ursulines. The Ursulines had a further advantage in having their own financial resources, having been able to secure 6,000 pounds sterling from the order's head office in Rome for the establishment of the Regina Coeli girls' school in Chiang Mai, which opened its doors in 1932.⁶⁶ Matters were not so simple with regard to the Brothers of St. Gabriel, with the Director of the new boys' college complaining about the difficulties encountered while operating in such a remote region. Nevertheless, following their first year of operation the two schools had acquired just over 200 pupils between them.⁶⁷ Incomplete records suggest that the schools experienced a slow but constant growth throughout the 1930s. By the end of the decade, Montfort School had increased the number of pupils to 178 from its original figure of 103,⁶⁸ while the number of pupils in Regina Coeli had increased to 138 from its original 111 by 1935.⁶⁹

⁶³ B.A.A., Report, 21 July 1931, 37/2/13.

⁶⁴ B.A.A., From Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Director Principal of Montfort College, 10 November 1931, 37/2/14.

⁶⁵ The most controversial alumni from this school being Thaksin Shinawatra, the former prime minister of Thailand from 2001-2006.

⁶⁶ B.A.A., Report, 21 July 1931, 37/2/13.

⁶⁷ B.A.A., Montfort School Report, 1 April 1933, 77/1/6 and B.A.A., Regina Coeli School Report, 1 April 1933, 81/3/21.

⁶⁸ B.A.A., Montfort School Report, 12 September 1938, 77/1/22.

⁶⁹ B.A.A., Regina Coeli School Report, April 1935, 81/3/46.

The Bangkok schools' network also had a role in the schools' success, as a 1931 report noted:

I do not exaggerate when I say that the College of the Brothers and the Institute of the Ursulines are assured of success. In Chiang Mai, there is a great number of former students of the Brothers of St. Gabriel who have promised us their children, not to mention the others who, like them, appreciate the instruction and education given by the Brothers and Sisters.⁷⁰

Thus, after only two years of commencing operations in the north, the Catholic presence was growing fast, at least in terms of educational provision. However, in its healthcare provisions, it still lacked the resources to set up a hospital to rival that already established by the Protestants, but the Vicar-Apostolic was actively looking for the remedy. Indeed, the provision of healthcare became an urgent matter as the Catholic presence and influence began to grow at the expense of the Protestants. The Protestants' attitude towards Catholic expansion is indicated in a letter in which the Vicar-Apostolic requested the involvement of the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, a missionary order that specialised in medical care, based in the United States:

There is McCormick Hospital⁷¹ up there but this is in the hands of the American Presbyterian Missionaries who are becoming more and more aggressive and even bitter in their propaganda. Among the native Protestants, who compose a good part of the population, there is at present a very decided movement towards Catholicism.⁷²

⁷⁰ B.A.A., Report, 21 July, 1931, 37/2/13.

⁷¹ McCormick Hospital was where Prince Mahidol (1892-1929), father of Kings Ananda Mahidol and Bhumibol Adulyadej, worked following his return from Harvard University in 1928, when his princely status precluded the grant of an internship at the state Siriraj Hospital. There he was known to patients as "Mho Chao Fa" (the Doctor Prince). After three weeks working in the hospital, he returned to Bangkok for the funeral of an uncle. However, his health (which had never been robust) deteriorated thereafter and he never returned to Chiang Mai. He died the following year on 24 September 1929.

⁷² B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Dr. Anna Dengel, 13 July 1933, 53/3/19.

Notwithstanding the rivalry with the American Presbyterians, in the following years, the Mission's activities would continue its expansion to Wieng Papao in Chiang Rai and Phitsanulok. But it was the institutions in Chiang Mai that would continue to flourish and become well-known across the country.

The nature and scale of the financial and personnel resources the Mission was willing to expend on the north suggests that there was a conscious effort to replicate the successes of Bangkok, despite the global economic depression. The importance of the lack of resources in delaying the founding of the northern mission stations and the expenditure of money and effort in the face of the difficult economic situation raises some questions. Why did the Church suddenly feel the need for the frenetic burst of activity in the north? Part of the answer lies in the status of Chiang Mai as the second largest city in Siam, as well as its strategic location as a base for launching future missionary efforts into northern Burma and Laos or southern China. Indeed there were several expeditions, including one where the future Blessed Nicolas Kitbamrung, was sent into northern Burma to assess the viability of the plan. Furthermore, the Mission of Siam had held a longstanding ambition to expand there. But surely, the most important factor behind the Mission's efforts was the prior dominance of the Protestants in the area, a dominance that the Catholic Mission felt they had to urgently balance. While from the conventional viewpoint, the Protestant presence posed a challenge to Catholic efforts in the area, in fact it inadvertently assisted the Catholics' conversion efforts through the introduction of basic Christian concepts to the local populace. Thus, unlike other regions where Catholic teachings had to be explained with reference to Buddhist concepts, the missionaries in Chiang Mai could readily build on the foundations prepared by the Protestants.

The Protestant Challenge

I'm heartily sick of trying to do good among persons of high rank in Siam. My business it seems to me is properly with the poor and the helpless.

- Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, 1837

What really distinguishes the documents of the northern parishes from all the others was their commentary on the Protestant presence and activities there. Although Bangkok also had a notable and successful Protestant presence, their activities hardly attracted the comment of the Catholic missionaries there. On the other hand, neither is there evidence that the Bangkok Protestants expressed any bitter attitude towards the Catholic Mission, unlike those in the north. The documents indicate that there were three reasons for the cold relationship between the northern mission stations and the local Protestants. The first was the 'poaching' of converts. The second reason was the two sides' treatment of the others' "apostates". The final reason was the Catholic fear of the Protestants gaining too much influence through their provision of healthcare and especially education, the very same methods used by the Catholics to expand their social influence.

The 'poaching' of converts from each other was the major contentious issue between the Catholic and Protestant missionaries. For the Catholics, recent Protestant converts were far easier to convert than Buddhists. As Fr. Mirabel noted on his visit to a village outside Chiang Mai in March 1933 prior to an expedition to northern Burma:

The instruction of the latter group [i.e. Buddhists] requires a little more time since they are totally ignorant of the Catholic doctrine. It's not the same for the Protestants, with whom we only have to correct and complete their understanding of the doctrine.⁷³

⁷³ B.A.A., Fr. Mirabel to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 31 March 1933, 37/3/5.

It did not help relations when these conversions were made *en masse*, where the local social dynamic determined that if the leader of the village converted, everyone in his immediate (and wide) social group would follow suit and cut all contact with their former pastors. This was the case with the villagers visited by Fr. Mirabel. What is equally interesting in this case is that the Catholics had, at that time, very little to offer to the converts in terms of material goods, in contrast to the Protestants who already had a well-established infrastructure for education and healthcare. No school had been built in the area, for the letter made a request for one to be built, since the adjoining villages also did not have a school. The nearest school was located three kilometres away. Not only was the school a state school, which had limited willingness and capacity to cater for the needs and sensibilities of Christians (Catholic or Protestant) but the school admitted children only from the age of 11 to 14.⁷⁴

Naturally, the ease with which the Catholics made headway in the area made the Protestants uneasy and drove some to actively resent the Mission and its new followers. Indeed, Vicar-Apostolic Perros saw the Protestants' standing monopoly on the provision of healthcare in Chiang Mai as a Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of the Catholic converts and converts-to-be, especially if they had a past relationship with the Protestants:

There would be many more converts were the people not held back by the thought of what might happen if they become ill. It would be practically impossible for them to return to the Protestants for help; Bangkok is over 400 miles away and there is not a Catholic doctor in Siam [sic].⁷⁵

⁷⁴ B.A.A., Fr. Mirabel to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 31 March 1933, 37/3/5.

⁷⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Dr. Anna Dengel, 13 July 1933, 53/3/19.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the Protestants turned away patients from their facilities just because of their religious background or history, the point was that the fears of the Catholics and their converts were sincerely felt. Equally, the Protestants had their fears and were not afraid to address them directly to the Catholic Mission, as one Dr. Kneedler did in 1933:

Speaking as a Protestant, I know that there are beliefs which the Roman Catholic Church considers essential, which I could never accept. But it would be far from me to want to confuse the mind of a Catholic by trying to convert him to Protestantism... Now when I'm giving my life in Christian service in a non-Christian land, it makes me sick at heart to see the un-Christian way in which my fellow-Christians of the Catholic Mission are acting towards the still weak Protestant Christian Church of this district.⁷⁶

While the weakness of the Protestant position in Chiang Mai as portrayed by Dr. Kneedler was obviously an exaggeration, the same cannot be said about the Protestant position in Siam in general, which did indeed remain weak. Despite early attempts to set up posts in other provinces, most of these met with failure, with the notable exception of Chiang Mai. In effect, Chiang Mai was vital to the Protestants as one of their few viable footholds outside Bangkok. However, the arrival of the Catholics threatened to undermine what was perceived to be a precarious position.

At the same time, the Mission was far from alone in attempting to 'poach' for converts. Protestants were equally guilty of attempting to do so, as can be seen from a report by a parish priest regarding a visit by a Protestant pastor to his village:

The leader of the Protestants has come here to convert people to Christianity. He has come here many times but has been unable to convince anyone; indeed their faith has become stronger. Last Sunday he came with some gifts, but nobody would receive them apart from the people at the house where he was staying.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ B.A.A., Dr. W. Harding Kneedler to Mission of Chiang Mai, April 1933, 37/3/9.

⁷⁷ B.A.A., Fr. Vincent to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 2 July 1932, 37/2/26.

The villagers' 'cold-shoulder' treatment of the visiting pastor would not have helped ecumenical relations,⁷⁸ and would have exacerbated fears among Protestants that the Catholic Mission was using its new-found influence in the area to undermine them. It is also doubtful whether the American Presbyterians would have found much comfort in the Mission's trite but true lecture on the topic of freedom of conscience:

I came to Chiang Mai to convert the pagans, not the Protestants. But when a Protestant came to me to inquire about the Truths of the Catholic Faith, I considered my duty to give him the desired information... It is my opinion, Doctor Kneedler, and yours also, I think, that each one enjoys freedom of conscience, and it seems to me that when members of the Protestant Christian Church of this district came to inquire about our religion, they did nothing more than make use of the liberty we all enjoy. No one, therefore, can reproach them their conduct, nor can anyone reproach us for having received them.⁷⁹

Although what was ostensibly at stake throughout this bitter conflict was the responsibility for the souls of the inhabitants of the district, it can be argued that both denominations were actually fighting for influence. From their longer experience of Siam, it was clear to the Mission of Siam that the only method by which the Mission could acquire influence to protect its interests was to demonstrate its social utility in promoting and providing education and healthcare. As already seen, this approach had proved to be highly successful in Bangkok. Thus, in view of the Protestant activities in the north, which followed the same approach, it is not surprising to find the Mission concerned at the spread of Protestant influence.

Equally, even though the Mission of Siam was successful in making connections in high society and could exert some influence, these efforts were

⁷⁸ Ecumenical (inter-church or inter-religious) relations and dialogue were not a high priority in Catholicism until the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

⁷⁹ B.A.A., Chiang Mai mission station to Dr. W. Harding Kneedler, 19 April 1933, 37/3/8.

restricted to very specific spheres. Mainly, the interventions were in the realms of education, guaranteeing religious freedom, and the rights and privileges of the Church and its clergy (for example, exemption from conscription and certain taxes where most of these privileges were already confirmed for Buddhist monks). In many of these cases, the Mission of Siam and the central government had already negotiated a solution: but this solution was not being applied to the local clergy or by the local authorities, thus requiring intervention by the centre. Furthermore, even when this influence was reinforced with intervention from the French diplomatic representatives in Siam, the Church did not always obtain what it asked for, as will be seen in the northeast.

Notably, there is no evidence to suggest that the Mission used its influence to sabotage the growth of the Protestant churches in Siam. Neither is there evidence that the Protestants would use their influence to undermine the activities of the Catholics in Chiang Mai. However, it is clear that both sides distrusted each other, accusing each other of proselytising and of 'poaching' new converts. Thus, from the Mission's perspective, the Protestant position in the north had to be challenged, if only so that future projects of the Mission in the area would not have to rely on the Protestants' good-will to succeed.

The capitalist twist to this situation was that the locals were the clear winners in the conflict and competition between the two denominations. Whereas converts or "apostates" of the two groups might be restricted by their conscience or face, the Buddhists were not constrained by the same considerations, and could pick and choose between the two denominations. It is possible that the Protestants were aware of this factor. Certainly the Catholic mission station was under no illusion

even before the first Catholic schools were set up in Chiang Mai, as indicated in its initial report in 1931:

At first one may fear the competition of the American Protestants, but everyone in Chiang Mai knows, and the Americans themselves know, that many of their students will pass between their schools and our schools without saying to us which school they originally came from.⁸⁰

On balance, this situation seemed to favour the Catholics where, prior to their arrival, locals would have had a choice only between the state schools with their limited facilities and the European-style schools of the Protestants. With the arrival of the Catholics, they had another solid alternative, mainly at the expense of the Protestants whose monopoly on European-style education had been broken.

Mission activities in the north during this period were thus defined by the attempt to build a Catholic presence in the face of an established Protestant competitor. The unique combination of active competition, as well as the strategic position of Chiang Mai, convinced the Mission to fully engage in what it did best and most professionally in Bangkok, if only in order to balance the Protestant influence in the area. The Mission's obsession in this task is indicated by the minimal conflict with the local authorities, in contrast to most of the other regions. Where conflicts did occur, they concerned schools that had been set up in haste without due regard to changes in Siamese school regulations and its attendant paperwork (mainly to do with establishing the ownership of the schools). Even so, these conflicts were resolved without requiring major intervention. Some schools were inspected by suspicious local authorities, but they remained open.

⁸⁰ B.A.A., Report, 21 July 1931, 37/2/13.

Unlike in most regions, there were no 'strikes' by the parishioners or overt conflict with the local authorities. Indeed the novelty of the Catholic missionaries, their activities, the reputation of their work in Bangkok, as well as their role in balancing the Protestant presence may have been welcomed by some. The only area where the Mission did not look so healthy was in its finances. Not surprisingly, the schools proved to be the largest drain on Church finances and by 1939 the Mission authorities had come to the realisation that the situation was not sustainable in the long-term, especially in the light of the overall deficit in the general budget of the Mission of Siam. Although two schools (one in Bo Sang and one in Chiang Dao) were closed in 1938 and 1939, the Mission was looking to further limit its activities by cutting down on the number of non-Christian pupils admitted and prioritising the building of new schools in areas with known Catholics. As the head of the Chiang Mai mission argued in 1939, there seemed to be only two solutions:

It [the deficit] has to be so, unless the Mission furnishes the necessary funds to continue at this pace, or finds some other means to restrict the expenditure in this district.⁸¹

In fact, there were two additional choices. The first, a complete withdrawal, was the unspoken (perhaps unthinkable) solution. The second solution, the division of the Mission, seemed perfect since it would allow another religious congregation to take over the financial and administrative burden of the Chiang Mai Mission (as the Salesians had done with Ratchaburi). Failing that, it could request additional funding from the Propaganda Fide for the new Mission. Even if the first division of the Mission, that of the northeast, had not performed to expectations, the later division of Ratchaburi certainly had. The documents suggest that the Mission of

⁸¹ B.A.A., Chiang Mai Mission Financial Report, 28 February 1939, 37/4/35.

Siam had chosen to explore the second solution and was on the verge of enacting it but was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War:

The Holy See has already pointed to us the possibility of detaching the northern part of the Thai kingdom to make a new Mission as soon as the number of Christians allowed hope of the great development. Alas! The current war prevents the new apostolic workers to come to our aid.⁸²

Thus, at the outbreak of the Second World War, what occupied the thoughts of the Catholic missionaries in the north was how the mission should be split and run in the following years, and not the remote possibility of a state persecution against Catholicism.

Conclusion

Once again, as the Mission moved into a different area, it adapted to the local challenges, conditions, and circumstances. Again, the conditions in the north were unlike the ones the Mission had faced in the other regions: that of a dominant Protestant presence. The Mission's entry into the area undoubtedly caused friction, although this did not seem to overly concern the Mission. Indeed, the Catholics were more worried about whether they would be able to sustain the momentum of their efforts in the face of poor financial prospects.

In gearing up to compete with the well-established Protestant presence, it was possible that the Mission could have utilised its Bangkok network to accelerate its progress in the region. However, if Vicar-Apostolic Perros did use the network it was not anywhere near as effective as Fr. Colombet's earlier efforts. Whereas Colombet went straight to the key figures in Siamese society and quickly won their

⁸² B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Rev. John Scally, Director of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, New York, 24 August 1940, 55/2/39.

support, Vicar-Apostolic Perros went instead to the religious orders for help and employed his own resources, including getting into personal debt. Arguably, the differences in approach were a reflection of the different personalities of the two clerics, as well as changes in political circumstances. During the period of absolute rule before 1932, the Mission only needed to approach a few influential princes to solicit aid. However, after 1932, such political power was re-distributed among more people. In addition, the political turbulence that continued after 1932 would have made a repeat of a Colombet-style campaign even more difficult.

Finally, there is an issue pertaining to identity. The entry of the Catholic missionaries into the area also meant that some converts became effectively double converts: the first time was to Protestantism, the second time to Catholicism (or vice versa). There is insufficient data to evaluate the implications of a double conversion, but seeing that the Catholic missionaries were able to build on the spiritual foundations prepared by their Protestant rivals with relative ease suggests that a second conversion may not have been as problematic compared with the first conversion.

The East

*For the past ten years, I have gradually withdrawn European missionaries from the area [the East], in order to encourage the local clergy to administer all the Catholics there.*⁸³

- Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1943

On the surface, there is nothing remarkable about the parishes in the eastern part of Siam during this period. Unlike the northeast, there were no explosive conflicts with the local authorities. There were no plans to divest responsibility of the region to another, unfamiliar entity, unlike in the west. Furthermore, unlike the north, there were no Protestants to contend with, and there was no drive to 'showcase' achievements in order to gain influence and thus safeguard the Mission's social legitimacy, as in the capital. The picture the documents give is that of a prosperous and functioning provincial parish system that was running without major problems.

It is, however, precisely this lack of a problematic characteristic that makes the eastern parishes remarkable. The special circumstances in the other parishes had inevitably influenced the direction and approach of the Mission. Thus, the eastern parishes provide an invaluable picture of how the provincial parishes were intended to function, that is, without all the mitigating circumstances that reordered the Mission's priorities. The region also acts as a perfect foil to the troublesome northeast. The two regions are similar in that they are located near the border of a colonial power, and one with which Siam was at war in the early 1940s. Moreover, following the 1893 crisis, French troops had been garrisoned in the Chantaburi region up to 1904.

⁸³ B.A.A., Informationes quod futuram Missionem de Chantabun, 15 July 1943, 35/4/8.

The region thus had a troubled political history yet, in spite of this past, the lack of ill-will from state agencies and the local non-Catholic communities in the documents suggests that both the Mission and local Siamese authorities had taken steps to ensure a harmonious co-existence, an approach which would pay unexpected dividends later.

Parishes...As They were Meant to Be

Love never says 'I have done enough'.

- St. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus

The Catholic presence was first established in the region around 1710, thereby making the communities there among the oldest in the Mission of Siam. By the twentieth century, the area possessed altogether five major parishes: two in Chantaburi province (Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception), two others in Chonburi province (SS. Philip and Jacob and The Holy Name of Jesus), and one in Paetriu (Chachoengsao province). However, the true number of Catholic communities in the east was significantly higher since these five parishes acted as the bases for the itinerant priests that served the smaller, more isolated communities in the area.

According to 1943 statistics, the area was home to 9,530 Catholics, spread across six provinces (Chantaburi, Chachoengsao, Prachinburi, Chonburi, Rayong, and Trat) with the majority residing in the vicinity of Chantabun (4,900) and Paetriu (2,070).⁸⁴ Bearing in mind the effects of the persecution, the numbers were probably even higher in the 1930s. The outward prosperity of the Chantabun area is indicated in the impressive and, up to 1908, continually expanding church that served the

⁸⁴ B.A.A., Informationes quod futuram Missionem de Chantabun, 15 July 1943, 35/4/8.

community of the Immaculate Conception. The church would later be designated a cathedral as part of a later division in the Mission during the early 1940s.

The area was equally rich spiritually. It was home to the Mission of Siam's new seminary at Sri Racha that was set up following the creation of the separate Mission of Ratchaburi. There was also a convent that belonged to the order of Amantes de la Croix de Jésus-Christ, a religious order that had a distinct eastern touch, not only in its spiritual approach but also in its historical origins in Vietnam. The latter was arguably one of the key factors behind the order's success in the area. An undated list of the Catholic dignitaries in the Immaculate Conception indicates that all were ethnic-Vietnamese.⁸⁵ Other reports indicated that, while there were other Christian ethnic groups in the area (Chinese and Siamese), this particular parish was still, in the Mission's view, a "Vietnamese church",⁸⁶ and the Vietnamese there were the oldest and most substantial among the ethnic groups in the area.⁸⁷

By the time of the anti-Catholic persecution, the province had a total of 19 primary schools and two secondary schools.⁸⁸ Reflecting the communities they served, the schools' curricula were eclectic and ranged widely from the basic to the international. For the Immaculate Conception community, two brothers of St. Gabriel were brought in by the Mission to run the school. The Mission thus saw the area as significant, since the order also ran the 'flagship' schools in Bangkok (St. Gabriel) and Chiang Mai (Montfort). The two priests were tasked with giving instruction on the catechism and the biblical stories in both Vietnamese and Siamese,

⁸⁵ B.A.A., Liste des noms des dignitaires de l'Eglise de l'Immaculée Conception à Chantabun, Undated, 35/5/4.

⁸⁶ B.A.A., Fr. Etienne Ollier to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 27 September 1934, 35/2/60.

⁸⁷ B.A.A., Informations quod futuram Missionem de Chantabun, 15 July 1943, 35/4/8.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

and providing a basic course in Siamese language skills (speaking, reading, and writing), as well as basic arithmetic.⁸⁹

Other communities, such as the parish of SS. Philip and Jacob in Chonburi also catered to the more elaborate needs of the local community, in this case the Chinese, who were being discriminated against by the local authorities, as the parish priest wrote in June 1931:

At this time there are around 20 Chinese students at our school under the instruction of the [Chinese teacher]. This [Chinese teacher] is Christian. The reason that he brought the students here is because the provincial governor would not allow them to set up a separate school because they did not know the Siamese language and could not teach it.⁹⁰

The same school also responded to local demands by expanding its provision to include English-language teaching in the following year.⁹¹ The provincial school could thus teach an impressive array of languages by the early 1930s – Siamese, Chinese, and English.

Provisions in Paetriu were arguably the most elaborate in the area. It was a centre of education during this period, hosting a teacher training school (St. Tarcisius) as well as the St. Paul Secondary School, which received funding from the French Indochinese government. The latter school was staffed by French, Spanish, and Siamese teachers and offered a two-tracked curriculum. One was solely conducted in Siamese, tuition fee being one baht per month. The second track offered a bilingual curriculum, conducted in Siamese and English until students reached the Grade 10 (*Matthayom 4*) level, at which point they also started learning French. The tuition fee for this track was two baht per month. The school also accepted boarders

⁸⁹ B.A.A., *Projet de Contrat rédigé par le P. Peyrical*, Undated, 35/5/11.

⁹⁰ B.A.A., Fr. Alphonse to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 20 June 1931, 36/5/7.

⁹¹ B.A.A., Fr. Alphonse to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 14 September 1932, 36/5/21.

at a cost of 20 baht per month.⁹² The only factor that prevented this school from becoming a 'flagship' school of the Mission, it seems, was the fact that it was not located in a population centre as large or influential as Chiang Mai or Bangkok.

In addition to the schools, the Mission also ran three orphanages in the area – one each at Huaphai, Paetriu, and Chantabun.⁹³ All of these educational and social institutions required funding as a matter of course. Even if various international organisations, such as Sainte Enfance (also known as L'Enfance Missionnaire) for the orphanages and the French Indochinese government for one school in Paetriu, were persuaded to contribute financially to the Mission's work in the area, the reality was that some parishes were encountering financial difficulties. For example, by 1932, the parish priest of SS. Philip and Jacob had contracted a debt of 3,000 baht,⁹⁴ while new projects were being hampered by lack of funding.⁹⁵

The general picture presented by the communities in this area is thus one that is not that different physically from Bangkok. The parishes were running smoothly, albeit with severe financial constraints. The east may not have been the equal of Bangkok in terms of its economic or political influence, but the area's spirituality arguably surpassed that of the capital parishes. The presence of the convent, the seminary, as well as other educational infrastructure, certainly facilitated this development and the area even had an alleged Marian apparition, although the priest who wrote the report urged people to "listen but not believe just yet".⁹⁶ Furthermore, the stability of the parishes in this region was encouraged by the lack of longstanding conflicts with the local communities and authorities, which seemed to occupy the

⁹² B.A.A., Regulations for St. Paul School, Undated, 75/5/52.

⁹³ B.A.A., Informations quod futuram Missionem de Chantabun, 15 July 1943, 35/4/8.

⁹⁴ B.A.A., Fr. Alphonse to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 27 September 1932, 36/5/22.

⁹⁵ B.A.A., Fr. David to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 24 December 1939, 35/3/35.

⁹⁶ B.A.A., Marian Apparition at Thasala (Fr. Simon), 13 November 1937, 35/3/25.

attention of parishes in other regions. However, it is perhaps this lack of galvanising external conflict that allowed some of the parish priests to indulge in various 'luxuries' such as internal politics.

Trouble in Paradise

As a youth, I prayed 'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet'.

- St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, VIII.7

The characteristics of parishes in the other regions covered in this chapter have often been defined by the local conditions and experiences. The documents speak of their problems and, at the same time, suggest that it was the resolution of these problems that was foremost in the mind of the parish priests and Mission authorities, thereby affecting the direction and running of the parishes concerned. In the case of the eastern parishes, the absence of problems with the local authorities and communities did not mean that they were entirely problem-free.

Among the documents that report the construction of new schools and churches, there is an extraordinary amount of material about alleged and actual misconduct of priests in the eastern parishes. The extent of this phenomenon throughout the 1920s and 1930s suggests that the eastern parishes were not being as hard-pressed by external problems as other parishes. Given the dominance of the indigenous clergy in the eastern provinces, it is also possible that the allegations were part of the jockeying for position. From a more modern perspective, many of the allegations and complaints are rather trivial. For example, in 1932, the indigenous parish priest at Immaculate Conception church was accused of indulging in conduct unworthy of a Catholic priest by arranging a drama troupe performance, musical entertainment, and a dance on church grounds on the occasion of a feast day,

as well as other unspecified “loose behaviour”. In certain parts of the modern day Catholic Church, this sort of behaviour would probably have passed without notice, but in the early 1930s, “it was the cause for Christians to look down on priests and an obstacle to their spiritual development”.⁹⁷

In the following year, another indigenous priest, Fr. Boniface, was accused of buying and drinking moonshine, when the resident priest had forbidden the production of moonshine in the parish. Furthermore, it was alleged that Fr. Boniface “liked to frequent the houses of drunkards” and even the children were noticing that the priest liked to get drunk. The allegations appear to be trivial, but they become more serious once seen in the social context of Catholic communities living among Buddhists, with the fifth precept prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating substances. Thus, the letter asked that the priest be temporarily transferred elsewhere.⁹⁸ The case appeared to be straightforward, but in a twist, Fr. Boniface had his own accusations against his fellow indigenous priests. Fr. Clement was accused of neglecting the Vicar-Apostolic’s instructions for him to learn Chinese, was “addicted to Thai newspapers and novels”, and neglected his confessional duties at the convent in favour of frequenting the local households. Fr. Simon, another indigenous priest, who had accused Fr. Boniface of misconduct in the previous day’s letter, was himself attacked for failing to control Fr. Clement.⁹⁹

Given the timing of the letters, it was clear that there was political manoeuvring and that the head parish priest at Immaculate Conception Church had lost control over his subordinates. Eventually, Fr. Boniface was replaced by Fr. Norbert, another indigenous priest, in 1935. Far from settling the issue, however, the

⁹⁷ B.A.A., Fr. Theophane, Clement, and Frederic to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 9 December 1932, 35/2/48.

⁹⁸ B.A.A., Fr. Simon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 24 July 1933, 35/2/51.

⁹⁹ B.A.A., Fr. Boniface to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 25 July 1933, 35/2/52.

arrival of the new priest was a cause of more trouble. Prior to his arrival, the priest had already been implicated in a misconduct occurring in Chantabun as well as in distant Chiang Mai. This time, even by modern standards, the allegations were scandalous. They involved improper conduct and relationships with certain nuns, persuading nuns to leave their vocations, and of disobeying the Vicar-Apostolic's order to move to Chantaburi. In the words of the parish priest:

Your Grace wrote to me that 'Now you should be glad since I have transferred Fr. Boniface from Chantabun, and have sent Fr. Norbert in his stead'. I can only answer with a proverb: 'Out of the frying pan into the fire'.¹⁰⁰

In reality, it was not until much later in the 1940s that Fr. Norbert was involved in any significant trouble.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Catholic and non-Catholic communities' attention were fixed on the priest who had a prior reputation for such things, and so Fr. Norbert was apparently transferred to another parish,¹⁰² since the correspondence failed to mention him again.

A more immediate crisis broke out in 1937 when Fr. Simon failed to publish a public apology for falsely accusing Fr. Frederic of misconduct, when the latter had already "announced everywhere, his victory over Fr. Simon". The resulting conflict engulfed the lives of the other parish priests and opened a rift between the ethnic Vietnamese and the ethnic Cambodian priests, something that a report on the situation touched upon:

¹⁰⁰ B.A.A., Fr. Simon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 25 October 1935, 35/2/51.

¹⁰¹ In 1940, Fr. Norbert was implicated in an improper relationship with a nun [B.A.A., Fr. Simon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 13 July 1940, 35/3/46], although the facts are murky since the parishioners, the priests, and the non-Catholics were all making assumptions and accusations at that point. It was established that a nun had become pregnant and had left the convent, but the child's parentage was never established [B.A.A., Fr. Simon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 16 July 1940, 35/3/47].

¹⁰² B.A.A., Fr. Simon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 30 July 1940, 35/3/49.

As for me, I don't see what is so reprehensible about the conduct of the priests at Chantabun but I do see what is reprehensible about the conduct of the Cambodian priests.¹⁰³

In addition, the affair affected Fr. Andre, a priest in Bangkok, whose "simplicity and gullibility was truly extraordinary". The report summarised the conflict as follows:

What I do understand is that Fr. Frederic is becoming more and more furious that there has been no publishing of his innocence at Chantabun by Fr. Simon, and that he is always looking for ways and occasions to get the upper hand.¹⁰⁴

There was thus an unmistakably poisonous atmosphere between individual members of the clergy in the parish.

What is intriguing is that the records of these cases continued right up to 1940, at which point there is no further mention of any scandal. Judging by the nature of the other regions, the congregation of the eastern parishes certainly had enough reason to be discontented with the conduct of their clergy, while the non-Catholic communities may have been equally scandalised – had they been aware of the situation.

However, unlike its northeastern counterpart, much of the tensions and damage in the eastern parishes were internalised, since the origins and targets of the accusations were internal (that is, made by members of the clergy or Catholic community) rather than external. Indeed, there are no reports of contacts with or threats of intervention from the local authorities with regard to local scandals, which would be an indicator of a wider circle of disaffection. The exceptions were the occasional court case regarding land and rent disputes, but there was nothing in the

¹⁰³ B.A.A., Fr. David to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 2 March 1937, 35/3/15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

nature of these cases or their aftermath that indicated anything remotely explosive and no foreign representatives were called to intervene.

What is noteworthy is that the majority of those involved in these incidents were indigenous rather than foreign priests. Although foreign priests were present in the area, their role was limited to administering schools and reporting on the situation as the more serious cases arose. Questions regarding the extension of the role of the indigenous clergy had been raised by foreign missionaries, but it was only in the east that a concrete effort was made to prepare the indigenous clergy for the formation of an indigenous Archdiocese, thereby spelling the formal end of the Mission of Siam. The fact that the 'experiment' took place in the east, with its rich spiritual centres and institutions that resembled those in Bangkok, suggests that Vicar-Apostolic Perros was serious about promoting the role of the indigenous clergy. Furthermore, there was historical precedence for the move since some of the first priests who came to the area (Fr. Nicolas and Fr. Jacques Tchang) in the eighteenth century were converts from Ayutthaya, while out of the 48 indigenous priests serving the Mission in 1943, 15 were from this region.¹⁰⁵ The leadership of the Catholic Church in eastern Thailand could, therefore, be said to have a distinctly Asian, if not Thai, face, unlike many of its counterparts in Siam at the time.

However, at this stage, far from using their new-found freedom to espouse or support Thai nationalist concepts, the priests still demonstrated their dependence on the Mission authorities through their complaints against each other, and requests for priests from other parishes to act as impartial observers or mediators in their disputes. Nevertheless, the eastern project should be considered a success. In spite of the internal conflicts, tensions, as well as financial difficulties, the parishes were still

¹⁰⁵ B.A.A., *Informationes quod futuram Missionem de Chantabun*, 15 July 1943, 35/4/8.

running smoothly. It was thus not surprising to see the area being designated a Vicariate Apostolic in 1944, the first of the mission in Siam to be completely run by the indigenous clergy, with the first indigenous bishop, Vicar-Apostolic James Louis Cheng, in charge.

Although it is debatable whether this last development would have come about so soon without the wartime and nationalist pressures, in the light of the history of the Mission, the step was inevitable. It was the Mission's history, its indigenous face, and the internalised nature of the local conflicts that prevented Thai nationalism from inflicting catastrophic damage on the parishes in this region, as it did in the northeast.

Conclusion

To conclude, although there are some similarities between the conditions in the east and that of Bangkok, such as the provision of customised schools and a non-homogenous ethnic composition, there were also significant differences. Whereas the public face of the Mission in Bangkok was clearly French, the face of Catholicism in the east was demonstrably Asian, if not Thai.

The dominance of the indigenous clergy in the east was the result of the Mission's intention to gradually hand over control of the Mission to the indigenous clergy. At this stage, this policy was implemented for pragmatic and long-standing ecclesiastical reasons. Indeed, the whole point of setting up a Mission in the first place was so that a self-sustaining indigenous hierarchy could be built so as to render the role of missionaries unnecessary. The establishment of the east as a testing ground for the abilities of the indigenous clergy was another step towards fulfilling this ultimate missionary objective. As Chapter VI will elaborate further, this policy

was in line with the instructions contained in the 1909 Papal encyclical, *Maximum Illud*, as well as certain M.E.P. encyclicals.

Thus, the Mission's pre-1940 policy in this area did not stem from any local, nationalistic demands. Not that there were any such demands before 1940. What discontent there was in this area was, like in the west, directed inwards, with the indigenous clergy in conflict with each other as opposed to with their French superiors. In spite of this internal conflict, there was a notable absence of conflicts with the local communities, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. It suggests that externally the Mission was functioning harmoniously, while internally it faced the same problems as any other human communities.

General Conclusion

Calm continueth not long without a storm.

- Anonymous

This chapter has demonstrated that despite being in the same country, the Catholic presence in these four regions, the central plain, the north, the west, and the east had distinctively different characters and concerns. In Bangkok, it concentrated on its social works and enjoyed the support of the elite. Meanwhile, in the north, it faced a strong Protestant presence, which it worked hard to challenge. At the same time, the Mission of Siam had ceded its authority to another religious order in the west, thereby changing the identity of the Catholic Mission in Siam from being a purely French-led organisation to one that was more mixed, albeit still with a European face. Nevertheless, the Mission was working towards further changes by making the east effectively a testing ground for indigenous priests being groomed for further responsibilities. There, at least, the face of the Catholic Church was distinctively Asian.

Given the dissimilarities between these regions, casual observers could be forgiven for thinking that there were different churches at work – not one. The differences, however, did not stem from a lack of a coherent policy. They originated from the varying conditions the Mission encountered in each region and its attempt to adapt to them. In the light of the different identities and conditions in each region, it is not surprising to find that when the persecutions occurred, they also had an inconsistent character. These differences in character between the regions were also encouraged by the divisions of the Mission. By 1939, the Catholic Church in Siam was being administered by three Missions: the Mission of Laos in the northeast, the Mission of Ratchaburi in the west, and the Mission of Siam in the rest of the country.

As the situation in the west demonstrated, these divisions did not always work as planned. Sometimes, intervention from the Mission of Siam was still required, even though the new Missions were meant to be autonomous. However, as Chapter IV will demonstrate, the administrative difficulties in the west, and indeed in all the other regions covered in chapter, were very mild indeed when they are compared with the problems that were encountered in the northeast.

IV

The Northeast, 1909-39

The Siamese government see that the missionaries are instigators of French encroachment and occupation.

- M.E.P. Report, 1886

The administrative arrangements made for the northeast were far more complicated than for the other regions. During the persecution of the 1940s, this area saw the worst excesses, including the initial arrest of Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung and the intimidation and mass extra-judicial execution of lay and religious Catholics in Songkhon village. Much of the excesses in the persecution in this region can be attributed to the earlier effects of this complex administrative set up, as well as issues arising from the proximity of the area to an 'enemy' state, in this case French Indochina.

Historically, Catholic missionary activities in the northeast or Isaan region of Thailand began relatively recently, commencing in the late nineteenth century. Prior to this period, Catholic missionaries had visited the area, but had not conducted any significant missionary activities. At that early stage, the jurisdiction of the northeast still belonged to the Mission of Bangkok. However, this administrative structure had not taken into account the practicalities of operating mission stations, for example, in terms of available infrastructure, health, and difficulties in communications. Indeed, during the Ayutthaya to early Bangkok period, the northeast was not a priority since, at that time, missionary activities were focused on gaining and widening access to new areas for evangelisation and administering existing parishes in the capital and central plain.

Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century, the practical considerations of administering parishes that were far away from the capital area had to be taken to heart by the vicars-apostolic of Siam, as missionary activities expanded beyond the capital and the central plain. The eventual solution appeared to be simple and practical in nature. The control and administration of the Catholic parishes in the northeast of Siam were to be ceded to the authority of the Mission of Laos on 4 May 1899. The Mission was based in French Indochina which, at the time, was easier to communicate with than Bangkok. For example, at one stage, it took one Church expedition just under one month to journey to Ubon Ratchatani from Bangkok,¹ even with the Bangkok-Korat railway that was built in 1900.² In addition, like the Mission of Siam, the Mission of Laos was under the direction of the M.E.P.

It was true that, in terms of internal Church organisation, the arrangement allowed for easier communication between the relevant Church authorities in the day-to-day running of parishes, for example, for the purposes of formalising baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, and other common religious rites. Nevertheless, in terms of the relationship between the Church and state entities, changes in the administration of Siam were to affect this arrangement, such as to render it almost impractical and, at times, extremely problematic. More often than not, for these matters the Mission of Laos had to refer constantly to the Mission of Siam and request its assistance in matters ranging from litigation in Siamese courts to facing down hostile local authorities. It seems that while the Mission of Laos was competent in handling the Church-side organisation, it had insufficient knowledge and connections to handle Siamese matters pertaining to the Church, in stark contrast

¹ The whole expedition took place over 102 days from 1919-20, R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, pp. 302-4.

² H. Evers, R. Korff, *South-east Asian Urbanism: The Meaning and Power of Social Space* (LIT Verlag, Münster, 2000), p. 99.

with the Mission of Siam. At the same time, the Mission of Siam no longer had jurisdiction over priests operating in the northeast, with the result that decisions had to be sent inefficiently back and forth between Bangkok and the Mission of Laos.

The problems were exacerbated by the advent of firm territorial borders, with their attendant restrictions on the free movement of goods and people. The fact that the Mission of Laos straddled this border led to serious legal confusions, among other problems. These misunderstandings frequently threatened to erupt into full-scale communal rifts, while local authorities, urged on to differing degrees by the central government, remained suspicious of the intentions and loyalties of the French priests across the border and thus, by implication, the Catholic population within their own border.

Furthermore, events that preceded and occurred during the initiation of missionary efforts in the northeast only served to engender local suspicion of the missionaries. Most prominent among these was the 1893 Paknam incident that resulted in the loss of territories by Siam. But in terms of later Catholic persecution, it was arguably the smaller, localised events involving French missionaries that would push local authorities from merely resenting the presence of Catholics to promoting their persecution, some because they were genuinely convinced of the Catholics' disloyalty and others because they stood to gain in one way or another.

Loyalty Demands Dissent

The passive or merely physical presence at non-Catholic funerals, weddings, and similar occasions because of the holding of civil office, as a courtesy, or other serious reasons (in case of doubt, the bishop's approval should be sought) can be tolerated, provided there is no danger of perversion or scandal.

- Canon 1258.2, 1917 *Codex Iuris Canonici*³

Following the 1893 Paknam incident and the establishment of a geographically-based boundary between Siam and French controlled Laos, there appeared to have been a crisis of faith among the Siamese authorities regarding the loyalties of citizens, particularly those in the border areas. Ethnically, the northeastern people are closely related to their Laotian neighbours and thus it was quite conceivable at the time that these border people might initiate their own separatist movement or else encourage the French to establish another protectorate. Indeed, the Paknam and other incidents demonstrated that France's local colonial agents were quite willing to do so, especially if they could furnish themselves with a good and, at least in the eyes of other Europeans, acceptable excuse.

One of the Siamese solutions to counteract this situation⁴ during this period was the arrangement of public ceremonies that involved locals pledging their loyalty to Siam through the *phithi thuenam* (a ceremony involving the taking of an oath of allegiance and drinking consecrated water). For the Catholics, the original ceremony and the oath itself have clear pagan themes, thereby making it unacceptable for the local Church authorities to allow their parishioners to attend.

³ The complete text of the 1917 Canon Law can be found in its original Latin at: <http://www.intratext.com/X/LAT0813.HTM> [Last Access: 19 January 2009].

⁴ Other measures pre-dating this period included the setting up of a system of commissionership as well as an expansion of judicial power and political force, backed by the army. The centre of this new thrust by Bangkok into the northeast was Nakhon Ratchasima. See Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1994), pp. 28-34.

Moreover, this ceremony has been a longstanding point of dispute in relations between the Thai state and the Church. One of the most notable incidents occurred during the reign of King Taksin (late 1767-82). At the time, the ceremony was to be administered to court and military officials only which, even at that time, included Catholics. On the one hand, from their religious point of view, the missionaries viewed the ritual as clearly "pagan". However, King Taksin saw the missionaries' religious objections as disloyal intransigence on the part of his Catholic subjects. According to Bishop Pallegoix's (1841-62) later account, three Catholic officials chose to swear a Christian version of the oath in the following manner:

The time to take the solemn oath having come in September 1775, three of the main Christians, appointed mandarins and officers of the King instead of going to the temple to find the monks to drink the water of allegiance...went to the church in the morning and there, before the altar, in view of a great crowd of Christians they took their oath of loyalty to the King in the Siamese language on the gospel which was in the hand of the Bishop who gave them a formal certification of it.⁵

King Taksin was deeply unimpressed. The incident led to the arrest, torture, and imprisonment of the three Catholic officials together with the bishop and two other missionaries involved in the ceremony.

The monarch's displeasure with the missionaries can be explained by the fragile political situation of the monarchy at that time. In ethnic terms, King Taksin was essentially a foreigner due to his half-Chinese heritage and lack of blood links to the old ruling family of Ayutthaya. Moreover, despite his spectacular military victories, he remained vulnerable to accusations of having abandoned the old capital during its time of greatest need. The decision to move the capital from Ayutthaya to

⁵ Bishop J. Pallegoix, *Descriptions of the Thai Kingdom* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 2000), p. 387.

Thonburi should be seen as reflecting the monarch's lack of traditional means of establishing his legitimacy.⁶

Given his tenuous position, King Taksin's sole recourse to cement his legitimacy was through Buddhism. Religion was to be the main avenue for the new monarch's apotheosis from being merely a successful military commander to the *devaraja* (god-king) or, better still, *dhammaraja* (virtuous-king), of the new capital. Therefore, any challenge to the monarch's version of Buddhism and its ceremonies were perceived to be tantamount to a threat to the legitimacy of the fledgling dynasty. By implication, those who excluded themselves from the ceremonies also excluded themselves from the kingdom, as the monarch once exclaimed when some Catholic soldiers had come to claim their pay: "What does it serve to give pay to these people? They do not want to attend any of my ceremonies".⁷ Despite the missionaries' efforts in attempting to negotiate compromises, the crisis had escalated to the extent that all Catholic missionaries were expelled by the end of 1779.⁸

Evidently, the oath-taking ceremony was deemed to be important for the security and welfare of the state which, at that time, would have meant the person of the monarch. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the state would have achieved anything concrete by coercing Catholic officials to do what they thought was profane. Indeed, rather than gaining their loyalty, the ceremony would be neither binding nor affect their morale, other than to offend the religiously inclined, and thus encourage disloyalty rather than devotion as intended. In King Taksin's case, his paranoia was, therefore, self-fulfilling.

⁶ Subsequent Taksin legends, such as the phantasmal torments he endured during a stay in the palace grounds of Ayutthaya could also be read in this light.

⁷ Bishop J. Pallegoix, *Descriptions of the Thai Kingdom*, p. 391.

⁸ B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History*, p. 56.

Following the establishment of the Chakri dynasty in 1782, the missionaries were allowed to return. Nevertheless, the dispute over the oath ceremony had not been satisfactorily resolved for either side. Eventually a compromise was agreed. Catholics would be able to give their oaths of allegiance to the state (that is, the monarch) in the ceremony, so long as they could swear in the Catholic manner. Even so, the dispute regarding this matter continued to the time of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, as the ceremony grew to involve ordinary citizens. In addition, other newly introduced bureaucratic formalities required oaths, such as giving testimonies in court, thereby making the practice more widespread, where previously it would have been administered only to select officials of the court.

As more and more state organs from the various government ministries to the local administration were coming into contact with ordinary citizens, some of whom were Catholics, the problems regarding the oaths reoccurred. While by the late 1920s, the court and the central ministries were familiar with Catholic sensitivities as well as the solutions that had been worked out between the two parties, it was a different matter for the provincial authorities who did not seem to be aware of the religious sensitivity, some thinking that reluctance on the part of the Catholics was actually recalcitrance. Although, when complications arose, the Vicar-Apostolic communicated with the relevant central ministries to remind them of existing arrangements, thereby solving the immediate problems, the alternative procedures were not as well known as the Church assumed. This discrepancy indicates that, although the amelioration of Catholic grievances concerned the central government, it did not see the matter as relevant to provincial administration, despite the expansion of missionary efforts into the provinces. More significantly, it may also

indicate a loose central grip on the local state apparatus in terms of policy implementation.

Even as late as 1916, local missionaries in the northeast still cited the oath ceremony as one of the major obstacles in the Church's relationship with the local state apparatus, an indication perhaps of the ceremony's late introduction into the area, since no mission station in other areas reported problems to such an extent. On the other hand, the situation in the northeast was not helped by what could be perceived, from the local authorities' perspective, as 'imperialistic' behaviour on the part of the missionaries themselves. Indeed, in some cases, rather than ignorance on the part of the local authorities, it was the priests who did not know the procedures that had been established between the Thai state and the Church. This ignorance was arguably a consequence of these missionaries being subject to the Mission of Laos rather than the Mission of Siam. The situation was especially volatile given the Thai authorities' paranoia over Catholic citizens working with the French colonial authorities to annex territory. At the same time, the local authorities' resentment that threatened to spill over into harassment could well have furnished local French colonial agents with the necessary pretext to intervene and 'protect' their fellow Catholics from 'persecution'.

One case raged for three months, from July to September 1916. The case involved alleged coercion by local authorities against a village headman who was supposedly coerced to go to a Buddhist site to give his oath of allegiance. The general situation was outlined in a memorandum submitted to the Mission of Siam by Wolcott Pitkin, a General Advisor in Foreign Affairs to the government of Siam, who was investigating the incident. According to Pitkin's memorandum, Nai Siha Butr, the village headman of Seisang had been compelled by the district chief officer

to go to a Buddhist temple and was ordered to take the oath and drink the water of allegiance in front of a portrait of the king. Compulsion was necessary because the headman "had previously failed at the proper time to appear [sic] for this purpose at Ubol [sic] Town". Nevertheless, the parish priest, Fr. Leon Quentin complained bitterly to the authorities and "alleged that the headman had already taken the oath at the *monthon*",⁹ contrary to the evidence presented by the district official. To make matters worse, the memorandum states that: "The father is said on this occasion to have made use of extremely insulting language and gestures".¹⁰

However, according to Fr. Leon Quentin via the Vicar-Apostolic of the Mission of Laos, the headman had not failed in his duty, and had duly taken the oath at Ubon, with a priest as his witness. Nevertheless, for some unknown reason, the district chief officer of Lum Phuk insisted on getting the headman to drink the water of allegiance again, apparently through the use of threats:

At length, by means of threats and lies, the [district chief officer] succeeded in inducing him to the Court. From the Court, he was led to the Pagoda and there, under new threats, yielding to them, he drank the water of allegiance.

The priest then defended his subsequent actions as "verbal representations worthy of the case". More worrying, the priest also cited another case of harassment by the district chief officer of Sasunthon on similar grounds, adding ominously that "people there being more sensible and less timid, nothing as yet has occurred".¹¹ The situation thus was threatening to degenerate into a volatile clash over the word of the foreign priest and the word of the local authorities.

⁹ A *monthon* was a country subdivision of Thailand, being essentially a collection of provinces. The system was adopted in 1897 but had been abolished by 1933.

¹⁰ B.A.A., General Advisor in Foreign Affairs to Fr. Colombet, 15 July 1916, 46/1/34.

¹¹ B.A.A., Fr. Colombet to the General Advisor in Foreign Affairs, 27 September 1916, 46/1/38.

Subsequently, the Mission of Siam reaffirmed the fact that “formulae [for the oath] have been presented to the high authorities and approved by them”, that the priests in the missionary stations had been informed of the changes, and that “nowadays, they are generally known and applied everywhere”. Nevertheless, while the same letter indicated that there had been frequent conflicts over the oath-taking ceremony in the past, it also suggested that these cases had been successfully resolved, albeit with some difficulties.

For reference, the same letter cited one case that had occurred in Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima) in 1915 where a Catholic headman was compelled to participate in the ceremony at a Buddhist site. In the end “the matter was reported to the Catholic Mission, and Mr. Garreau, then the Acting French Consul, was sent there to investigate the case together with the Siamese authorities of Korat”. Ultimately, for the 1915 case, both the Siamese and French authorities concurred and concluded that “the conduct of the [district chief officer] was blamed as abuse of power and he had to apologise”.¹²

However, the General Advisor found a different account for the 1915 case. Rather than involving an oath ceremony, the 1915 case involved Nai Sali, a Catholic, being ‘involuntarily’ made to prostrate himself in front of a Buddha statue. Contrary to what was implied in the Mission of Siam’s letter, the General Advisor stated that:

...the assistant district officer was taking Nai Sali to the [District Office] to enquire into some other offence, when they came near Wat Noi. Nai Sali then asked to be allowed to go and do worship there as he felt remorse at having forsaken the Buddhist religion. The [assistant district officer] granted him the request and thus it was clearly proved that no force had been used against Nai Sali.

¹² B.A.A., Fr. Colombet to the General Advisor in Foreign Affairs, 27 September 1916, 46/1/38.

The eventual censure against the assistant district officer was for “the dilatory manner in which he carried out his duties”. As for the 1916 case, the General Advisor concluded that the district official was partly to blame for the incident and that he would “recommend that the [assistant district officer] be asked to use more tact and carry out his duties in a more conciliatory manner”. At the same time, he also recommended the Mission to maintain a better control of the behaviour of its priests.¹³

This exchange of letters indicates the extent to which both the Mission of Siam and the Mission of Laos were out of touch with information on the ground. The situation is reminiscent of the government in European colonies, that is, while the central government ostensibly determined the general policies, in reality, it was the local agents that had a greater role in making on-the-spot decisions. Furthermore, through the effective control of information sent to the centre, the local agents can, to a great extent, determine policy directions. In the Church’s case, it was clearly the parish priest who held most of the power to make decisions on the ground, especially if their posts were located in remote areas. While it is true that both the Mission of Siam and Mission of Laos had the authority to act as they saw fit, they still greatly relied on their parish priests to relay the relevant information. Thus, by controlling the flow of information, the parish priest could greatly influence decisions, unless the centre had an alternative ‘agent’ to whom they could turn, such as a parishioner or a concerned official.

A more serious implication is the amount of local resentment generated by the occurrence of these incidents. From the General Advisor’s report, it is clear that both the priest and the local authorities were culpable in the escalation of the crisis.

¹³ B.A.A., General Advisor in Foreign Affairs to Fr. Colombet, 10 October 1916, 46/1/42.

While there is no documentation to indicate the extent of public resentment regarding these interventions, it is conceivable that the incident could be construed as evidence of Catholic disloyalty. Furthermore, even if Catholics chose to conform, the parish priests would make an issue of it and, if necessary, involve higher authorities, both domestic and foreign. Together with the difficulties in communication between the parties involved, situations tended to fester for far longer than necessary.

Although the issue of the oath also arose in other mission stations, for the most part they involved individuals who were working in various official capacities¹⁴ and could quickly be resolved through civil memoranda to the relevant ministries rather than through the heavy-handed intervention of international and domestic representatives. The memoranda were mainly directed to various provincial governors under the Ministry of Interior and officials at the Ministry of Defence. For example, in one 1916 memorandum to the Ministry of Defence, along with asserting the right of Catholic soldiers to receive the sacraments while being hospitalised and to take leave for religious reasons, the Church acknowledged that the alternative ceremony may not be as well-known outside Bangkok:

In Bangkok, it is a custom for the participants to assemble at the Ministry of Defence with a priest and high official acting as witnesses when the water oath ceremony is performed. As for the provinces, there has not been an established custom, thus the civil servants do not know how to conduct affairs in the proper manner.¹⁵

Indeed, as late as 1927, the Church still had to prod provincial governors into action over local authorities overstepping previously agreed limits. Some of the responses, however, confirm that the Catholic ceremony was not well-known to local

¹⁴ The majority of cases involved enlisted soldiers and officers.

¹⁵ B.A.A., Memorandum to the Ministry of Defence, 30 May 1916, 59/3/7.

provincial authorities and, more significantly perhaps, by the participating Catholics themselves.

Regarding the matter that Muen Anukul reported to you, I don't think he believed what he was saying himself or perhaps another party instigated him to bring the inappropriate complaints to you. In the matter of swearing the oath according to one's religion, I have performed this ceremony with the police for 24-25 years now and, unlike in the present case, the Christians I encountered did not have any problems. The Christians in the present case have never been through the ceremony before and were probably over-excited.¹⁶

Clearly, in this matter, there were problems in communication, not only between the government and its provincial arms, but also within the Church establishment itself. The Siamese government appeared to be unaware of the spread of the missionary efforts, while on the Church's side, the deficiency can be attributed to an organisational structure that did not fit the new national boundaries. Technically, it was the Mission of Laos that should have informed and disciplined the priests in the northeast of Siam, yet it can already be seen from these two cases that this arrangement was impractical and that matters pertaining to the Siamese authorities could be dealt with effectively only through the Mission of Siam in Bangkok.

While the 1916 case was remarkable in itself and in its implications, one of the most interesting of its aspects was its background. The case occurred at around the same time as another controversial incident. The incident involved the transfer and slaughter of cattle between Catholics that contravened a newly promulgated law. From the Siamese point of view, the law was introduced to tackle one of the problems that arose from having a firm border with French-Indochina, but from the

¹⁶ B.A.A., Response from the Governor of Minburi, May 1927, 60/1/16.

Mission of Laos's point of view, the law was deemed to be unworkable and therefore should not be followed.

The incident and the legal case that followed was to last a total of three years, from July 1916 to July 1919 and would come to involve the Missions of Siam and Laos, the French authorities, and Siamese ministry officials. It is possible that these, and other cases, were the source of local resentment against Catholicism and the French. Thus when the central government eventually voiced its support of anti-French measures (and by implication anti-Catholic), it did not take much for locals in the northeast to throw their support behind the initiative, even if they became more 'creative' than the central government would probably have liked.

Border Crossings

Peace never respects borders.

- Loesje, 2004

One of the major problems that arose following the establishment of a firm border between Siam and French-controlled Laos derived from the administration that was created to manage movements across the new, porous border. Some historians have argued that proximity to a strategic borderland, especially when one side is ruled by an imperial power, usually increased the probability of violence.¹⁷ In the case of the Catholics in the northeast, this proximity to French colonial territory led to several potentially explosive court cases.

The border established between Siam and French Laos was especially problematic since it created a boundary where previously there had been relatively free movement of people and commerce. With the border came the need for security, that is, control of the movement of people and goods and the economic benefits that derive from this control through tariffs and custom duties. Naturally, the states involved were the main beneficiaries of this arrangement, but for the people who lived near the borders and who had been free to move from one side of the river to the other, the new arrangement caused obvious difficulties and, undoubtedly, resentment. At the same time, the states also encountered new problems in terms of trans-border crime, with the added complication that some 'crimes' were not illegal until the establishment of the border, while others were considered legal in one territory but not the other.

All of these developments not only led to the establishment of the 'other' across the border but also gave rise to resentment against those who were 'others'

¹⁷ N. Ferguson, *The War of the World* (Penguin, London, 2007), p. 635.

but 'inside' the border. In effect, the borders encouraged what Thongchai Winichakul has termed "negative identification" where ethnic groups define themselves in terms of their differences from each other, rather than shared characteristics.¹⁸ Thus, even though the Laotian ethnic groups on the Siamese side of the border may share some characteristics with groups on the French side of the border, the border itself encourages, and in a way, creates a sense of 'otherness' despite the existence of shared characteristics.

From a more practical point of view, the border was also a source of grievances. The Catholics were particularly vulnerable to this pressure, and local resentment increased when it was perceived that priests would cite foreign law or invoke higher authorities in their defence when they, or their parishioners, had violated local laws. While this approach was perhaps conducive in promoting the loyalty of parishioners to an institution that could protect the interests of its members, it no doubt spurred resentment among the non-Catholic locals who were also affected by the same laws and regulations, yet did not have such vigorous representation.

Certainly, teething problems could be expected from a newly established border, but it was still the source of dispute several years after its establishment. One 1921 report remarked: "The regulation of the border incidents between the French and Siamese authorities do not always pass without difficulties".¹⁹ As for the northeast, there were three cases that were of particular concern. The first case highlighted the nature of the Mission of Laos, as it concerned the ownership of land. Traditionally, as a foreign entity, the Mission of Siam had an arrangement under various agreements to purchase and own land. However, upon the transfer of

¹⁸ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 1998), p. 5.

¹⁹ B.A.A., Rapport de tournée, 4 July 1921, 46/2/21.

jurisdiction to the Mission of Laos, the status of its existing lands, as well as the right to purchase further land in the northeast, was called into question, since the Siamese government had no such agreement with the Mission of Laos.

The land holdings of the Mission of Siam were formalised as extensions of the commercial treaties with France. While these treaties guaranteed the Church freedoms unseen since the Ayutthaya period during the reign of King Narai, they also contributed to the Siamese perception that the Catholic Church was a French institution, as opposed to a multinational organisation. Nevertheless, by the 1910s the right of the Mission of Siam to hold land within Siamese territory was no longer a matter of dispute, although the quota of land it could hold was still in contention. The transfer of jurisdiction over parishes in the northeast to the Mission of Laos, however, raised an entirely new point of contention between the Siamese government and the Missions of Siam and Laos. The basic issues that had to be resolved were: is the Mission of Laos a separate entity from the Mission of Siam? If so, on what grounds should the treaty rights granted to the Mission of Siam be extended to the Mission of Laos? The Siamese government also had to consider whether the extension of such rights would affect national security.

However, these basic issues remained unresolved for several decades after the division in 1899, since the issue did not come to the attention of the courts and central authorities until the late 1920s. As late as 1926, the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos still had to request his Bangkok counterpart to assist in the regularisation of the land situation.²⁰ The Ministry had concluded that:

²⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Prince Traidos Devawongse, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 7 June 1926, 46/4/7

...the question of deciding under what conditions the provision of the Decree of 1909 shall be extended to cover the lands owned by the Catholic Mission in Nong S[a]eng [which was under the jurisdiction of the Mission of Laos in Siam], must be discussed entirely apart from Treaty rights [that is, the rights granted to the Mission of Siam].²¹

The uncertain status of the Mission of Laos's ownership of land in Siamese territory placed it at a disadvantage in court cases where land and property rights were in dispute. It took two more years of information-gathering and negotiations for an agreement to be reached. The 1928 agreement extended the rights of the Mission of Siam, as covered by the August 1909 agreement, to the Mission of Laos, with the exception of three articles. One of these exceptions was directly relevant to the Mission of Laos, while the other two were irrelevant.²² According to the 1909 agreement, the Mission of Siam was entitled to own a maximum of 3,000 rai²³ in a given province. Later agreements also allowed the Mission to transfer quotas from one province to another, if necessary. However, for the 1928 agreement, this was limited to 1,000 rai per province for the Mission of Laos. The Siamese authorities gave the following justification:

The recommendation that the maximum area be thus reduced in Nong S[a]eng is not due to any changed attitude of His Majesty's Government towards the Catholic Missions but to the difference in circumstances. The Decree of 1909 was the result of a compromise. At that time certain Missions in the Bishopric of Bangkok owned large amounts of land for endowment purposes. While the Mission of Nong S[a]eng have existed for some thirty years, the largest amount of land held for endowment purposes in any [province] is less than 600 rai so that a maximum of a thousand rai still leaves a considerable margin for new acquisition.²⁴

²¹ B.A.A., From the Office of the Advisor in Foreign Affairs, 18 June 1926, 46/4/8

²² The other two exceptions were related to specific provinces within the Bangkok area and the extra-territorial courts' jurisdiction over disputes concerning Catholic-held lands, which no longer applied, since these disputes had come under the jurisdiction of the regular courts.

²³ 1 rai is equal to 1,600 m².

²⁴ B.A.A., Memorandum concerning Catholic lands in the Vicariate-Apostolic of Nong Saeng, 10 December 1928, 46/4/39

The authorities also noted that many other countries either restricted or banned the purchase and ownership of land by religious organisations for purely investment or endowment purposes. The new limits could be interpreted in terms of national security where Siamese authorities were uncertain about the credentials of the unfamiliar Mission of Laos, in stark contrast to the members of the Mission of Siam, many of whom were personal acquaintances of the princes. It is also likely that the authorities were aware of the emerging tensions in the area and were unwilling to aggravate the situation by granting a foreign Mission permission to buy up large parcels of cheap land. In addition, the negotiation of the treaty, even if it was ultimately successful, reinforced the notion that the Mission of Laos was a foreign entity.

While the negotiations took place, the Mission of Laos was encountering difficulties in the encroachment of its lands. One case of note in 1923 involved local officials in Ubon Ratchatani who requested the return of some parish land ostensibly for military purposes (indicating the strategic value of lands held by the Church). The Mission of Laos complied but, subsequently, the land deeds were never returned, while the government requisitions went far beyond what was initially requested. As one missionary's letter to the local authorities stated:

Various governors have requested that the Catholic Church return some of the land granted to it by Chao Krom Thewa in order to establish a barracks, and up to today those lands have never been returned. You have also continued to ask for this land piece by piece so that the land that could be used to support the Catholic Church has been much reduced.

Although this situation could simply have been the result of bureaucratic forgetfulness, suspicion of ulterior motives behind the encroachment is raised by the fact that during that period, Ubon Ratchatani was experiencing an economic boom.

The parish priest was clearly worried, since the local boom had brought with it new problems in the Catholic and surrounding communities: "The town has since continued to develop but now its citizens are jealous of each others' lands and vie for them. They have even encroached onto the lands of the Catholic Church".²⁵

The encroachment was facilitated by the fact that the land held by this particular parish had not been properly demarcated. From the correspondence, it is clear that there had been a change in personnel, where the agreement reached between the previous parish priest and the authorities was only 'formal' as long as the official who made the agreement remained in charge. In such cases, these agreements may, or may not, be continued by subsequent officials. Additionally, with the growth of the bureaucratic state, all such informal deals would either have had to enter the formal system or be rendered null and void.

Problems regarding Catholic lands in the 1920s were thus characterised by the uncertain status of the rights of the Mission of Laos, and various sections of society taking advantage of the process of change from an informal state to one more formally governed by bureaucrats. Part of this transformation was the promulgation of various new regulations, which were often flawed (or perceived to be flawed) in practice. Two such laws proved troublesome for the Catholic community in the northeast throughout the 1920s, and as late as the 1930s the customs situation remained unsettled. As mentioned in the previous section, a case pertaining to the registration and slaughter of animals occurred almost at the same time as a dispute concerning the oath of allegiance, that is, around July 1916, and thus the two cases were dealt with concurrently by the foreign advisors. However, unlike the oath, the matter of the transfer and slaughter of cattle was not properly resolved until July

²⁵ B.A.A., Letter to the District Chief Officer of Ubon, 23 July 1923, 46/2/48

1919. Furthermore, the fact that the legal case appeared before the dispute over the oath of allegiance suggests that it was this legal case that began the local animosity between the Church and the local authorities. This particular case also highlights the difficulties of operating cross-border parishes.

The essence of the case, as summarised by Wolcott Pitkin, was this:

Nai Kene and Nai Prom are accused by the local officials of transferring cattle without appearing before the [district officials] in violation of the Beast of Burden Act of the year 119 and of killing cattle without permission in contravention of the Cattle Diseases Act of 119.²⁶

Supposedly, the two laws were designed to prevent trans-border cattle thefts as well as the spread of cattle diseases, as Pitkin points out:

[The Acts] have not been put into force to obtain revenue from the fees, as may be supposed, but for the reason that cattle theft is very prevalent in the Provinces. Before the Act stolen cattle were easily disposed of by thieves, either by sale at a small price or by their being slaughtered and the meat and hide sold.²⁷

The case was further complicated by the fact that Fr. Leon Quentin, the same priest implicated in the dispute over the oath of allegiance, later appeared to take responsibility for the 'crimes', and to take away the cattle hides that had been seized by the authorities following the incident. It was also initially noted that the perpetrators, Nai Kene and Nai Prom, were "said to be novices in this mission".²⁸

The matter was referred to the Mission of Siam. However, it becomes clear that the working relationship the Bangkok-based mission had cultivated with the authorities had not been transferred over when the administration of the northeastern parishes was ceded to the Mission of Laos. As Fr. Colombet explained, the Bangkok

²⁶ Year 119 corresponds to 1900 A.D.

²⁷ B.A.A., Wolcott Pitkin to Fr. Colombet, 10 October 1916, 46/1/42.

²⁸ B.A.A., Report on the Case of Fr. Leon Quentin, 15 July 1916, 46/1/34.

Mission and the Siamese authorities had encountered the problem before and had worked out a solution:

...with regard to the first case of Father Quentin, the high authorities of the Ministry of the Interior have several times been approached by me and now by the Right Revd. Bishop Perros on similar cases, and the application of the Act regarding the killing of cattle having been proved as impracticable in many instances, we have been advised in these cases to give it satisfaction in paying only the tax imposed upon killing cattle when it is claimed.²⁹

Thus, the case of Fr. Quentin should have been resolved on the basis of the agreement negotiated with the central authorities by the Bangkok Mission, since the circumstances were certainly 'impracticable', as Vicar-Apostolic Prodhomme of Laos (1913-20) who was present during the incident noted:

The distance from the parish to the residence of the [district chief officer] and the delay involved in obtaining the [authorisation] are such that (sometimes it can take up to 8 or 10 days) we would be dead of hunger 10 times before we received this permit for the slaughter. These considerations, it seems, should be made known to the high authorities in Bangkok who should be able to remedy the situation.³⁰

Nevertheless, it seems that any attempt at conciliation was too late by this point, since the foreign advisor charged with dealing with the case took a legalistic view: "the statutes create criminal offences and no one can evade responsibility for such an offence by showing that he was directed by his employer to commit it".³¹

The Mission of Siam was resigned to accept this judgement, but the Mission of Laos was unwilling to let the matter go so easily:

Although certain that Your Excellency has brought in the examination of this matter the greatest spirit of conciliation, I am afraid, however, that the Bishop of Laos be somewhat not satisfied of Your Excellency's point of view regarding the case of Nai Kane and Nai Prom, if they are prosecuted without

²⁹ B.A.A., Fr. Colombet to Wolcott Pitkin, 27 September 1916, 46/1/38.

³⁰ B.A.A., Response of Mgr. Prodhomme, Vicar-Apostolic of Laos, 23 August 1916, 46/1/40.

³¹ B.A.A., Wolcott Pitkin to Fr. Colombet, 10 October 1916, 46/1/42.

granting to them the benefit of the doubt for having transgressed the law not of their own accord and to their own profit, but solely to please and render assistance.³²

In other words, the Mission of Laos did not wish to pay tax. The matter was then forwarded back to the Mission of Laos and the Bangkok archives have no more documents regarding it until December 1916, when the Interior Ministry officially stated that it had dropped all charges against the offenders, with the provision that a compromise solution (presumably the one that had already been negotiated between the Mission of Siam and the Siamese government) be followed in the future.³³ Vicar-Apostolic Perros immediately agreed to the conditions.³⁴

While this particular case was ended amicably with the compromise, the negotiated solutions appeared to have been unknown to new priests or were purposefully ignored, since the same matter was raised again three years later, in 1919. The complaints from the Mission of Laos rested on the same basis as the case in 1916, that is, the impractical nature of the procedure. However, this time they were augmented by more serious allegations of bias among Siamese judges and of double-standards among the officials, none of which impressed the Office of the Advisor in Foreign Affairs:

The charges made by Mgr. Prodhomme as to the Siamese judges are serious, if they are founded in fact, but they also furnish no justification for a refusal to obey the law, nor does a rumour that Siamese and Lao Mandarins [sic] are permitted to slaughter the cattle whenever they please form any excuse to disobey the law.³⁵

³² B.A.A., Fr. Colombet to Wolcott Pitkin, 17 October 1916, 46/1/43.

³³ B.A.A., Ministry of the Interior to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 8 December 1916, 46/1/47.

³⁴ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to the Ministry of the Interior, 9 December 1916, 46/1/48.

³⁵ B.A.A., Office of the Advisor in Foreign Affairs to Fr. Colombet, 17 May 1919, 46/1/55.

The Bangkok Mission once again attempted to negotiate on behalf of the Bishop of Laos with the Siamese authorities. There is a hint of local frustration and resentment at the end of the correspondence, where it was emphasised that “the law is not a new one and no complaints have been received from the Siamese cattle owners who are in the majority, as compared to the members of the Catholic Mission”.³⁶ It is clear from the correspondence that there had been a transgression against Siamese law, yet the French consulate at Ubon Ratchatani, together with its Bangkok counterpart, had declared that the laws did not apply to the Bishop of Laos because he was a French subject. Thus, this second violation was demonstrably born out of a provocative attempt to claim colonial rights, rather than ignorance of local laws, as was the case with the 1916 incident.

Nevertheless, the Siamese Mission still attempted to negotiate a compromise between the two parties, where the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos would submit to regulations concerning the registration of animals, while the fee for doing so would be waived.³⁷ However, this offer was rejected by the authorities, who cited the fact that even animals belonging to government ministries had to be registered and paid for, and that any exemption would give rise to others claiming the same privileges, and even if the privileges were to be granted it would cause complications for the administration and may even render the law null and void.³⁸ It seems as if the case had been left unsatisfactorily for both sides; the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos remained reluctant to accept the laws of the Siamese authorities, despite compromises already brokered by his Bangkok counterpart, while the Siamese authorities were undoubtedly becoming exasperated by the former's recalcitrant stance.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to the Office of the Advisor in Foreign Affairs, 26 May 1919, 46/1/57.

³⁸ B.A.A., Office of the Advisor for Foreign Affairs to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 18 July 1919, 46/1/60.

The last controversial case of the mission concerned the seizure of goods from two priests who were travelling from an annual meeting of the Mission clergy at Nong Saeng to Tha Rae in January 1938. The priests complained that the search was not conducted in their presence and that they were not transporting any illegal goods.³⁹ However, the Siamese authorities disagreed. The list of seized goods included over one hundred bottles of wine⁴⁰ and a less impressive two packets of cigarettes, totalling 14 chests. Siamese regulations stipulated that these goods must be taxed if they travel beyond 25 kilometres from the border, and thus the authorities charged the two priests with tax evasion.⁴¹

The matter eventually concluded with the priests agreeing to pay taxes on the goods, albeit with much complaint. What was significant about this case, however, was not the nature of the violation of the law, but the level of local resentment against the Catholic Mission it indicated. In the previous incidents examined, it has been seen that although the two sides of the dispute disagreed, neither the authorities nor the general public demonstrated overt ill-will during the proceedings. However, when examined in detail, this case demonstrates that there were elements within both the general public and the local authorities who were no longer afraid to express their resentment against the Church, especially if it profited them.

How the case was initiated is telling. The authorities had acted because "an anonymous citizen who has received a bounty had declared that the goods were

³⁹ B.A.A., Re: Transport of goods to Sakhon Nakhon and Illegal Search, 17 January 1938, 47/3/33.

⁴⁰ The precise words used by the authorities were: *sura tang prathet* (foreign alcohol) but it is later confirmed that the priests were transporting supplies for the Mass [B.A.A., 47/3/41]. There is no record as to the reaction of local Buddhists towards clerics stockpiling such a large amount of alcohol, but it can be assumed that the reaction, if any, would not be positive.

⁴¹ B.A.A., Re: Transport of goods to Sakhon Nakhon and Illegal Search, 18 January 1938, 47/3/34.

evading tax", which already indicates a degree of local resentment, albeit for pay.⁴²

More significantly, the local authorities were no longer being co-operative as previously, as one of the priests later complained:

I, Fr. Bayet, the parish priest of Tha Rae...am very saddened that Lieutenant Ee displayed such vulgar behaviour against a member of the clergy. I have met in my time the whole gamut of officials; from the high to the low but I've never met anyone who displayed such awful behaviour.⁴³

Bizarrely, a year later, this incident was seized upon by the *Siam Nikom* (Siam Territory) newspaper, among others. As Fr. Bayet, the head priest of the Tha Rae parish, wrote to Vicar-Apostolic Perros on 19 February 1939:

The Siamese newspapers have reproduced, without any checks, the biased and wholly inaccurate account of their correspondent in Sakon [Nakhon] regarding the little incident involving Fr. Lacombe.

The priest then proceeded to recount the particulars of the incident, and asked Vicar-Apostolic Perros to rebut the newspaper article, and if necessary, invoke the assistance of the French consulate.⁴⁴ Tellingly, the Bangkok bishop merely used one of his connections to get the *Siam Nikom* newspaper to publish a verbatim translation of Fr. Bayet's 19 February 1939 letter,⁴⁵ once again highlighting the differences in the approaches to the Siamese government between the two Missions. The Mission of Siam was extremely careful to be conciliatory with the Siamese authorities, using French representation as a last resort, while the Mission of Laos appeared bent on provoking a conflict at every opportunity.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ B.A.A., Re: Illegal Search and Behaviour of Pol-Lt. Ee, 22 January 1938, 47/3/35.

⁴⁴ B.A.A., Fr. Bayet to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 19 February 1939, 47/3/41.

⁴⁵ B.A.A., Memorandum from the Siam Commercial Company Ltd., 2 March 1939, 47/3/43.

Personal Fiefdoms and Fifth Columnists

It is true that we do not see you, father, doing anything wrong. But we have heard news that you have come to preach the Roman Catholic faith in the hope of preparing the way for the French to occupy this place.

- A Buddhist monk to a Catholic missionary, 1933

From the Mission of Laos's stance towards state religious rites and laws alone, it is easy to see how the local public and local authorities could come to resent the presence of the missionaries. In addition, as a consequence of the mediation of the Mission of Siam, the two missions were effectively lumped together, despite the two being quite separate entities with no real control over each other's administrative affairs or priests.

At the same time, it is also true that the parishes of the northeast were not the only ones who were 'troublesome' to the local authorities and public. As outlined in the previous sections, parishes in other regions also had disagreeable encounters with figures among the local authorities and public. Yet the extent of the persecution in those other regions during the 1940s could in no way match that which occurred in the northeast in the same period. An alternative explanation could lie in the region's proximity to a border area, neighbouring an imperial power. But if this factor was the key, then those parishes in the eastern seaboard, which had a close proximity to the French protectorate of Cambodia, would also have seen similar levels of resentment and persecution, and this was not the case.

The main difference between the northeast and the other regions was arguably the local population's prior negative pre-disposition towards 'outside' or 'foreign' elements. The origin of this hostile attitude could be the relative isolation of the region, as well as the central authority's wariness of the region, due to

previous unrest and lack of formal administrative control and protocols. The problematic oath of allegiance ceremonies were likely off-shoots of a general policy by the central administration to secure the region. Nevertheless, this policy that sought to reinforce loyalty and legitimacy in the face of colonial encroachment also encouraged the local population to be more suspicious of outside elements, particularly those that seemed overly Western. The Catholic situation, however, was exacerbated by the fact that the ethnic backgrounds of parishioners in the northeast had more in common with groups across the border than with those in Bangkok, while some were not even Siamese but French subjects. The fact that the majority of the parish priests in the region were French also did not help matters.

Of all the accusations and suspicions held by the local authorities vis-à-vis the Catholic communities in their jurisdiction, the one that was the most significant was the view that the Catholics were nothing more than pawns in the hands of the French parish priests, who were determined to annex more territory from Siam. This nationalistic view would crystallise and become more widespread during the rule of Pibul, but it is intriguing to find that similar sentiments were current in the northeast before the Leader had passed the first of his Cultural Mandates.

The distrust of the motives of the Catholic Church in the area goes as far back as 1886, shortly after its initial foray into the territory. The period corresponds with the cross-border tensions that would eventually lead to the Paknam incident in 1893 and the ceding of Siamese territories to French Indochina. That the association occurred during this period indicates that the connection between the Catholic Church and the actions of the French government, however misunderstood, was

formed very early on. Undoubtedly, the French authorities under Auguste Pavie⁴⁶ were adept at exploiting the deaths, injuries (perceived or otherwise) of its subjects within Siamese territories to great effect. Some observers could also make the argument that, superficially, the Church gained indirect benefits from the French annexations as they no longer had to be so attuned to 'strange' local laws and customs.

Nevertheless, there are no documents that show or indicate the complicity of the Siamese Catholic Church in these matters. On the contrary, at the height of the French aggression in the late nineteenth century, the Church leadership in Siam was very aware of the potential problems of being accused of aiding French efforts in annexing additional Siamese territory. As one missionary recorded:

The Siamese government see that the missionaries are instigators of French encroachment and occupation. It seems this sentiment originated from their view of past events in Tonkin, not to mention the European newspaper articles or even the overbearing arrogance of our country's government.⁴⁷

To this effect, the predecessor of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, Monsignor Vey, gave explicit instructions for missionaries to avoid areas that were being claimed, or could fall under the claims that were being made, by France at the time. These included the areas around Champasak and Nong Khai. It was partly due to this reason that the northeast was one of the last regions to have Catholic mission stations, the self-imposed ban on missionary activities in this area ending only in 1893 – after the border between Siam and French Indochina had been settled. In reality therefore,

⁴⁶ Auguste Pavie began his career as a surveyor. During 1879-95 he conducted a survey of the Indochinese peninsula, the *Missions Pavie*, which significantly contributed to the shaping of France's policies in Indochina. He became France's first vice-consul to Luang Prabang in 1886, becoming consul in 1889 and consul-general in 1891. In 1892 he became the French resident minister in Bangkok, during which he played a key role in rally French public opinion behind the seizure of the left-bank of the Mekong, which was conceded to France following the naval blockade of the Chao Phraya River in 1893 (also known as the Paknam incident). He later became the first commissioner-general of Laos (1894-5).

⁴⁷ M.E.P.A., 21 January 1886, v. 895/406.

rather than aiding missionary efforts, the actions of the French government agents actually hindered the expansion of the Mission in Siam.

The Church's effective work in education, as documented in the previous sections, may also have backfired against it in the northeast. Furthermore, the fact that the parish priests who ran the schools were invariably Europeans (the majority being French) or otherwise from an ethnic background other than Siamese (for example Chinese or Vietnamese) would not have given local officials much comfort. A major part of the congregations in this and other areas were from a variety of ethnic minorities where some, such as the Lao, may have had stronger ties with their ethnic group across the border than with the Siamese of the central plain, spurring further fears of separatism under a Franco-Catholic aegis.

In remote and sensitive border areas, the Church's schools were a double-edged sword. In many cases, not only were they the more effective and attractive alternative to state schools (especially for the ethnic minorities) but occasionally they were the only choice available for locals who wanted their children to be formally schooled. The Hobson's choice undoubtedly worried some local authorities, concerned over the possibility of the young being indoctrinated by foreigners, whether to their religious or other causes. Their concern was increased by the effectiveness of the education. The Songkhon School was certainly one of such schools that was located very near to the border, in a remote region, and was the only locally available option for a formal education, as the parish priest noted in 1933:

When I arrived at this parish, the government came to close the school which had been established by the [district chief officer]. The lack of budget has imposed this measure on a good number of schools...⁴⁸

⁴⁸ B.A.A., Re: Opening of Churches and Songkhon School matters, 20 May 1933, 47/2/11.

It was suggested in the same letter that the local authorities – the local official representing the Ministry of Education, the district chief officer, and the governor of the province – had expressed appreciation of the achievements of the new school, notwithstanding the fact that it was the district chief officer's school that had closed down, and the Catholic school that survived.

Church documents from this period do not contain any evidence directly linking the local official's resentment against the actions of the Catholic Church, but earlier missionaries did voice their suspicions. The advent of the Catholic missionaries in the area in the late nineteenth century saw a marked decline in the 'slave trade'⁴⁹ that still continued in this remote region, notwithstanding the proclamations from the central government from 1874 abolishing the practice. To the poor and the displaced on whom the 'slave traders' preyed during this period, the Catholic Church was certainly one of the few institutions that could protect them from rapacious officials.⁵⁰ In addition, some missionaries felt that their teachings concerning equality and respect were not welcome by those officials who wished to exploit the corvée system of labour that was still practiced or those who were involved in the illegal slave trade.

Even during this early period, the authorities had a mixed reaction to the actions of the Catholic Church. Some, notably officials at Sakon Nakhon, were overtly hostile and threatened the locals with punishment if they met with

⁴⁹ Missionary accounts mention the 'slave trade' but it is unclear whether they were confusing the slave trade in the conventional sense with the Siamese practice that bore similarities to the European system of indentured servants – i.e. labour under contract. In either case, the Church's capacity to 'buy out' contracts or prevent abuses against converts would have made the prospects of conversion even more attractive to some.

⁵⁰ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, pp. 315-6.

missionaries.⁵¹ On the other hand others, such as the officials of Ubon Ratchatani, encouraged the missionaries to obtain as many converts as possible. The contrast between the provinces did surprise missionaries at the time, and Fr. Dabin suspected that there were ulterior motives behind the mission's promotion at Ubon Ratchatani, that is, the official wished for more settlers in the area so that more people would be available for *corvée* labour.⁵² There is no evidence to confirm Fr. Dabin's suspicions, but the differences in the attitudes of the authorities presaged the inconsistent conditions that would be seen in the early twentieth century.

Differences in attitudes were not solely confined to local officials, however. While some poor locals did undoubtedly welcome the presence of missionaries, others openly expressed their suspicions. The discovery of suspicion, accusations, and fears of Fifth columnists may not be surprising during times of acute tension and crisis, such as around the time of the 1893 Paknam incident, the Thai-French War (1940-1), or following the promulgation of anti-foreign laws such as the Cultural Mandates. But it is surprising to find them being raised in otherwise peaceful times, when there were no "hot" conflicts or the prospects of one. As late as 1911, Vicar-Apostolic Perros still had to consult and request the Interior Minister (then Prince Damrong Rajanubhab)⁵³ to intervene in the matter of abuses against Catholics in the northeast.⁵⁴

⁵¹ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 317.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ A son of King Mongkut, Prince Damrong was born in 1862. He became the Ministry of the North in 1892, which became the Interior Ministry in 1894. Among other things, during his time as minister, he was responsible for the overhauling of the provincial administration system and overseeing reforms in the national education and health systems. He resigned from his post in 1915 and was the founder of the Royal Institute of Thailand. After the 1932 revolution, he was exiled to Penang. He was allowed to return in 1942 and died a year later in 1943.

⁵⁴ B.A.A., Notes on Visit to Prince Damrong, 9 January 1911, 46/1/10.

Furthermore, in 1933 the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos still had to appeal to the Siamese Prime Minister to crack down on anti-Catholic sentiments in the northeast, in particular in Sakon Nakhon:

The key point is, when we come to a village where Buddhism is in the majority, even if there are Roman Catholics present, we hear people saying the most hurtful things such as 'It is true that we do not see you, father, doing anything wrong. But we have heard news that you have come to preach the Roman Catholic faith in the hope of preparing the way for the French to occupy this place'.⁵⁵

The appeal also reaffirmed the loyalty of the priests in Siamese territories to the newly promulgated Constitution, and to the Church's non-interference in political matters as per the instruction of Pope Pius XI. Nevertheless, the rumours in 1933 appeared to be so strong that even a forest monk had come to hear them. As Fr. Bayet noted, he and the parish catechist had on many occasion debated religion with the monk. However, meeting the monk on a trip in 1933, the monk said that: "I have heard a great deal that you did not come here so much for preaching religion! But that you've come here to take Thai land and give it to the foreigners".⁵⁶

Thus the link between the Catholic Church and French territorial encroachment was surprisingly strong in this area even in 1933. Consequently, some parishes suffered serious problems with anti-Catholic officials during this period but they were rare. For example, in a 1933 report, a parish priest noted the abusive nature of the local officials when the Catholic head of a new village of Catholic converts was unceremoniously dismissed from his position by a higher official:

One or two days before he [the high official] left Sakon, he went to the new village and, without any semblance of formality, discharged the village

⁵⁵ B.A.A., Appeal to the Siamese Prime Minister from Bishop Gouin, Vicar-Apostolic of Laos, 3 August 1933, 47/2/24.

⁵⁶ B.A.A., Re: Infamous Rumours, 21 August 1933, 47/2/34.

headman from his post. As an explanation, he said to the headman: 'You're of two hearts now,' and that was it.⁵⁷

The priest who compiled the report was in no doubt that the incident came about directly because of the village chief's recent conversion to Catholicism, rather than for "other reasons" as stipulated by the local authorities.

Apart from once again highlighting local fears of Catholics being of "two hearts", this incident also illustrates how local authorities could arbitrarily use their power. In remote regions, it is possible that some areas could be considered the "personal fiefdoms" of officials (or later, of elected officials), so long as their actions, legal or otherwise, remain hidden from higher authorities. At the same time, the situation indicates inconsistencies within and between the hierarchies of the Siamese local authority in terms of attitudes towards the Catholics. The lack of a consistent, central policy arguably exacerbated this.

Thus, the inconsistent nature of the persecution of the Catholic Church in the 1940s should perhaps be explained as much by the attitudes of the local authorities as through central policies. In the more remote regions, it was possible for local authorities to get away with various abuses, be they against ordinary citizens or Catholics, especially if they went unreported to the central authorities. The more unscrupulous local authorities could utilise anti-foreign rhetoric as convenient excuses for abuse, as well as a method for deflecting criticism, harassing communities (be they Catholics, 'Fifth Columnists', or later on, Communists and alleged drug dealers), as well as a way to acquire material benefits. But it was only when they knew that the central authorities would do little or nothing to mitigate or

⁵⁷ B.A.A., Report from Tha Rae, 21 August 1933, 47/2/35.

condemn their abuses that this became widespread, as was the case during the persecution.

Out of all the regions examined, the area governed by the Mission of Laos was by far the most problematic, with Sakon Nakhon being historically the most trouble-plagued area. While parishes in other regions encountered problems with local authorities and various members of the public, the extent and nature were very different. The Mission of Laos encountered regulations and laws that were specific to the region, and failed to establish a rapport with the authorities to negotiate a mutually acceptable compromise. Occasionally, they made matters worse by attempting to place themselves outside Siamese jurisdiction, consequently increasing resentment among the local authorities and public.

Nevertheless, all the transgressions alone would still be insufficient to provoke a full-scale persecution, even during the war years. The northeastern parishes shared the same common characteristics with parishes in other regions, such as proximity to border areas, congregations consisting of ethnic minorities, the domination by foreign priests, and problems with local authorities. Yet other regions did not experience the same levels of persecution as the northeast. Moreover, the experiences between different parishes within the northeast were markedly different. Therefore, how could these inconsistencies be explained?

Arguably, the decisive factor was the region's pre-disposition to anti-foreign rhetoric. To a certain extent, the rhetoric originated from an opportunistic desire of various parties to profit from the vulnerable legal and political situation of the Mission of Laos. By the 1930s the region was a cauldron of suspicion, directed unofficially at the French priests and their parishioners. Some of this sentiment was

built on unfounded rumours. But surely the perceived abuses by Catholic authorities and the reluctance of Catholics to involve themselves in communal displays of loyalty to the state would have created further suspicion among the local population or the Buddhist-centric authorities.

All that remained for a full-scale anti-Catholic persecution to be unleashed was for a leader in the central government to emerge and imply, regardless of the truth, that the French were indeed enemies of the state, that the Catholic religion was 'French', and that their followers were 'Fifth Columnists'. Pibul's ideas were certainly novel in parts of the country, but in the northeast of Thailand, his ideas merely reinforced existing pre-conceptions, and encouraged people to act on them when they may not have done so previously. Coupled with the freedom that local authorities in remote regions had to use or abuse their power and the result is almost predictable. Already, prior to the ascent of Pibul, some local authorities in the northeast were abusing their power against Catholic interests. While some officials may not have held any particular grudge against the Catholic Church, there were others who were merely waiting for a convenient excuse or pretext to act, which Pibul effectively provided.

Where was the Mission of Siam in all of this? The Mission of Siam was effectively caught between the Mission of Laos and the Siamese government. In theory, its role in this region should have been extremely limited, and ideally nonexistent. However, in practice, the Mission of Siam became the reluctant intermediary between the Mission of Laos and the Siamese government. While the priests and leader of the Mission of Laos were quite ready to invoke French intervention and extra-territorial rights at every sign of Siamese intransigence, the Mission of Siam was much more cautious in its approach. Given the troubles

provoked by the Mission of Laos and the Mission of Siam's role in calming them, it is surprising that there was no pressure from the Mission of Siam leadership for the reversion of the northeast to it. It is likely that the Mission of Siam thought that the trouble would eventually go away, since they made no moves to suggest revisions in the arrangement. At the same time, even if there was a full reversion, the Mission of Siam, already financially hard-pressed, would have found it difficult to allocate additional funds for the parishes that would return to its control. All the Mission of Siam could do was to use a conciliatory approach to blunt the undiplomatic actions of its Laos counterpart. Yet it was this very association with the recalcitrant Mission that encouraged others to see the Mission of Siam as a collaborator of French 'colonial aggression', especially following the 1893 crisis.

Conclusion

To punish a man because we infer from the nature of some doctrine which he holds, or from the conduct of other persons who hold the same doctrines with him, that he will commit a crime, is persecution, and is, in every case, foolish and wicked.

- Thomas Babington

In conclusion the chapter has shown that the northeast was already a problematic area, even before the outbreak of the Thai-French War in 1940. The issue over the oath of allegiance ceremony directly raises the question of religious identity and national loyalty. As problematic as this issue came to be, arguably it should have been a non-issue. Historically, the problem was not a new one, having emerged as early as the late eighteenth century during the reign of King Taksin, and, indeed, the Mission of Siam had already negotiated and resolved the problem with the central authorities.

The real problem was that while the Mission of Siam knew the solution to the problem, the Mission of Laos, which was in charge of the northeast of Siam, was not clear on this issue. Even when the Mission of Laos wanted to implement the Bangkok-negotiated solution, some of its priests, particularly the French ones, were often uninformed about the procedure. Consequently, these priests' refusal to allow their congregation to participate in the ceremony encouraged the damning suspicion among locals that Catholics were disloyal subjects. Moreover, even when priests were aware of the procedure, it was sometimes the case that the local state officials were unaware that such a special procedure existed.

This situation implies that there is a dysfunctional relationship between the central organisations and their local agents during this period. It seems that neither the state nor the Mission authorities had a firm control over their agents. Although

the central organisation could impose their will on their agents, this could only occur if they were focused on the issue. In the 1920s and even up to the late 1930s, the government and the Missions were quite willing and able to co-operate to resolve issues. But because of the turbulent situation of the 1940s, their focus laid elsewhere. Consequently, local agents came to have more freedom of action than ever before, without having to be accountable to the centre. It was this dysfunctional relationship and the fact that the government's attentions were diverted elsewhere that would allow the localised persecution events of the 1940s to take place.

In addition, there were also issues that exacerbated local tensions. The most significant were the issues that came with having a fixed geographical border. The border itself served as an active reminder of Siamese territorial losses following the 1893 Paknam incident, especially for the locals whose families straddled the Mekong. These families were now subjected to new Siamese and French regulations that came with the border. Resentment on the Siamese side was also exacerbated by some Mission of Laos priests attempting to bypass the Siamese regulations with threats and bluster. This attitude directly contrasts with the Mission of Siam's activities in the east. In that region, there were also parishes near to the border, but if there were similar problems they were never so prominent in correspondence. This difference arguably stemmed from the presence of indigenous priests in the area and the fact that this area came under the jurisdiction of the Mission of Siam. Both the indigenous priests and the French leadership of the Mission of Siam were already experienced in Siamese law and effective methods of conducting negotiations with the Siamese authorities, unlike the Mission of Laos whose priests were perhaps more used to operating under the more accommodating French Indochinese conditions.

The behaviour of the Mission of Laos priests further contributed to widening the gap between the Catholic and non-Catholic communities. They encouraged the suspicion that the French had designs on the territory: that the Catholics under their jurisdiction were Fifth Columnists who would eventually help the French colonialists to annex the area. This impression was strengthened by the arbitrary division of the Mission areas, where in the northeast these did not conform to national boundaries, unlike in the Mission areas in the west and the north.

The area was therefore already tense before 1940. All that was needed to trigger the persecution was official sanction. This came partly when conceptions of Thai identity changed. The behaviour of the students in Bangkok (as shown in Chapter III) indicated that this process of raising Buddhism's role in the Thai national identity was already underway by as early as 1933. However, this change alone would have been insufficient to provoke such a violent reaction against the Catholic presence since, as Chapter I described, King Vajiravudh had earlier employed the idea without any untoward effects on the Mission. The decisive factor was arguably the Thai-French War. It furnished the government with an active and visible enemy with which to distinguish itself (for example through an emphasis on differences in religious beliefs: French Indochina was 'Catholic' while Thailand was 'Buddhist') and encouraged anti-French attitudes throughout general society. In the rest of the Mission, this factor may have encouraged some mild actions against some Catholic parishes. However, in the northeast, they combined with pre-existing factors to produce some of the worst and most violent persecutions the Catholics were to see in the twentieth century.

V

Persecution, 1940-45

*He who mocks the infant's faith
 Shall be mocked in age and death.
 He who shall teach the child to doubt
 The rotting grave shall ne'er get out.*

- William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

The situation outlined by the previous chapter is that of a Mission in administrative fragmentation, resulting in different emphases and activities, under the common aegis of Catholicism. By 1939, Siam, or Thailand as it became that year, was divided administratively into three separate Missions – the Missions of Ratchaburi, Siam, and Laos, with the North potentially making a fourth. Most importantly, the local reception of these separate Missions varied widely, which was remarkable since they were operating in the same country, along the same religious principles. The most recent of the divisions, the Mission of Ratchaburi, was largely welcomed despite (or perhaps because of) the difference of the new priests' nationality from their M.E.P. predecessors. Similarly, the Mission of Siam was operating on a largely amicable basis and its expansion to the north was welcomed by most, with the possible exception of the existing Protestant communities there. Although the Mission of Siam came into conflict with the central government in terms of education policies in the closing years of the 1930s, the extent of these problems was incomparable to the problems that plagued the Mission of Laos.

In contrast to the Mission of Siam's conciliatory approach, the Mission of Laos seemed to provoke confrontation with the Siamese government on every possible occasion. Coupled with pre-existing anti-French sentiment in the area, it was not surprising that anti-Catholic persecution, when it occurred in the first half of

the 1940s, was the most intensive in this area. That persecution had not emerged in the pre-1940 period in the northeast was arguably due to a lack of opportunity rather than a lack of intention. While other areas, notably Bangkok, Nonthaburi, and Singhburi, also saw warning signs of a change in government and local attitudes towards the Catholic Mission, they were not taken seriously at the time by the Mission authorities. Even so, these signs cannot fully explain the outbreak of intimidation and assault in areas that, previously, had not seen any significant trouble between the clergy and elements of the local community. The explanation for these incidents, it seems, can be found as much in the effects of nationalistic propaganda as in other ulterior motives, such as personal conflicts and the desire for material gain.

Opportunity for would-be persecutors came in the form of the irredentist movement, whose aim was to reclaim territory ceded to the French following the Paknam crisis of 1893. For the government, the irredentists were arguably one of the first public movements to surface after the 1932 coup. Before, politics in democratic Thailand was restricted to conflicts between various factions within parliament, and outside and direct participation by the population was rare. The movement thus presented the government with a dilemma. Would the government deny the aspirations of the movement, however detrimental it may be in the long-term, thereby damaging its democratic credentials? Or would it attempt to exploit the movement as a vehicle to further its own interests, popularity, and thereby extend its grip on power, regardless of the constitutional consequences?

When the persecution broke out, the wide variations that occurred across the country – from a brief ‘token’ intimidation to extra-judicial executions – suggest a lack of a unified, consistent government policy against the Catholic Missions.

Within the Missions themselves, there were also contradictory forces at work, especially among the French priests that still remained in Thailand. When Thailand went to war with French Indochina, on whose side would the French M.E.P. priests stand? Would they stand on the side of their original motherland? If so, did they care that the government of Indochina nominally owed its allegiance to the Vichy government? Or would they stand on the side of their, as they themselves termed it, "*patrie d'adoption*", even as they faced local hostility purely for their national origin? Or would they be diplomats and declare themselves for the Catholic Church and render nationalities irrelevant? Then there was the question of the Italian Salesians – how far would they exploit their advantageous position at the expense of their French colleagues? Finally and most importantly, there were the indigenous priests and parishioners. Some indigenous priests who had been perfectly content under the French administration took the opportunity to agitate for greater powers. In some cases, particularly for the parishes on the eastern seaboard, it was a perfectly logical progression. However, other cases raise questions as to whether this agitation was really a result of principles, born from effective nationalistic propaganda or a more personal matter. These cases suggest that the phenomenon of the anti-Catholic persecution can also be explained through an examination of personal and economic interests.

Auguries of Violence

The Indian plays much the same role in our American society that the Jews played in Germany. Like the miner's canary,¹ the Indian marks the shifts from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere; and our treatment of Indians, even more than our treatment of other minorities, reflects the rise and fall in our democratic faith.

- Felix Cohen, 1953

While there is a world of difference between the experiences of the Native Americans and the Catholics of Siam, the missionaries and their congregation can still be regarded as 'canaries' reflecting the rise and fall of the 1932 Constitution's strength and the extent to which Pibul's brand of anti-French nationalism, that is the official endorsement of anti-French attitudes as opposed to the pre-existing unofficial, localised phenomenon had been received.

Already, it can be assumed that there were certain areas that would be more susceptible to anti-foreign sentiments than others. The northeast was a case in point. There were frequent and vehement conflicts with the local authorities and the documents give the impression of an atmosphere that was rather hostile to missionary activities. In addition, even with the Mission of Siam's forbearance in entering the area during periods of French belligerence in the late nineteenth century, there were already signs of distrust in the motives of the missionaries among non-Catholic locals. Together with the region's proximity to French colonial territories and the transfer of leadership to the foreign Mission of Laos in 1899, the northeast was a powder-keg waiting to be ignited. It is thus unsurprising to find that the worst

¹ Before the advent of modern safety devices, one of the few early warning devices available to those involved in mining were canaries – singing birds that would succumb to the toxic gases before it affected the miners. Should the canaries fall silent, it meant that the air was about to be too dangerous for humans.

of the incidents – the Songkhon incident and the arrest of Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung, occurred within this region.

Yet the fact remains that there were many more isolated Catholic villages and communities in the northeastern region and elsewhere and, while they faced various manifestations of persecution, it was never to the extent of Songkhon. Thus one can conclude that there were two forms of persecution: controlled and uncontrolled.

Both forms were repressive, but while the controlled version shared the aim of suppressing the French presence and activities in Thailand, it never would go to the extent of taking lives (or, indeed, even formal internment) and seemed largely capable of making the distinction between national and religious identities. On the other hand, the uncontrolled version was unpredictable and, in most cases, lacked a strong basis in the policies of the central government. This version was not at all adverse to subjecting victims to false accusations, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, violence, and even death, regardless of the orders of the central government, established laws, and the 1932 Constitution.

The unique characteristics of each region also arguably encouraged variations in persecution. The region most likely to see the controlled persecution prevail is Bangkok, given its proximity to the central government. The stations in the north, with their newly opened facilities, would place local authorities in a dilemma – would they turn on the missionaries and deprive themselves of the Mission's schools and other benefits? Or would they attempt to strike a balance between the edicts of the central government and their own attitude towards the missionaries and their facilities? The east, given its proximity to the French protectorate of Cambodia and a key naval battleground during the French-Thai war, was also a region at risk. Yet some of the risk could be mitigated by the presence of a longstanding indigenous

clergy that had little conflict with the local authorities. Out of all the regions, it appeared that the west was the safest from persecution. Not only was there an absence of volatile conflict with the local authorities but, crucially, the leadership of the Mission there was not French. Yet the difference in nationality would give rise to conflicts within the Mission itself, as the French missionaries saw their hitherto unchallenged influence wither in the face of persecution, and the Salesians filling the resulting vacuum.

It is clear therefore, that there were some areas that were safer than others – areas where the canaries were still singing, as it were. But such clarity is achieved through hindsight. To contemporary observers, the signs were obscure and often clouded by local dimensions and other considerations. A land dispute at Immaculate Conception Church in Bangkok is a case in point. The parish had been a battleground between some tenants and the indigenous parish priest, Fr. Andre, since the late 1930s. The dispute involved a group of residents that had been evicted from church land. Their eviction followed complaints from other parishioners about the evictees' illegal and "immoral" activities on parish land.² A later petition by some parishioners goes into further detail: the thugs were involved in setting up gambling dens and the manufacture of moonshine and were intimidating the local community, so much so that "many had sold their property to escape the troubles". More worryingly, at least one member of the gang appeared to have the support of the son of an aristocrat (Chao Khun Samut Sakdarak) and a printing press.³ It was this access to a patron and a printing press that escalated the conflict beyond the bounds of the parish. The battle was fought out in newspapers and even Pibul publicly expressed his opinion that Fr. Andre should be stripped of his post and another priest,

² B.A.A., Fr. Andre to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 18 March 1937, 30/1/40.

³ B.A.A., Petition to Fr. Andre, 7 November 1937, 30/1/48.

Fr. Henri, should take his place.⁴ The fact that figures in government were willing to interfere in what was essentially a local and ecclesiastical matter should have been of some concern to the Mission authorities but it appeared that they remained unperturbed. Indeed, despite the escalation of the situation, the Mission still saw the matter as a purely local problem, rather than as an indicator of the government's intensifying animosity towards the Catholic Missions.

More worrying for the Mission were the June and September 1930 incidents at Bangbuaathong (Nonthaburi province) and Ban Paeng (Singhburi province), where circumstances were much murkier. There, churches had been burnt down and the local and Mission authorities disputed the causes of the blaze. In a letter to the French chargé d'affaires, the Vicar-Apostolic insisted that the cause of the fire was deliberate:

The fire started outside in the part of the property where there are no houses and the incredible violence of the flames during the peak of the monsoon is proof that the cause of the flame was malicious.⁵

On the other hand, initial official reports denied the possibility of arson, insisting that the incident was accidental.⁶ A second investigation was called at the behest of the French chargé d'affaires, but that too failed to turn up anything that indicated arson. The police investigation did turn up evidence that there were some in the community who were discontented with the parish's refusal to allow their cattle to graze on parish grounds, but it quickly added that this was an insufficient motive for arson.⁷ Whether this judgement is accurate or not will never be known.

⁴ B.A.A., Fr. Andre to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 13 April 1937, 30/1/42.

⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic to French Chargé d'affaires, 26 September 1930, 43/1/31.

⁶ B.A.A., Ministry of the Interior to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 11 October 1930, 43/1/30.

⁷ B.A.A., Secret Police Report, 22 December 1930, 43/1/32.

Nevertheless, in the annual report to the M.E.P. headquarters in Paris, the Vicar-Apostolic remained uncertain whether the incidents were “due to fortuitous accidents or ill will”, adding that “we are unable to find out any more in either case”.⁸ The Mission, therefore, seemed aware that local hostility had the potential to manifest itself in violence against property: but this case occurred in 1930, a decade before the persecution movement occurred. That violence did not occur on the scale of the 1940s during this period was arguably because the Mission still retained the full public support of the government, while nationalist rhetoric during this period was still not explicitly anti-French. It was perhaps the absence of these two elements that lulled the Mission into a false sense of security in the 1930s and allowed it to view the events as a purely local phenomenon. The missionaries could have expected further trouble from this particular parish, but they could not predict that this sort of incident would soon occur across their holdings.

What also encouraged the Mission to continue in this complacency were the mixed messages being given out by the constitutional government. As late as 1939, the Mission was still being invited to participate in state celebrations and was not being excluded in any way. On the newly promulgated Constitution Days (24 June – the anniversary of the 1932 revolution and 10 December – the anniversary of the promulgation of the permanent 1932 Constitution), churches were to be decorated with the national flag, bells were to be rung, and Masses were to be said “for the prosperity of the Thai nation”.⁹ The Mission had been involved in such celebrations since 1932¹⁰ and, on occasion, had even been praised for its participation. In 1934 the Prime Minister, Phraya Phahon, wrote to Vicar-Apostolic Perros congratulating

⁸ M.E.P.A., *Compte-Rendu*, 1931-32.

⁹ B.A.A., Bangkok City Hall to Fr. Ollier, 7-12 June 1939, 31/4/69-71.

¹⁰ In this case, it was for the 10 December, the day when the permanent 1932 Constitution was promulgated: B.A.A., Ministry of the Interior to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 3 December 1932, 60/1/27.

him on the occasion of a Mission school winning first prize in a float competition during the Constitution celebrations of that year, and expressing his appreciation for the “love of the nation, the monarchy, and the constitution” held by the Catholics.¹¹ The celebrations of 1936 appeared to have been especially successful, with officials praising the participation of the Catholic schools, writing that “the results were very pleasing to the general population”. The Vicar-Apostolic was subsequently invited to be one of the members of the committee co-ordinating student activities.¹² Even Pibul was still inclined to be diplomatic in 1938, writing personally to Vicar-Apostolic Perros on the occasion of the death of Pope Pius XI, expressing his “personal sincere grief and sympathy on this sad occasion”.¹³

Superficially, therefore, there was little reason for the Mission to be concerned. Undoubtedly there were government intrusions into the Mission’s traditional spheres of interest and outbreaks of worrying incidents, but these could be dealt with on a case-by-case basis or could be dismissed as purely local phenomena. To that end it could be said that, by 1940, most of the canaries were still singing with the possible exception of those in the northeast. Even if the Mission had been fully aware of the threat (and it clearly was not), by 1939, there was little that could have been done short of handing over control of the entire Mission to an indigenous clergy that was not yet ready for the responsibility. The matter would also have to be referred to M.E.P. headquarters, as well as the relevant Vatican agencies, since the Vicar-Apostolic was not empowered with the authority to create an indigenous ministry on a personal whim, even *in extremis*. Indeed, the effect of such a premature move taken under duress would arguably have been as devastating as the

¹¹ B.A.A., Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 29 September 1934, 59/4/6.

¹² B.A.A., Committee for the 1937 Constitution Fête to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 14 September 1937, 60/6/4.

¹³ B.A.A., Pibulsongkhram to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 18 February 1938, 60/6/8.

outbreak of persecution, if not more so, to the long-term development of Catholicism in Thailand.

When the government's attitudes changed, it was sudden, occurring on the back of unexpected military and political developments in Europe and Asia. France had fallen to the Nazi blitzkrieg unexpectedly quickly, while Germany's Asian ally, Imperial Japan, was inexorably expanding its influence southwards. At the same time, the shift in the Thai government's attitude was built on the foundation of longstanding anti-French resentment. The resentment could be traced as far back as the attempted colonial incursion in the seventeenth century but, more recently, to the Paknam incident of 1893. The latter incident led to the loss of territory to the French at the expense and humiliation of the Siamese, and influenced the nationalism of Vajiravudh, from which many of the visions of Pibul took their cue. The Paknam incident had occurred under the absolutist government. Would it therefore not be tempting for the new, constitutional government, anxious to differentiate itself from the failures of absolutism, to make the redressing of this historic wrong the first in a long line of crowning achievements when the opportunity presented itself?

Manifestations

Even in the first three centuries, when persecution after persecution, inspired by Hell, fell upon the infant Church in a raging attempt to crush her, even then when the whole of civilisation was deluged with Christian blood, out on the far frontiers of the Empire the heralds of the gospels journeyed, announcing their tidings.

- Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, 30 November 1919

The opportunity for the Thai government to engineer the return of territories lost to French Indochina came through a conjunction of three factors. The first was the fall of France, which left the French central government and many of its colonies in disarray.¹⁴ French unity was further undermined by the creation of the Vichy government and the emergence of the Free French forces. The resulting weakness offered the Thai government an unprecedented opportunity to exploit. The second factor were the ambitions held by Imperial Japan, vis-à-vis the European colonies in Southeast Asia.¹⁵ The strategic position of Thailand meant that any Japanese attempt to incorporate Malaya, Singapore, or Burma into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere would have to take the attitude of the Thai government into consideration.¹⁶

¹⁴ The situation in French Indochina was not immediately exploited by Thailand but Japan, which was eventually allowed to set up military bases in French Indochina. Probably inspired by Japan's example, the Pibul government subsequently asked to settle the disputed border between Thailand and French Indochina. The French response was a mixture of delay, which indicated weakness, and defiance, both of which provoked a more aggressive Thai response, eventually leading to the border skirmishes and the Thai-French war, see Direk Jayanama, *Thailand and World War II* (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2008), pp. 23-4, 32, 35.

¹⁵ Matsuoka Yosuke, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, had outlined the concept of 'Japan's living sphere' as early as 30 July 1940. Although there had been earlier formulations, they were not as thorough. Included in this sphere were French Indochina, Borneo, Malaya, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, Australia, New Zealand, and India, and Thailand. It seems that, in this scheme, the Philippines came under another zone. In any case, according to its "Asia for Asians" slogan, it was clear that Japan was unwilling to see these territories "remain under the administration of any country outside East Asia". See W.G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991), pp. 227-8.

¹⁶ In their calculations for the defence of Malaya, the British authorities were unclear as to where the Japanese would attack until they began the construction of bases in southern Indochina, raising the possibility that the attack would come through southern Siam. Operation Matador was thus formulated, where British forces based in Malaya would effectively invade southern Siam to take up position to repel the Japanese invasion. The plan had the fatal flaw in that it relied on Japan violating Siam's neutrality first (since one of Japan's likely points of invasion was southern Siam, the plan would be and was effectively pre-empted). In the event of the actual invasion, the Japanese forces landed at Songkhla, Pattani, and Kota Bahru. Following the end of the Pacific War, the British were

There was the danger that Japan would simply take over Thailand: but the invasion and occupation of the only independent nation in Southeast Asia would have undermined the Japanese propaganda of 'liberating' colonies from Western imperialists.¹⁷ As such, the situation allowed the Thai government significant leverage in obtaining reluctant Japanese support for its ambitions. The third factor was domestic support through the vocal irredentist movement, whipped up in part by government propaganda efforts. Previous political activities were largely restricted to conflicts between political factions, mainly inside the Assembly. The rebellions and coup attempts throughout the 1930s were arguably the continuation of such politics by other means. The irredentists, however, were different, since they were arguably the first instance of a mass public movement in Thai political history. Certainly they were the first to employ mass street demonstrations in Thai history and it seems Pibul was conscious of the importance of the movement, since he personally came to receive irredentist student demonstrators on at least two occasions.¹⁸

The "Thai Blood" Group (*Khana lueat Thai*) that was responsible for much of the uncontrolled persecution was an offshoot of the irredentist movement. At first, the group appears to be an unofficial, independent group. However, their unusual level of organisation indicates a degree of official sanction since they had chapters in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phanasnikhom in the east of the country. Indeed, their

certainly more conscious than ever about the strategic position of Thailand in the defence of Malaya. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand* (University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1991), p. 202 and N. Barber, *Sinister Twilight: the Fall of Singapore* (Collins, Glasgow, 1985), p. 10, and Direk Jayanama, *Thailand and World War II*, p. 327.

¹⁷ In contrast to North Asia, the Japanese envisioned their role in Southeast Asia as a combination of Britain's role as the 'law-giver' and France's role as the 'civiliser of liberated peoples'. Figuratively, the relationship was to be a paternalistic one, like that between a little brother and a big brother (even if in reality this was far from the case), see W.G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*, pp. 245, 256.

¹⁸ The main destination for these rallies was the Ministry of Defence, where Pibul would come out personally to welcome them. Many of the gatherings were also instigated by the Thai Blood Group. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, pp. 154, 157.

leader was Prasert Tharisawat, an official in the Government Propaganda Bureau.¹⁹ Prasert himself was the younger brother of Luang Thamrongnawasawat, the Minister of Justice from 1938-44.²⁰ However, there appear to be no other government officials directly affiliated with the group, suggesting that if they were not opposing the agenda of the Thai Blood Group, they were not comfortable actively promoting it either.

Nevertheless, this group was the only one to be consistently mentioned by name in missionary accounts as a major perpetrator of harassment against the Catholic Church, its property, and its personnel. From the group's announcements it seems its campaign sprung from the belief that Buddhism was the only valid religion for Thais – a belief that arguably drew some inspiration from the nationalism of King Vajiravudh but was further reinforced by the Cultural Mandates and its support for a “Thailand for Thais”. Looking back on the events that had befallen them, the missionaries were clear in their view as to how the persecution occurred. The 1940-46 report of Vicar-Apostolic Perros argued that:

The political conflict was the occasion of an open persecution against the Catholic religion. Under the pretext of national religious unity, the Catholics were declared enemies of the state [and] all sorts of calumnies and accusations were levelled against them without control.²¹

This view has been echoed in subsequent explanations and accounts of the Thai persecution against Catholicism.²² As an immediate cause of the outbreak of violence against Catholics, this argument is certainly attractive. However, it ignores

¹⁹ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, pp. 153, 174.

²⁰ Born in 1901, Luang Thamrongnawasawat (also Thawal Tharisawat) was a naval promoter who studied at the Thai naval academy. He held various cabinet posts, including Minister of the Interior, 1936-8, Minister of Justice 1938-44, as well as the position of prime minister from August 1946–November 1947. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 377.

²¹ M.E.P.A., *Compte-rendu*, 1940-45.

²² R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, pp. 427-8.

the local conditions and the inconsistencies in the methods of persecution. As discussed in the previous chapter, each region had its own relationship with the local authorities and communities. Sometimes they were cordial, as in the case of the Mission of Ratchaburi; in other cases, like the northeast, they were problematic, at best. The correlation between good community relations, or lack thereof, and the severity of the persecution is strong. During the persecution, none of the northeastern parishes was left untouched. All had seen either their facilities closed down, destroyed, or otherwise confiscated. On the other hand, while the parishes of Ratchaburi did encounter some problems with the local authorities during this period, they occurred at a much later date (after 1943) and were incomparable in severity to that of, say, the case of Songkhon.

The lack of a clear policy against the Catholics (or against their persecutors) reflected the contradictions within the central government – essentially an uneasy coalition of politicians divided along military and civilian lines, ultra-nationalist and constitutionalist lines, as well as pro-Japanese and anti-Japanese lines. Ultra-nationalist slogans such as “Thailand for Thais” were useful in galvanising popular support for the government at a difficult time, but there was a danger that, when taken too far, they would undermine a government whose legitimacy was based on the 1932 Constitution – one that guaranteed certain rights, such as freedom of religious belief, to all citizens. Pridi’s alacrity in reaffirming constitutional liberties following the fall of the first Pibul government in 1944 is an indication of the constitutionalist’s concern at the damage that had been wrought during the rule of Pibul’s military faction. At the same time, some members of the Pibul cabinet had a personal stake in keeping ultra-nationalists on a tight leash. For example, Luang Aduldejarat, a Muslim, was certainly uneasy with the uncontrolled (perhaps, to an

extent, uncontrollable) actions of his subordinates in his capacity as the police director-general and deputy prime minister.²³ He, along with many others in the government, would have been conscious that if the ultra-nationalists went out of control, there was no telling who or what other religious or ethnic minority they would target next. At the same time, there was also a danger that if the government did not appease the rampaging mobs, they would be accused of failing to respond to the 'democratic' aspirations of the people.

The delicate balance was heavily influenced by international developments. Undoubtedly, there were some who could not resist profiting politically and economically from the fall or weakening of the European colonies in the face of a seemingly invincible Japan. On the other hand, the inevitability of the Allies' victory after 1943 allowed the constitutionalists, along with the members of the Free Thai movement, sufficient leverage to ease Pibul's government out of power and initiate attempts to reaffirm the constitutional order.

The persecution itself conformed to two broad categories. The first type, the controlled persecution, was centrally driven and much of it was directed against French nationals and the Chinese ethnic minority rather than specifically against Catholics. Notably, the controlled persecution was limited in its time-span (the duration of the Thai-French War) and territorial extent (mainly to provinces close to the Thai-French Indochina border, as covered by the emergency decrees). Nevertheless, given the ethnic composition of the Catholic parishes and clergy, these measures inevitably had an indirect effect on the operations of the Catholic Missions.

²³ Born in 1894, Luang Aduldejarat was the son of a British subject from Ceylon. He graduated from the Thai military academy in 1915, the same year as Pibul. He was a member of the junior army promoters' faction and became the deputy director-general of the police in 1933, rising to director-general of the police in 1935, a position which he kept until 1945. He also held the post of deputy prime minister from 1941 to 1944. He was one of the leaders of the Thai resistance (*Seri Thai*) movement, became Army commander in 1946 and retired from public life in November 1946. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 367.

In contrast, the second type of persecution was uncontrolled, unpredictable, and more driven by local groups and interests. Ulterior motives made themselves clear in the uncontrolled persecution through the many incidents of confiscation, rather than destruction, and may also explain some of the most severe cases of persecution – the Songkhon murders and the arrest and trial of Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung.

In most cases there was no linear progression or a fixed pattern to the persecution. Indeed, some parishes like Songkhon experienced multiple manifestations. First, the village priest was expelled, according to the official orders, and this was shortly followed by the assassination and executions. The transfer of the local police unit responsible for the murders did not end the persecution as the villagers faced manipulative local officials,²⁴ as well as the destruction of their chapel.²⁵ In contrast, within the same period, eastern parishes faced minor harassment from the local authorities or incidents of vandalism. However, by 1944, when churches were still being burnt down in the northeast, priests and nuns in the eastern parishes were free to go on a major boat trip (requiring five boats) with their parishioners in Rayong province to the site of one of the naval battles of the Thai-French War. The trip was possible because of a jump in the parish's revenue, when they managed to sell 10,000 baht worth of fish that year,²⁶ in spite of the Thai Blood Group calling for a trade boycott against Catholic businesses in a nearby province. The lack of uniformity and co-ordination in the persecutions outside the official expulsion orders suggests that, ultimately, they were a local phenomenon rather than the results of a centrally co-ordinated policy.

²⁴ Archbishop Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On et al, *Bunyarasi thang jed*, pp. 54-5.

²⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti to Interior Minister, 10 September 1944 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, pp. 215-218.

²⁶ B.A.A., Fr. Thomas to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1 February 1944, 35/4/14.

Controlled Persecution

I do not ask you to hate the Chinese; I ask only that you think more of yourselves.

- King Vajiravudh

On 28 November 1940 all Europeans, specifically French citizens, were ordered to vacate the border areas in the northeast and the east within 24-48 hours and were given the choice of either coming to Bangkok or leaving for another country.²⁷ The policy followed an incident in which five French planes had flown over Nakhon Phanom with "dubious intent". Thai fighters were scrambled to intercept whereupon the French planes bombed the town, resulting in the injury of six civilians. The Thai air force then retaliated on the same day with a bombardment of French military barracks across the border.²⁸ However, even at this early stage, the implementation of the forced evacuation was inconsistent. Some priests, such as Fr. Paul Figuet, the parish priest of Songkhon, were able to leave relatively easily by merely crossing the Mekong into French Indochina. In contrast, priests in other areas encountered problems ranging from harassment to violence and detention. For example, three priests in Nong Saeng including Mgr. Gouin, the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos (1922-43), were jailed in a "cage" by soldiers and the police before being expelled. Meanwhile, Fr. Excoffon, the Provincial of Laos, was badly beaten while a nun of the same parish, Sister Yvonne of the Order of St. Paul, was pushed off in a small boat and abandoned in the middle of the Mekong without a rower. Foreign priests in the eastern parishes also received similar treatment. Fr. Richard in Paetriu,

²⁷ At this point, the order only applied to the northeast, the east, and certain provinces in the north. However, French priests were still allowed to stay in certain areas (as Vicar-Apostolic Perros and the leadership of the Mission of Siam did in Bangkok throughout the war) and none were officially expelled although many faced unofficial pressure not to return. If priests and nuns left the country, it was either because it was easier than going to Bangkok or found that their expertise would be put to better use elsewhere.

²⁸ Direk Jayanama, *Thailand and World War II*, p. 40.

Chachoengsao province, was taken in the middle of the night by a dozen policemen, beaten, and exposed to a mob before being beaten again. After that he was taken to another police station and made to sign a declaration that he would leave the area within 48 hours, at which point he was freed. At the same time, other priests like Fr. Carrié were merely threatened and made to promise that they would leave in 48 hours.²⁹

At this stage, the central government's main concern was for the aliens to vacate the crisis area for either another country or to Bangkok, where they could be placed under the government's control and scrutiny: both alternatives were designed to curtail the activities of foreign agents in the approaching conflict with French Indochina. Nevertheless, it is telling that the government did not issue orders to kill or harm those who had to be evacuated but merely to detain and force them to leave, or arrest them and send them to police headquarters if they resisted.³⁰ In the absence of clear orders, local authorities implemented their own interpretation of the official policy. Even so, at least up until December 1940 when full-scale hostilities broke out between Thailand and French Indochina, local authorities were prepared to act in this manner only against foreigners.

Following the commencement of hostilities, a further order was given by the police on 6 January 1941 for all remaining French missionaries in the provinces to assemble in Bangkok,³¹ indicating that the earlier forced evacuation had not been entirely successful. There were also additional instructions for the police that "in informing them of this measure, the police must inform them with absolute politeness with no exceptions, unless they are ordered to do otherwise by the chief of

²⁹ B.A.A., Treatment inflicted on missionaries in Thailand, Undated, *Beatification Documents* 166/1.

³⁰ C.B.A., Police Department Order 6/2483, Re: Dealing with French citizens in certain instances, 28 November 1940.

³¹ B.A.A., Notes on the religious events in Thailand, October 1940-March 1941, 24 February 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 182/2.

police”,³² suggesting that the police were aware of the abuses that had taken place under the previous evacuation order. Nevertheless, the police restrictions on the movement of the missionaries meant that they were unable to work and, by February 1941, many had decided that it was better to leave the country and be more productive elsewhere. In total, 13 priests from the Order of St. Gabriel, 13 missionaries, and 12 sisters from the orders of St. Paul and Ursulines had left in this manner.³³ It is telling that neither they, nor the Mission hierarchy in Bangkok, were officially expelled from the country by the central government at any point during the Thai-French or the Pacific Wars.

By July 1941, the Thai-French War was over and the orders issued on 28 November 1940 and 6 January 1941 were rescinded. The head of the police, Luang Aduldejarat, also confirmed that French citizens were free to travel to the provinces, as long as they observed the relevant laws. Furthermore, any weapons that had been confiscated as per the order of 6 January 1941 could also be reclaimed.³⁴ Such a quick restoration of ‘official’ rights was arguably helped by the fact that despite the armed clashes between Thailand and France, a state of war was never officially declared, while diplomatic relations between the two countries continued during the conflict.³⁵ The unusual state of affairs suggests a degree of ambiguity within the government with regard to the actions against France. Certainly, French diplomats were appreciative of the “impartial attitude and statesmanlike qualities”³⁶ their Thai counterparts displayed during the negotiations, notwithstanding the vociferous anti-French protests that were taking place at the time.

³² C.B.A., Police Department Order 1/2484, Re: Dealing with French citizens in certain instances, 6 January 1941.

³³ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Ambassador to Japan, 17 April 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 193.

³⁴ B.A.A., Police order 9/2484, 28 July 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 191.

³⁵ Direk Jayanama, *Thailand and World War II*, p. 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Furthermore, following the cessation of hostilities in January 1941, officials in the Thai central government were publicly condemning the excesses that had been committed in the name of religion during the conflict with France. For example, on 1 February 1941, Luang Aduldejarat tried to convince Thais that “from now on the pressure, threats, and compulsion with regards to religious conformity must come to an end”, and that such matters should be left to the police. The police chief gave the following reasoning:

In supporting the government's call for a rectification of the border between Thailand and French Indochina...some people have been excessively violent...some cases were covers for corruption and personal interests and even murders and assassinations...all of this has an impact on foreigners with friendly relationships to Thailand...and is against government policy. It is a reason for unrest and is immoral, inhuman, and unbecoming of a civilised race.³⁷

Thus, by this evidence alone, it seems that the centrally directed ‘persecution’ of the missionaries was over by July 1941. Furthermore, Luang Aduldejarat's words provide strong evidence that there was indeed no official policy against the Catholics and that certain members of the central government were aware of, and discouraged, the policy abuses in the provinces. Certainly normality had nominally been restored in parts of the country by April 1942 when the Vicar-Apostolic wrote:

At this time the troubles have much subsided. The government have seen that those who truly hold the Catholic religion are trustworthy and good citizens and have permitted the re-opening of many Catholic churches that had been closed down such as in Chonburi, Prachinburi, Kok Wat, Ubon, Nakhon Phanom, Tha Jin, and so on.³⁸

However, the Mission continued to be affected indirectly by other policies, such as the twelve Cultural Mandates that were issued by the government between

³⁷ *Nikorn* newspaper, 4 February 1941 in B.A.A., V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 143.

³⁸ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Governor of Phitsanulok, 23 April 1942, *Beatification Documents*, 209.

June 1939 and April 1940. The Cultural Mandates affected everyone in Thai society but the one that had the most effect on the Catholic community was the second, issued on 3 July 1939 that urged Thai citizens not to act as proxies for foreign powers and not to sell land to foreigners. Again, the measure was not expressly directed at the French or the Catholics. Indeed the government applied these measures only to those not covered by treaty obligations (i.e. the Chinese) and, since the Missions operating in Thailand were covered by several treaties, they were legally safe. Nevertheless, the foreign composition of the Missions' leadership, as well as their substantial landholdings placed them in a particularly vulnerable situation – one that could be exploited by the unscrupulous.

Indeed, the main targets of the Cultural Mandates were the Chinese. The Chinese schools felt as much pressure from the ninth Cultural Mandate issued on 24 June 1940 as the Catholic schools that remained open. The ninth Cultural Mandate required all Thai nationals to know and use the Thai language. While the Catholic schools were consistent in their attempts to apply government standards in their institutions before 1939, many Chinese schools were not as assiduous, and thus the 1940s saw the mass closure of Chinese schools in Thailand. By the end of 1940 there were no Chinese schools outside Bangkok, while in 1941 there were only two Chinese schools in the capital.³⁹ Some restrictions, such as the prohibition on buying land and the forbidding of entry into certain parts of the country, were similar to those that applied to the missionaries. However, the Chinese faced additional limits on their activities, such as the ban on entering certain professions as well as additional taxation.⁴⁰ In the case of the Chinese Catholics, of which there were a substantial number, it is difficult to assess whether they were being persecuted

³⁹ Liang Chua Morita, 'Language Shift in the Thai Chinese Community', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 24, 6 (2003), p. 490.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 491-2.

because they were Chinese or because they were Catholic. Certainly their status as a double minority left them vulnerable to exploitation one way or another.

The Cultural Mandates were thus instrumental in continuing the persecution against Catholics well beyond July 1941. Nevertheless, while discrimination against the Chinese ethnic minority was officially expressed numerous times through the Cultural Mandates, as well as through direct legislation, discrimination against Catholics was never officially sanctioned. If anything, the government remained confused over the issue. For example, on 12 May 1944, the Office of the Prime Minister issued a *Viratham khong Chat Thai* ("Heroic Virtues of the Thai Nation") designed to "support the orderly building of our nation, as appropriate to a nation with a civilised culture". The fourteen virtues were arguably a distillation of Pibul's vision of Thai identity. These ranged from the nationalistic "Thais love the nation more than life" along the lines of King Vajiravudh, to the authoritarian "Thailand is an obedient nation and follows its leader", to the more benign "Thailand is a nation that extols children, women, and the elderly" and "Thailand is a nation that loves peace". Out of fourteen virtues, the one most relevant to Catholics was the eighth which read: "Thailand is a nation that worships the Buddhist religion like life itself".⁴¹ Yet this declaration seemed to be a contradiction of Pibul's position where he held that:

In practical terms, I have the opinion that all religions have the same teachings and whichever is the most efficacious or appropriate is up to the conscience of the individual.⁴²

At the same time, certain members of the Pibul government were themselves in a vulnerable situation when it came to religious matters. Luang Aduldejarat, for

⁴¹ Thamsuk Nummond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok khrang thi song* (Saitharn, Bangkok, 2005), p. 100.

⁴² Tamruat newspaper, Undated, in B.A.A., V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 143.

example, was a Muslim, which allows for an alternative interpretation of his statement against religious persecution in February 1941. Given how far the persecution of the Catholics had gone beyond central control, some government officials perhaps wondered where such a 'grassroots' movement left unchecked would go next. Certainly, Muslims were not left untouched, as one *Bangkok Times* article indicated:

The University, I understand, does not allow Mohammedan students to study there, though one of its teachers, is said to be a Mohammedan convert. I do not know whether or not there is also discrimination against Thai Christians in the University. As you must know, Christians are now debarred from becoming officers in the Army, Navy, and Police, and more or less in the Civil Service too. To put it frankly, the article in the Constitution about religious liberty is now a dead letter.⁴³

In the same period, Malay leaders sent petitions to British colonial authorities, which probably did not endear them to the Siamese authorities, given the content of the missive. One sent by Tengku Abdul Jalal and other Malay leaders on 1 November 1945 described the measures Siamese authorities were imposing on the Muslims: "The Siamese [officials] are trying their best to put the Islamic religion out of existence in the State by forcing the Malays to believe in Buddhism instead".⁴⁴

It did not help that the government was deliberately stoking public paranoia regarding Fifth Columnists and spies. On 27 December 1940, the Ministry of the Interior issued secret orders for its civil servants to the following effect:

1. Assemble ordinary citizens and inform them of their duties [to counter Fifth Columnists and spies], the methods with which to go about these duties, and the importance thereof.

⁴³ *Thai Ekaraj* newspaper in *Bangkok Times*, 15 October 1941 in B.A.A., V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 161.

⁴⁴ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, p. 133.

2. Inform the [Buddhist] monks and abbots as well, and ask them to give homilies on the subject as according to their abilities.
3. Assemble the teachers, whether they are government, municipality, or private and ask them to talk to their students about this matter.
4. Various provincial organisations, such as the municipality and provincial councils should also do the same.
5. Apart from the above, perhaps some signs should be made with large letters, spelling out easy to remember slogans such as "Beware of the Fifth Column", "Beware of Spies", "Beware of Sellers of the Nation", "Let's help each other destroy Sellers of the Nation", "Help each other destroy Enemies of the Nation", and so on. These should be posted in public places, and should be useful.⁴⁵

The order, as well as the meetings they engendered, undoubtedly created an atmosphere of mistrust among the provincial communities. Furthermore, their secret nature arguably allowed the more unscrupulous local authorities to interpret the order and conduct meetings as they saw fit and, in some instances, use them as a platform for opportunistic anti-Catholicism. Apart from calling for local monks to give homilies, the order itself had no religious reference. Nevertheless, arguably, this order was the one that gave credence to the allegations of "secret orders" being sent from the central government to destroy Catholicism.

In official terms, despite growing evidence to the contrary, the government and certain sections of the media remained adamant that the Constitution was still being observed and expressed their shock when they found that this was not so. Some radio stations still proclaimed religious liberties,⁴⁶ while certain newspapers such as the *Thai Ekaraj* (Thai Independence) were also vocal in calling for liberty of religious belief, as stipulated in the 1932 Constitution, to be properly practiced and enforced by making the following appeal:

During the dispute [Thai-French War] and in spite of the fact that their churches were closed down, these patriotic people were not in the least

⁴⁵ C.B.A., Interior Ministry's secret order to all provincial governors, 458/2483, Re: prevention of sabotage, 27 December 1940.

⁴⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Minister, 24 April 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 189/1.

discouraged, for they made every possible effort to respond to the Country's appeal. Why then, in the name of common sense, should these people be badly treated in return for their generosity?

The article went on to relate the vandalism inflicted on the Catholic churches in the northeast, some of which were "carried out with impunity at a distance of two hundred metres from the police station". It also addressed the inconsistencies between the official endorsement of the Constitution and the actions of local officials:

To say that the [Provincial] Commissioner and the [district chief officer] or the Police have had no cognizance of the facts sounds absurd... One is tempted to ask: "Are there no officials to keep sacred the integrity of our beloved Constitution, and is Article 172 of the Criminal Code⁴⁷ no longer in force in those places?"⁴⁸

From the perspective of official decrees, the anti-Catholic persecution was largely an unintended, indirect result of emergency measures and other legal measures aimed at other foreign minorities. Nevertheless, it was the combination of these measures, together with the anti-French rhetoric in government propaganda, that created the poisonous atmosphere that let loose the uncontrolled anti-Catholic persecution and allowed it to thrive.

Following the fall of Pibul's government in July 1944 and the ascendancy of Pridi Phanomyong's faction, the regime moved quickly to address the issue of religious liberty. In his address to the Council of Ministers and the Ministers of State on 8 August 1944, a week after Khuang Aphaiwong's formal appointment as Prime Minister, Pridi, in his capacity as the Regent, emphasised that:

Remember also that in our Thailand there are people in many provinces who are Muslims while others have embraced Christianity or other religions. The

⁴⁷ In the present criminal code, the article relates to the giving of false testimonies – the penalty being up to two years' imprisonment, a 4,000 baht fine, or both.

⁴⁸ B.A.A., *Thai Ekaraj* newspaper in *Bangkok Times*, 20 October 1941 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 164.

Constitution accords to the people the liberty to profess the religion of their choice. The Constitution also stipulates that the King is the protector of all religions. Also, the Government has the task of contributing, where it is possible, to the prosperity of every religion that has been embraced by the people. This support, in my view, is not contrary to the principles of Buddhism, since Buddhism preaches loving kindness as its fundamental principle.⁴⁹

Although the statement and change of government did not completely stop the persecution, it served to reassure the Mission of the benign intentions of the new government.

After the surrender of Japan, the Seni Pramoj government found no evidence that supported the view that the Pibul government had actively worked to pressure religious minorities out of the civil and military services. Indeed, Seni contended that:

There is no evidence [for the Pibul government's pressure on civil servants]. There is only evidence that the prime minister at that time wished to know the number of those who held the Catholic religion in the service. There were no dismissal orders but there may have been people who acted beyond their competence. Those who were dismissed in this manner have the right to appeal, and the government shall consider their cases.⁵⁰

Pibul's question was surely an ominous sign, but there is no documentary proof of his real intentions. During its investigation for the beatification of the martyrs of Songkhon, the Thai committee attempted to follow every lead that could have led to such evidence, which would have been proof of the existence of *odium fidei*. For example, in 1952, investigators sought testimony from Mr. Bovo, the Italian consul, on the existence of a letter that allegedly expressed Pibul's "regret that the Italian priests were going to the Isaan region, because his intention was to

⁴⁹ B.A.A., Address of Pridi Phanomyong to the President of the Council of Ministers, 8 August 1944 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 297.

⁵⁰ B.A.A., R.S.O. Sudjamlong to Fr. Carreto, 21 October 1945, *Beatification Documents*, 247.

destroy the Christian religion".⁵¹ However, Mr. Bovo had never heard of such a letter, adding that, even if such a document existed in the past, it would have been incinerated on the expulsion of Commander Crolla, then the Italian Minister, following the surrender of Italy in 1943. Mr. Bovo further testified that Luang Vichitvatakarn⁵² had "never articulated an anti-Catholic sentence".⁵³

In the absence of conclusive documentary evidence, it has to be assumed, for now, that there were no formal orders from the central government authorising local authorities to persecute Catholics within their jurisdiction. This assumption leads to another problem, however. How can the absence of a formal order be reconciled with the claims made by local authorities during the persecution that such a policy existed? For example, the district chief officer of Phimai claimed that:

I want to inform you that the true policy that has not yet been revealed by the government is to destroy the Catholic religion. At this moment every official from village headmen to ministers have to be Buddhists – they cannot be of another religion... From now on, every Thai will have to be Buddhist. Therefore, we don't want any priests here. As for the Catholic parishioners, for now we are persuading them kindly; we've warned them to change their religion to Buddhism. But if they don't comply, then we will see that they are stubborn and un-cooperative. Then we will use other methods to cause a religious revolution and within three or four days there shall be no Catholics left.

The statement would indicate the existence of a 'secret' government policy. But if such a policy indeed existed, it was not consistently applied either in the context of the local or central government. As Fr. Larqué pointed out in his reply to the district chief officer of Phimai's claim:

⁵¹ S.N.A., Vicar-Apostolic Bayet of Tha Rae to Vicar-Apostolic Chorin of Bangkok, 19 July 1952.

⁵² Luang Vichitvatakarn became the ideological spokesman of the first Pibul government. He also held the post of Foreign Minister between 1942-3 and, by 1952, he had become the Thai ambassador to New Delhi.

⁵³ S.N.A., Vicar-Apostolic Chorin of Bangkok to Vicar-Apostolic Bayet of Tha Rae, 24 September 1952.

That is strange. In the Tambon where I lived earlier, there were seven village headmen. They were all Catholics, along with one kamnan. As for Luang Adul Aduldejarat, the head of the police, he holds the religion of Mohammed – not Buddhism.⁵⁴

It seems that Fr. Larqué was successful in calling the district chief officer's bluff when it came to government policy. However, government policy has to be separated from the unofficial views and orders of certain members of the government.

As R.S.O. Sudchamlong wrote at the end of the war:

During the conflict with French Indochina, [the government] opposed the Mission through the orders for those Catholics in the civil service to change their religion, against the constitution. These were the actions of 4-5 statesmen and politicians; the five are known to me and in the coming future they may have to pay for their sins as war criminals.⁵⁵

In addition, an anonymous letter also contended that it was Pibul alone who was responsible:

The hatred of Luang Pibul Songkhram was not appeased, he sent a secret order, written (one of my priests read it with a friendly [district chief officer]) to all the [district chief officers] to force the Christians to apostasy, especially the priests. In the event of success, he promised monetary incentives and promotion.⁵⁶

Thus while there is little evidence for government complicity in the anti-Catholic persecution, there appears to be more substance to the claim that certain members of the government abused their power to secretly effect the persecution, although there is no conclusive documentary evidence for this. The policy was a reflection of the personal preferences of individuals rather than the stance of the

⁵⁴ B.A.A., Conversation between Fr. Larqué and District chief officer of Phimai, 15 February 1942, *Beatification Documents*, 202/6-7.

⁵⁵ B.A.A., R.S.O. Sudchamlong to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 11 September 1945, *Beatification Documents*, 245.

⁵⁶ B.A.A., Anonymous to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, Undated, *Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii servi dei Nicolai Bunkerd Kitbamrung: Positio Super Martyrio* (1999), pp. 179-80.

government although, thanks to the wide-ranging influence of those allegedly involved, it was often mistaken for government policy. The policy's largely secret character would explain the absence of documentary evidence, while its clandestine nature may have left the policy open to interpretation, which would account for its inconsistent implementation.

Consequently, officials in local government who were friendly towards Catholics could easily ignore or 'delay' the implementation of the secret policy indefinitely, without fear of a government follow-up. After all, the secrecy of the policy was an indication of insecurity among the conspirators, while no penalties were prescribed in the event of 'failure' on the part of local officials. On the other hand, for the local authorities who were already hostile towards the Catholic Missions before the outbreak of the Thai-French War, the secret, unofficial order, together with the promise of rewards (official or otherwise), furnished them with a further incentive to prosecute a campaign against Catholics. The nationalist policies, in particular the Cultural Mandates, had already created an atmosphere conducive to anti-Catholic persecution that did not need to be centrally driven, while the relative prosperity of Church properties made them tempting targets for confiscation. Potential rewards from the central government were merely another bonus. Ultimately, a major motivator for the persecution may not necessarily have been government orders or nationalist rhetoric, but purely the desire for material advancement.

Indeed, even if the elimination of Catholicism had been Pibul's intention, there was no need for him to act openly since there appeared to be so many government officials who willingly "acted beyond their competence". Many of them were encouraged by the lack of consistent, clear policies dealing directly with the

Catholic question throughout the tenure of the Pibul government. Equally, the government created the conditions and opportunities for the unscrupulous to exploit, for example through the calling of meetings to counter vague “Fifth Columnists” and “spies”, as well as through the cultivation of communal paranoia. This situation opened loopholes for the unscrupulous to exploit and expose inconsistencies between central policies and the unofficial attitudes held (or at least thought to be held) by its officials. As Fr. Surachai Chumsriphan, the priest in charge of collecting and analysing Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung’s beatification documents, summarised:

I have to make a distinction. The official position of the Thai government of that time was “no religious persecution”. The constitutions, the official announcement of the chief of police, the minister of the interior all said that Thailand allows religious freedom, but the unofficial position was to have Buddhism as the national religion since some person disliked whoever was Catholic or whoever followed the French in matter of religion or politics in any way whatsoever. Through the radio and other means of communication, newspapers, they tried to convince the Thais that they were Buddhists and must preserve Buddhism because Catholicism will destroy Buddhism.⁵⁷

The attitude also suggests a destructive development in the role of Buddhism in Thai national identity. Whereas King Vajiravudh, in his support for Buddhism, had the intention of establishing Buddhism’s credentials as a religion equal to that of any in the West (albeit one that was most suitable for Thais),⁵⁸ under Pibul, the position was that Buddhism was superior to all other religions, with the devastating unofficial implication that those who were not Buddhists were un-Thai – even though the 1932 Constitution that was still in effect contradicted this view. The emphasis on Buddhism and its use as a central, legitimating device is similar to the policies of during the King Taksin period in the late eighteenth century, which also saw the disappearance of traditional political institutions. Like during the reign of

⁵⁷ B.A.A., *Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii servi dei Nicolai Bunkerd Kitbamrung: Positio Super Martyrio*, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁸ W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo!* (University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1978), pp. 219-220.

King Taksin, the political ascendancy of Buddhism led to problems for the Catholic Missions. However, in the 1940s there was also the added element of the disjunction between the formal policies and the unofficial views of members of the Pibul government, which opened up an array of opportunities for the unscrupulous to perpetrate excesses against the Mission and its congregation without explicit directives from the centre.

Persecution by Local Groups

*A solemn treaty is but a scrap of paper;
Laws are disposable when necessity requires.*

- King Vajiravudh, *Thammathamma Songkhram*

The disjunction between official policy and local attitudes can be seen in a conversation between Fr. Larqué, a French M.E.P. missionary, and a local policeman in Nakhon Phanom in 1942. The conversation took place some months after the order forbidding French citizens from travelling to the northeast had been rescinded. It can be seen that local authorities remained resistant to the presence of French priests performing their religious duties in the area:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Pol. Capt. Sanoh: | What religious duties? That religion no longer exists here. |
| Fr. Larqué: | Then let me see if it's true. I intend to go to some churches like Nong Saeng and Tha Rae. |
| Pol. Capt. Sanoh: | You can't go to Nong Saeng – it's a forbidden area. You're also not allowed to leave this hotel. |
| Fr. Larqué: | How? Am I not allowed to get food? |
| Pol. Capt. Sanoh: | You can, but you can't wander around. Eat and come back. Just know that you cannot stay here for long. |
| Fr. Larqué: | You're forbidding it? The Thai government has permitted French citizens to stay anywhere like before. |
| Pol. Capt. Sanoh: | I don't forbid it. But it's not safe here. |
| Fr. Larqué: | If you don't forbid it then it's only unsafe. I'm unafraid, I shall stay here; I shan't leave. |
| Pol. Capt. Sanoh: | You cannot stay here for long. Wherever you have to go, you must hurry and go there. Where else do you want to go? |
| Fr. Larqué: | To Tha Rae and Sakon Nakhon to see the churches there. I also have the intention to move here. |

Pol. Capt. Sanoh: That's not possible. You must know that no priest should come and stay here.⁵⁹

The contradictions between official policy and local attitudes are clear.

Officially, Fr. Larqué was free to travel anywhere he liked, unofficially the police captain wanted him to be as far away from his district as possible, regardless of the government's proclamations. Similarly, in April 1941, the governor of Chonburi was resolute in demanding that a priest leave his province within six months, never mind the fact that the restrictions had been lifted and that the priest in question was Swiss and not French.⁶⁰

Although from the perspective of the central government, the anti-Catholic 'persecution' that was tied up with the emergency war measures had ended as early as January 1941, there is overwhelming evidence that persecution in the provinces continued up to, and in one case, even after the surrender of Japan in 1945. However, as the previous section has shown, there was much ambiguity in the government's attitude regarding this matter, and it was this ambiguity that opened up opportunities for the unscrupulous. On the Catholic side, there was always a lingering suspicion that 'secret orders' were being despatched to the provinces by the central government. The general direction of these 'secret orders' was described in a petition by Thai priests to Vicar-Apostolic Perros in 1941:

The Interior Ministry has issued orders to various provinces to persuade Thai Catholics to abjure their faith and become Buddhists. If abjuration is not forthcoming, they are threatened, cruelly assaulted, detained for four to five days and if they then abjure they are set free. If those who refused were in the civil service, they are forced out of their positions. Apart from that,

⁵⁹ B.A.A., Conversation between Fr. Larqué and Pol. Capt. Sanoh, 1 February 1942, *Beatification Documents*, 200/1.

⁶⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Minister, 24 April 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 189/1.

Catholics are not allowed to be the owners or the managers of schools and it is for this reason that many Catholic schools have been closed down.⁶¹

Earlier, Fr. Chorin, the French procurator of the Mission of Siam, also concurred, arguing that "The local authorities have always pressured Christians to abjure their Catholicism".⁶² Indeed, many of the incidents saw direct involvement by local government officials. One well-documented incident was the arson of a church at Nonkaew in Nakhon Ratchasima province on 2 February 1944. The incident involved a night-raid on the priest's residence, in which the priests were shot at to the cries of "Shoot! Shoot! Don't stop!" and "If you value your lives don't come out, don't come down, don't go near the church!" as the village church went up in flames.⁶³ Vicar-Apostolic Perros in turn relayed the report to the French Minister, adding that:

It is regrettable to note that the violent acts were largely the effect of the attacks by certain orators on the local radio against Christianity in general and the Catholic Mission in particular.⁶⁴

Those involved in the incidents were no ordinary criminals or casual thugs. Further investigation by the priests suggested that those participating in the incident included one *palat tambon* (secretary of a sub-district), two village heads, one deputy from the local Forestry Department, and two policemen.⁶⁵ The government was

⁶¹ B.A.A., Petition of Fr. Andre et al to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 8 October 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 195/1.

⁶² B.A.A., Fr. Chorin to Apostolic Delegate of Indochina, 24 February 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 182/1.

⁶³ B.A.A., Report of Fr. Larqué et al on Nonkaew incident, 11 February 1944, *Beatification Documents*, 220/1-5, 221.

⁶⁴ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Minister, 12 February 1944, *Beatification Documents*, 222/1.

⁶⁵ B.A.A., Fr. Deschamps to French Minister, 8 April 1944, *Beatification Documents*, 224/1-3.

urged to conduct an inquiry; however progress was slow, probably due to local obfuscation, since by October 1944, the authorities were “still investigating”.⁶⁶

The key factors behind the local authorities' overstepping orders from the centre appear to be a combination of the innate hatred for France and, more importantly, how the Cultural Mandates came to be perceived as either superseding or having equal power to the Constitution. A conversation between Fr. Larqué and the district chief officer of Phimai on 15 February 1942 was representative of this mentality among the hostile local authorities. On that day, the district chief officer had arrived with a group of scouts to conduct an impromptu search of the parish priest's house for suspected hidden weapons. When nothing incriminating was found, a conversation ensued during which a number of allegations surfaced. The first point was the district chief officer's contention that the Thai government was still hostile towards France, despite the signing of the Treaty of Tokyo in May 1941 and the lifting of restrictions on the movement of French citizens. The district chief officer argued that:

The government does not like France; they are reluctant for the French to stay even in Bangkok. Last year there was the affair between Thailand and French Indochina. Even if there is a treaty of friendship between Thailand and France, this affair isn't finished. Furthermore, Thailand is now at war with Great Britain and the French are on their side. Therefore we cannot trust the French.

In response, Fr. Larqué offered to leave and have a Thai priest come and replace him, but this offer was refused with the district chief officer arguing that: “We don't want them here because your religion is a French religion”, a point which Fr. Larqué soundly refuted:

⁶⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Interior Minister, 9 October 1944, *Beatification Documents*, 228.

That's not true. Catholicism was born in Asia, in Palestine. Catholicism is universal; there are Catholics everywhere in the world. There are around 400 million Catholics right now. The head of the Church is His Holiness the Pope in Rome, Italy, and the first to propagate the faith in Thailand were not the French but the Portuguese – the French came later.

The district chief officer dismissed the claim, arguing that the “Portuguese, Italian, French are all the same – they’re all Western”. Fr. Larqué then brought up the Constitution and its stipulations on religious liberty. The district chief officer’s response is revealing:

Apart from the Constitution there is also the Cultural Mandates that was made by Thais for the Thais and in the Constitution there is an article that says that Buddhism is the religion of the Thai nation.

Although Fr. Larqué did not dispute the district chief officer’s constitutional claims, in actual fact the 1932 Constitution had no such stipulation regarding the status of Buddhism.⁶⁷ The article that was closest to the claim was Article 4 of Section 1, which stated that the monarch had to be Buddhist, yet act as the protector of all religions held in respect by his subjects. Clearly there were conflicts between the articles of the Constitution and the Cultural Mandates, where the authority of the latter appears to have superseded the former.

The disregard for the Constitution was not limited to local government authorities, but extended to other state-controlled sectors, most notably the state schools. The closure of many Catholic schools in the provinces forced many Catholic children to attend state schools if they wished to continue their education. In some cases they were coerced into doing so and became victims of cruel religious discrimination at the hands of state teachers. The childhood experience of Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On, the Archbishop of Tha Rae and Nong Saeng (1980-2004),

⁶⁷ Indeed, none of the many subsequent constitutions drafted after 1932 had the stipulation.

illustrates this phenomenon. When his seminary, the Sacred Heart minor seminary in Nong Saeng, was violently closed and destroyed by the police in 1940, he was forced to return to his village and continue his studies in a state school. According to his account:

Right there I met the persecution against the Catholic faith... At the school the teachers forced me and my friends to deny the Catholic faith and to adore the statue of Buddha. They said "There is no more other religion to practice except Buddhism". The teachers set up the statue of the Buddha in the hall and they forced us students to adore.⁶⁸ We refused to obey. They hit us with sticks. They forced us to kneel in front of the statue of the Buddha, pressed our heads down with their strong hands.

...Very often we were sent out of the classroom to do the labour works in the schoolyard instead of having the ordinary lessons. The teachers said "Who do not want to adore the statue of Buddha, get out of the classroom and work like slaves in the schoolyard". ...We were forced to stare at the sun with the open eyes. The teachers watched us with sticks in their hands and hit us heavily whenever we closed our eyes. They shout "Look up straight to the sun and pray to your God and we will see if there will be any God coming to shade the sun from your eyes!" The sun continued to shine brightly. They mockingly laughed at us, "You see, there is no God, no Jesus. Why do you believe the poor missionaries who told you bad lies. Adore the statue of the Buddha and we will stop torturing you".⁶⁹

In his protests against these incidents, the Vicar-Apostolic consciously appealed to the 1932 Constitution. Reacting to a further incident of Buddhist teachers whipping their students to conform, as late as 28 December 1945 (several months after the end of the Pacific War on 15 August 1945), the Vicar-Apostolic wrote to the Thai education minister that:

Article 13 of the Thai Constitution says: "Everyone has the perfect liberty in religious beliefs and has the freedom to conduct ceremonies according to their own beliefs when it is not contrary to the duties of the citizen, the public peace, or the citizens' morals".

⁶⁸ In fact, what the teachers were trying to coerce their students into doing was against all Buddhist principles such as the practice of *metta* (loving kindness), while technically Buddhists themselves are not supposed to "worship" the Buddha, never mind coerce others to do so.

⁶⁹ B.A.A., Archbishop Lawrence Khai to Fr. Larqué, 1 May 1984 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 171.

Catholic students are not acting contrary to their duties as citizens, the public peace or the citizens' morals. Therefore, those who force Catholic students to pray in a manner not in accord with their religious beliefs are acting against the Constitution.⁷⁰

Furthermore, the eclipse of constitutionalism can also be seen outside the state apparatus and officialdom to incorporate what can be described as a semi-grassroots movement. For the Mission, the most prominent of these movements was the "Thai Blood Group" that, with informal government backing, had set up chapters across the country by the early 1940s. The group's ideology can be easily grasped from its propaganda leaflets:

As for those who hold the faith of our enemies, we consider them to have completely forgotten their true nation and religion and are lost to our enemies. Consider the government's arrest of the Fifth Columnists; all of them were Roman Catholics who received instructions from the enemy, trying to find ways to make us slaves and destroy the nation. We must be careful of Fifth Columnists and help each other to utterly destroy this religion.⁷¹

The ideology was thus centred on encouraging citizens to rally around Buddhism as the national religion, and branding those who refused as "traitors" or "Fifth Columnists". The smear was especially effective in the light of the government's public sanction against Fifth Columnists. Thus, given its ideological stance, unsurprisingly, the group was frequently cited in Mission correspondence as the element responsible for the violent persecution and propaganda against the Mission, its priests, its property, and its congregation.

The Thai Blood Group's propaganda also successfully influenced those who were not officially affiliated with the group. For example, in one village meeting, a

⁷⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to the Education Minister, 28 December 1945, *Beatification Documents*, 251/2.

⁷¹ B.A.A., Declaration of Thai Blood Group of Phanasnikhom, 25 January 1941, p. 159.

village leader stood up and began an impromptu lecture on Catholicism and Fifth Columnists. The speech was clearly inspired by the Thai Blood Group's propaganda:

The Roman Catholic religion is a propagated religion. For example, the French first brought this religion to Vietnam. Later they had a war with Vietnam and Vietnam collapsed because of the Catholic Fifth Columnists. When France went to war with Germany, that time Germany was defeated because this religion sabotaged it. Now the Germans will not allow the Catholic religion in its borders and when they went to war with France again, they won in seven days because Germany no longer had this religion and its Fifth Columnists. Thailand must do the same; Thais must not be Catholics; if they are then they are not Thais.⁷²

The rhetoric translated into a campaign of trade boycotts against Catholics, suspicion, and violence. The Thai Blood Group in Chiang Mai, for example, announced a boycott on contact with the Catholic clergy and parishioners in February 1941,⁷³ while the Thai Blood Group in Phrapradaeng in eastern Thailand urged its community to heed the following seven points, emphasising that those who did not, would be considered "traitors to the nation":

1. Cease trade and social activities with Roman Catholics.
2. Cease buying all types of goods from Roman Catholics.
3. Cease selling all types of goods to Roman Catholics.
4. Be cautious of Roman Catholics.
5. And of the Fifth Columnists from this group.
6. Do not speak of any secrets or work where they can listen.
7. There are many Fifth Columnists in Phrapradaeng.⁷⁴

Thanks mainly to the presence of the Thai priests in the region, most of the eastern parishes were able to escape the worst excesses of violence, that is, nobody was killed or executed extra-judicially.⁷⁵ However, the ethnicity of the priests did

⁷² B.A.A., Testimony, 3 July 1942 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 207.

⁷³ S.N.A., Declaration of Thai Blood Group, Chonburi, 1 February 1941.

⁷⁴ B.A.A., Thai Blood Group Letter, Undated in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 160.

⁷⁵ The picture here is again mixed, although in general they fare better than their northeastern counterparts. Of the eight eastern parishes, three were completely destroyed while five were partially damaged. The properties of three of these parishes were also forcibly taken over – see B.A.A., State

not prevent the Thai Blood Group from harassing them, for as long as they remained dependent on the French leadership in Bangkok and followed a foreign religion, they were regarded as 'agents' of the enemy, as one Thai priest discovered from a warning letter he received from the group:

The Thai Blood Group of Phanas has unanimously agreed that the cross on top of the church and other places under your governance is an unforgettable eyesore to the members of the Thai Blood Group.

Therefore, we request that all crosses in your church be removed as soon as possible. Otherwise the Thai Blood Group of Phanas will come and deal with it ourselves as we see fit.

On another note, the Group wishes to inform you that you, in particular, should disown Catholicism and quickly convert to Buddhism. If you will spread this news to your relatives and disciples and persuade them to convert to Buddhism it would be a great work. The Group hopes and has confidence that you will comply by no later than 1 February 1941.

Finally, the Group wishes to thank you in advance and is confident that you will comply and help us to maintain the national culture and our and your beloved great empire of Thailand.⁷⁶

The warning is in stark contrast to circumstances in other parishes where attacks and accusations occurred without any kind of formal warning. The subaltern nature of the uncontrolled persecution arguably made it difficult for anyone to control, and thus incidents in this category prevailed for the longest, with churches being burnt down as late as 1944. Given the international situation at the time, there was perhaps little that the government could have done to rein in the excesses of the movement without damaging its democratic credentials. Yet, paradoxically, the objectives of the movements were disturbing perversions of the concept of

of Material Damage following the Persecution, in *Biography of the Blessed Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung* (Unpublished), p. 99.

⁷⁶ B.A.A., Thai Blood Group of Phanasnikhom to parish priest, 29 January 1941, *Beatification Documents*, 179.

democratic rule, and its results were immensely destructive to people, property, and even democracy itself.

Taken as a whole, the character of the local persecutions was inconsistent. The north experienced a very different style of persecution from that of the northeastern parishes. For example, at the parish of St. Theresa in Wiengpapao, Chiang Rai province, church gatherings were banned by the local army commander in March 1944⁷⁷ but otherwise the situation continued to be tranquil and the only complaint by the parishioners was about the price of rice and other goods.⁷⁸ Some churches were closed down and certain local officials expressed negative attitudes towards Christians, but in the words of a priest who visited the parish in July 1944, “The lives of the Catholics here are normal, and there is no persecution”.⁷⁹

The picture was similarly confused for the missionaries in the neighbouring province of Chiang Mai. There, in January 1943, the Catholic missionaries received orders for foreigners to “temporarily” leave within twenty days (by 9 February 1943),⁸⁰ but it appears that the indigenous Catholic clergy were allowed to stay, since the correspondence did not end.⁸¹ Later in the year, the authorities exerted pressure on the other religious minorities in the area – the Protestants and the Muslims – to come to religious meetings where presumably they were pressured to convert to Buddhism. The Catholics, however, did not receive an invitation.⁸² In any case, the Allied bombing of Chiang Mai, which also affected the Mission properties, soon meant that most of the inhabitants wanted to leave the city anyway, regardless of their nationality or religious background. In the words of one priest, by December

⁷⁷ B.A.A., Fr. Thongdee Kritjaroen to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 23 March 1944, 37/1/7.

⁷⁸ B.A.A., Fr. Paul Thavon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 20 August 1944, 37/1/8.

⁷⁹ B.A.A., Fr. H. Thongdi to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 29 July 1944, 37/5/15.

⁸⁰ Among other exceptions, the order also exempted foreigners with relatives in the police from the evacuation order, B.A.A., Police Order, 20 January 1943, 37/5/11.

⁸¹ B.A.A., Fr. Maurice Meunier to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 25 January 1943, 37/5/7.

⁸² B.A.A., Fr. Michel Baklychit to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 30 October 1943, 37/5/10.

1943, "Chiang Mai was like a desert".⁸³ But correspondence from the Chiang Mai parish nevertheless continued uninterrupted throughout the war, indicating that some Catholic priests were never compelled to leave.

That the persecution against Catholics occurred in the first place is, at face value, a testament to the effectiveness of the government's anti-French propaganda. However, the persecution's inconsistent nature suggests a disjunction between central policies and local actions. Even so the disjunction alone does not account for the inconsistency. The other key factor was arguably individual, ulterior motives, some of which dated from before the Thai-French conflict but much of which was merely opportunism. As will be seen, conflicts were most violent in cases where material or social gains were at stake.

⁸³ B.A.A., Fr. Michel Baklychit to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 27 December 1943, 37/5/12.

Confiscations and Ulterior Motives

*Let me speak of the meaning
Behind the three colours.
White is for purity and betokens the three gems
And the law that guard the Thai heart.
Red is for our blood, which we willingly give up
To protect our nation and faith.
Blue is the beautiful hue of the people's leader
And is liked because of him.⁸⁴*

- King Vajiravudh

The propaganda of the Thai Blood Group talked much about “eliminating” and “destroying” the Catholic religion. Undoubtedly it was successful in physically destroying some churches and coercing people to convert to Buddhism. However on closer examination, in many cases, a remarkable number of properties were preserved, even in the regions most affected by violent persecution. For example, in the case of the churches and adjunct properties of the 26 northeastern parishes, ten had been either destroyed or partially destroyed by September 1944. The rest of the sixteen remaining properties were confiscated and converted to other uses, mainly schools, Buddhist temples, and residences for Buddhist monks.⁸⁵

If the confiscations were the result of a centrally-driven persecution, the properties should have reverted systematically to the central government. In fact, many of the confiscated assets went into private ownership for private profit, specifically to individuals in the local community who precipitated the confiscations in the first place. Indeed, it could be argued that a significant proportion of the anti-Catholic persecution was born, not out of an ideal of religious conformity or nationalist hatred fomented by an effective government propaganda machine, but from local political and economic opportunism.

⁸⁴ W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo!*, p. 140.

⁸⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti to Interior Minister, 10 September 1944 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, pp. 215-218.

Typical cases were the parishes of Tha Lad and Tha Kwien in Chachoengsao province. On 27 March 1941, 150 people assembled at the parishes claiming that they had orders from the district chief officer of Bang Khla to destroy the church, the residences of the priests, nuns, and teachers as well as the school. In fact, they could not even follow this 'order' properly. Instead they began a fire sale of the parishes' property. Subsequently, in October 1942, the Mission was successful in its appeal to the central government and had its rights to the property reconfirmed. However, as the Vicar-Apostolic reported, the local authorities remained reluctant to recognise the Mission's claim in spite of the orders from the central government:

But the [district chief officer] of Bang Khla is still barring the parish priests from looking after the interests of the Catholic parish of Tha Lad and have allowed those who have no right to the land to reap its produce according to their whims without permission from the Mission. Moreover, he has announced that as long as he remains at Bang Khla, he will not allow a priest to stay.⁸⁶

The conflict of interest becomes clearer in an additional letter detailing the events, transactions, and relationships between the district chief officer and members of the local community. The district chief officer did not take control of the property himself, and neither did he cede control to a public body but to a private individual – a Nai Prakob Sundaradilok. Earlier, Prakob was involved in intimidating and tricking the priests and nuns of the community into leaving for Bangkok by feeding them false reports of oncoming violence, thereby paving the way for the confiscation. Furthermore, rather than using the property for the public good, Prakob was using church land as a cattle pen solely for his own profit. The district chief officer may also have reaped some benefits, considering his frantic reaction to the return of

⁸⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Interior Minister, 24 October 1942, *Beatification Documents*, 216.

Catholic priests to the community, when he arranged for the local police to arrest those who had provided accommodation to the priests who had come to re-establish the Mission's claim to its property, while threatening others with the same treatment. For those still in doubt:

The [district chief officer] then said...he had the right to do anything, which frightened the villagers who understood that the government really wanted to destroy the Catholic religion, otherwise the district chief officer would never dare to act in this manner.

The Mission was not oblivious to the possibility of economic motives being a major factor in these incidents. The introduction of its letter to the Ministry of the Interior clearly stated as much:

As you well know, during the conflict between Thailand and Indochina the majority of citizens understood that the Catholics were with the French and so took the opportunity to take the Mission's property for themselves or else hope to use [the situation] for the purposes of obtaining bribes.⁸⁷

An example of the latter can be seen in another eastern parish – SS. Philip and Jacob in Huaphai, Chachoengsao province. Between 1941-2, the parish was subjected to various persecutions standard to other parishes, such as Buddhist monks being sent to preach nationalist homilies according to the “demands” of local Christians,⁸⁸ the demolition of the Stations of the Cross by the local chapter of the Thai Blood Group,⁸⁹ as well as threats by some locals to arrest and sue the parish priest for business reasons under the guise of patriotism:

I have done no wrong; except perhaps in the case of Nai Charoen that came to rent the school but without reaping the results he desired. The authorities

⁸⁷ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Interior Minister, 24 October 1942, *Beatification Documents*, 217/1-3.

⁸⁸ B.A.A., Khun Vijarnbanakit, District chief officer of Pan Thong to St. Philip parish priest, 16 July 1941, 36/3/3.

⁸⁹ B.A.A., Fr. Jacobe to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 20 February 1942, 36/3/11.

have asked him to come in and return the school but he refuses to go and instead says that he will sue the [provincial governor], the [district chief officer], and myself for obstructing the founding of the school. As for me, he will say that I am the servant of the bishop, a representative of foreigners, which is against the [Cultural Mandates] and the law.⁹⁰

However, these threats came to an abrupt end when a deal was struck between the Mission and the local authorities in May 1942, by which some land would be ceded to the local authorities for “public use” and, in return, the Mission would still be allowed to send a priest to be resident at the parish, repair the church and the residence, and run the school, as well as the other operations of the parish as normal, but with the explicit protection of the local authorities.⁹¹ The local authorities appeared to have stuck to their end of the bargain since by October 1942, Fr. Jacobe, the indigenous parish priest, wrote the following of his parish and fellow indigenous priests: “I just want to let you know that Fathers José, Leonard, as well as all the Christians are happy and well”.⁹²

Considering the strong evidence for the existence of ulterior motives behind parts of the persecution movement, is it possible that the most malicious and prominent cases of persecution – that of Songkhon and Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung could be re-evaluated in such terms? For the Songkhon case, there was an obvious clash of personalities and worldviews. Nai Bunlue, the policeman in charge of the execution, in his subsequent testimonies for the beatification investigation committee, consistently denied ulterior motives, saying that the women did not die for “political reasons” but because “they were unwilling to abandon their religion” and admitted

⁹⁰ B.A.A., Fr. Jacobe to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 18 November 1941, 36/3/8.

⁹¹ B.A.A., Fr. Jacobe to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1 May 1942, 36/3/14.

⁹² B.A.A., Fr. Jacobe to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 29 October 1942, 36/3/17.

his “utter confusion at the women’s dedication to their faith”.⁹³ However, the events and other witness testimonies suggest that there may have been both personal and sociological factors behind the killings.

In terms of personal factors, some witness reports suggested that Nai Bunlue was infatuated with one or more of the nuns, and their consistent rebuff of his sexual advances, in favour of keeping true to their religious vocation, had led to a severe loss of face. Certainly, on his arrival, he had been associated with a number of women in the village, allegedly forcing some to be his lovers.⁹⁴ Such an infatuation would also explain his insistence that the nuns remove their habits. In the basic Buddhist understanding, the removal of sacred clothing was effectively the removal of the person’s sacred aura, authority, and obligations.⁹⁵ So, while the nuns themselves, and the other Catholics around them, understood that they were still very much nuns and had relinquished none of their religious vows or obligations by taking up ordinary clothing, in the mind of policeman Bunlue they had become ‘available’. His behaviour following the nun’s taking up of ordinary clothing confirms this speculation.⁹⁶ According to one testimony:

At that meeting, Sisters Agnes and Lucia had already abandoned their habits and later on the policeman [Lue] came to the teacher’s residence asking for flowers in a courting manner.⁹⁷

That the nuns continued to rebuff his courtship and defied his authority by ‘returning’ to their sacred clothing, symbolised their defiance against an abusive

⁹³ S.N.A., Witness statement of Police Officer Bunlue, 6 April 1961.

⁹⁴ Archbishop Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On et al, *Bunyarasri thang jed*, p. 18.

⁹⁵ The comparative ease with which Buddhist clergy can leave their religious vows is illustrated in literature in *Khun Chang Khun Paen*. There, within the space of a few pages, Plai Kaew (Khun Paen) was able to leave the monkhood to make love with Pimpilalai before returning to the monastery, which he leaves later – this time permanently. See National Library of Thailand, *Khun Chang Khun Paen chabab Hor samut haeng chat* [Khun Chang, Khun Paen: National Library Edition] (Khleng Withaya, Bangkok, 1963), pp. 83, 100, and 130.

⁹⁶ S.N.A., Testimony of Vincent Taenu, 15 February 1949.

⁹⁷ S.N.A., Testimony of Paul Tieng, 15 February 1949.

local authority as much as their dedication to the Catholic faith, and would have caused a massive and irreparable loss of face for the policeman. Their actions would have placed them in great danger under ordinary circumstances, never mind during such a sensitive time.

Nevertheless, personal infatuation alone is arguably insufficient to explain the deaths, especially of those who were not directly involved in Nai Bunlue's infatuation. After all, other officers under his command had been interested in some of the other villagers, in particular, Cecilia Budsri, one of the teenagers who was eventually killed. But according to witnesses, rather than embarking on a psychopathic rampage upon rejection, they were willing to learn the catechism in order to get closer to the women they were trying to court.⁹⁸

The threat that this development would have posed to the police intention to convert the village to Buddhism was clear, and arguably it was this threat to the police plans and social authority that sealed the fate of the women. Already, before the nuns had taken up the mantle of the village's religious leadership, Philip Siphong had succeeded in undermining the efforts of the police to convert the village, in spite of the absence of the French parish priest. His elimination was thought to be critical to weakening the resolve of the villagers. What the police underestimated was the effective leadership of the women in the parish. The switch of the leadership to the nuns appeared to have caught the police off-guard. Instead of being more yielding after the violent death of Philip Siphong, the nuns became even more determined to preserve Catholicism at all costs.

The patriarchal police organisation was clearly irked by the presence and success of the resistance of this group of nuns, who had neither formal rank nor

⁹⁸ S.N.A., Testimony of Cecilia Son Suwan of Songkhon, 15 February 1949.

significant political or social affiliations in the Thai world view. Undoubtedly, they were enraged by the defiant letter that was sent by the sisters that betrayed absolutely no fear of the police, despite their dire threats. Given the women's defiance of the police, their effective leadership – to the extent that they were, probably unintentionally, about to convert the police rather than vice versa – meant that they had to be eliminated.⁹⁹

The ulterior motives behind the arrest of Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung are more obscure. Unlike Philip Siphong and the nuns of Songkhon, Fr. Nicolas was not a resident of the parish where he was arrested. According to the Mission accounts, Fr. Nicolas had spent some days in early January 1941 wandering around various parishes in an attempt to meet up with two Thai priests – Fr. Leonard Phonsuwan and Fr. Ambrosio Minlukun to conduct their annual retreat which, at that time, traditionally began on the Monday after the feast of the Epiphany. Both Fr. Leonard and Fr. Ambrosio, however, had already left their posts due to fears for their own safety, and so Fr. Nicolas ended up by himself in Ban Han, the parish of Fr. Ambrosio, on 11 January 1941. In the absence of Fr. Ambrosio and with the approach of the feast of the Epiphany, Fr. Nicolas gathered the parishioners and led them in the *Litany of Mary*. The following day, the feast of the Epiphany, Fr. Nicolas rang the church bells at 8.30 in the morning to call the parishioners to Mass. On the same day, he was arrested along with eight others, initially on charges of violating an official ban on ringing church bells.¹⁰⁰ The Fifth Columnist allegations

⁹⁹ In spite of the assassination and the executions and subsequent persecutions, it is notable that Songkhon remains a predominantly Catholic village to this day.

¹⁰⁰ B.A.A., *Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii servi dei Nicolai Bunkerd Kitbamrung: Positio Super Martyrio*, pp. 32-3.

seemed to have emerged much later, when the facts regarding the bell-ringing were being effectively challenged.

This apparent ban on the ringing of church bells was another irregular law, since its contents and enforcement changed according to the whim of the local authorities. According to Vicar-Apostolic Perros who was aware of the law, bans on ringing church bells were in force only during the night.¹⁰¹ Witness testimonies attest that the bells were rung in the morning hours and thus, had the case against Fr. Nicolas and the others been based only on this regulation, they would have been acquitted. It was probably the realisation of this fact that led to the emergence of later charges connecting the incident to Fifth Columnist activities. Before examining the charges further, it is worth noting that by 1944, local authorities in some provinces like Chantaburi were quite happy to seek the co-operation of Catholic parishes to use their bells as a signal for the daily raising and lowering of the national flag in the mornings and evenings, and were appreciative of the co-operation.¹⁰² Conversely, the bells themselves could also be a potential source of complaint. It would not be the first time that a parish church was met with a noise complaint following the celebration of a feast day.¹⁰³ Considering the day Fr. Nicolas rang the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰² B.A.A., Fr. Thomas to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 12 April 1944, 35/4/18.

¹⁰³ In 1922, for example, the Holy Rosary Church in Bangkok was met with complaints from G.H. Ardon, manager of the local Siam Commercial Bank, who appealed directly to the Vicar-Apostolic:

For the last two mornings, being Saints' days (presumably) the bell-ringing has begun at 5 a.m. – Not a quiet call to prayer, or Mass, which would not disturb anyone ... I am a great Believer in Early-rising and am almost invariably up by 5.45 a.m. I contend that any ringing of bells, beyond a quiet toll, is – may I say – inconsiderate a little at any hour before 6 a.m. (B.A.A., G.H. Ardon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 5 June 1922, 50/4/32).

A few months later, the suffering neighbour had reason to complain again, and wrote another letter to the Vicar-Apostolic with, literally, cotton wool in his ears complaining of:

The incessant repetition of hymn tunes, including the nigger melody 'Old Black Joe' stumbled through for the inevitable three verses, at short intervals, many times badly played, followed by a continuous clash of Bells, has been going on as I write for well over an hour – reading, writing, &/or sleeping [is] out of the question – and it would not be a serious

bells of his parish church was the feast of the Epiphany, another major feast-day, and given his Chinese background, his bell-ringing may have been considered normal by members of the Catholic parish but, at the same time, it may well have been perceived as unusual (read suspicious) or a nuisance by the local non-Catholic community.

Having failed to find conclusive evidence of Fr. Nicolas's violation of the ban on ringing bells at night, new charges of being involved in Fifth Columnist activities emerged. The false testimonies were strengthened perhaps by Fr. Nicolas's seemingly erratic movements from one parish to another in the days preceding his arrest and, critically, allegations that the meeting at which he had led the *Litany of Mary* was in fact a prayer session for the victory of France. It had been alleged that Fr. Nicolas had instructed Catholics to pray for French victory: in fact he had asked the congregation not to hate the French because of their past contribution to Catholicism in Thailand.¹⁰⁴ Even with such 'conclusive' evidence it took a long time for the military courts to give a definitive ruling. Following their arrests, the suspects were first detained for a week in the local police station, before being transferred to the Nakhon Ratchasima prison. They remained there for a further month and a half before being moved to a prison in Bangkok, where they had to endure an 11 month long investigation and trial, at the end of which the suspects

exaggeration if I said it had been going on the whole day since daylight (B.A.A., G.H. Ardon to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 7 October 1922, 50/4/35).

The Mission authorities forwarded the letters to the parish priest of Holy Rosary Church but the lack of apologies may have irked Mr. Ardon, with the procurator merely writing that: "Yesterday was of course an exceptional day and unless a noisy display be allowed, Chinese people are not satisfied" (B.A.A., Fr. Chorin to G.H. Ardon, Undated, 50/4/35). The feast this time was presumably that of Our Lady of the Rosary, which would have been especially relevant to the Holy Rosary parish.
¹⁰⁴ B.A.A., Witness testimony of Fr. René Meunier, 7 September 1993, in *Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii servi dei Nicolai Bunkerd Kitbamrung: Positio Super Martyrio*, (1999), p. 198.

received sentences between ten to fifteen years' imprisonment. Fr. Nicolas was one of those who received the maximum fifteen-year sentence.¹⁰⁵

From the Vicar-Apostolic's point of view, the charges against Fr. Nicolas and the others were absurd. In a letter to Luang Aduldejarat, the Vicar-Apostolic argued that Fr. Nicolas had been "accused falsely of being a spy by some persons who had hated him".¹⁰⁶ Although Fr. Nicolas's base parish was in Nonkaew (its church was burnt down in 1944) and not Ban Han, he appeared to have been a regular visitor to Ban Han. According to Mak Ladchanthuk, one of the witnesses arrested with him, Fr. Nicolas had "visited villagers very consistently so that they all knew him". The same witness also confirmed the poisonous atmosphere at the time, saying that: "During the anti-Christianity persecution, village headmen and precinct headmen accused us (Catholics) that we were sided with the French, and prohibited us from praying in the church".¹⁰⁷ There was thus some clear pre-existing tension between the Catholics and the local authorities before the arrival of Fr. Nicolas in January 1941.

The last factor that could be responsible for the events in Ban Han was the character of Fr. Nicolas himself. Although he has been beatified, the investigation committee did note he had some character flaws. According to Justin Pagès, the superior of Penang Seminary (1917-31) where Fr. Nicolas (then called Xun Kim) trained before his ordination, the young novice had potential but also some character flaws in 1923:

Xun Kim does not please me much. His outward conduct is very good, but he is self-important and I believe that he does not have right judgement... I

¹⁰⁵ B.A.A., *Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii servi dei Nicolai Bunkerd Kitbamrung: Positio Super Martyrio*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Luang Aduldejarat, 23 February 1941, in *Beatificationis*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁷ B.A.A., Witness testimony of Mak Ladchanthuk, 13 September 1993 in *Beatificationis*, p. 202.

add that if he does not change he'll never be in the priesthood... I hope that he will change.¹⁰⁸

Matters had improved one year later, although the novice's stubbornness was still remarked upon. However, by 1925, the superior was far more confident of his ward's abilities, reporting that "Xun Kim has improved. He is pious, serious, and is not afraid of work".¹⁰⁹ From the witness testimonies, it seems that Fr. Nicolas had channelled his stubbornness and transformed it into the virtue of persistence. For example, when he was faced with Buddhists fearing the consequences of conversion, he said to them that "if people wanted to learn Catechism he would teach them anyway, even if it was at night".¹¹⁰ When faced with swarms of enraged bees that stung anyone in their path, he walked through them anyway – and was not stung, unlike those who went with him.¹¹¹ Yet, at times he still showed his old stubborn streak, fatally it seems in his decision to go to Ban Han. One witness had asked him before his departure where he was going, and Fr. Nicolas's reply was: "To Ban Han village, to open the church there and to be detained".¹¹² The statement suggests that Fr. Nicolas knew what was going to happen, yet he persisted in going anyway. It was perhaps this stubbornness, together with his personal charisma, that the local authorities found more threatening – much like the situation at Songkhon. Indeed, Fr. Nicolas seemed aware that it was he, and not the other villagers arrested with him, who was the target of the persecution, saying to his fellow detainees that "he alone is responsible for all accusations",¹¹³ a fact confirmed by the pressure exerted by the authorities on the Catholic detainees to incriminate the priest alone. According to

¹⁰⁸ B.A.A., *Biography of the Blessed Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung: Priest and Martyr*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ B.A.A., Witness testimony of Mrs. Chumchai Deebuakiang, 16 September 1993 in *Beatificationis*, p. 209.

¹¹¹ B.A.A., Witness testimony of Mr. Saeng Panyo, 17 September 1993 in *Beatificationis*, p. 211.

¹¹² B.A.A., Witness testimony of Mr. Mak Paphara, 14 September 1993 in *Beatificationis*, p. 205.

¹¹³ B.A.A., Witness testimony of Mr. Mak Ladchanthuk, 13 September 1993 in *Beatificationis*, p. 202.

one witness, the authorities had told them “to incriminate Fr. Nicolas for espionage and worshipping the French religion”, adding that they also had to convert to Buddhism or otherwise face execution.¹¹⁴

There is thus reason to believe that the anti-Catholic persecution was more than just a response to nationalist rhetoric or alleged government orders. Ulterior motives played a role in many of the persecution events; some are transparent, thanks to extensive documentation on the causes and consequences of the events, but others are not clear because of their innate obscurity or lack of documentation. What is clear is that the defiance of authority, even if this defiance had a firm basis in the law and Constitution, loss of face, and the possibility of material or social gain were factors in precipitating many of the crises. In some cases, local disputes and jealousies dated from before the outbreak of the Thai-French War but, in a majority of cases, it seems that the actions were the result of the political and economic opportunism that thrived in the poisonous atmosphere that was created by the central government.

For the seven martyrs of Songkhon and Fr. Nicolas, their defiance was as much an exercise of their political rights as their religious rights – the right to practice their beliefs freely, according to the Constitution. That the local authorities denied them through assassination, execution, and false imprisonment, effectively made them Catholic martyrs in the eyes of the Church. But from a secular perspective, for their courageous defiance in the face of rampant abuses by local authorities, they could also be regarded as Thai political icons and martyrs to the failings of the Thai constitutional order.

¹¹⁴ B.A.A., Witness testimony of Mrs. Champa Phuakchanthuk, *Beatificationis*, p. 201.

Conclusion

You should read history and look at ostracism, persecution, martyrdom, and that kind of thing. They always happen to the best men, you know.

- George Eliot

In conclusion by 1939, with the exception of the northeast and some localised incidents, there was little indication that the Missions operating in Siam would suffer persecution in the following year. The main factor that pushed many areas towards conducting actions against Catholic interests was the outbreak of the Thai-French War in November 1940 and the emergency measures that were introduced as a consequence. The war fanned anti-French sentiments and suspicion of everything that was vaguely associated with France and, indeed, all Westerners. This factor was further reinforced by indirect government sanctions of the action, such as some of the Cultural Mandates, which were viewed as being above the 1932 Constitution, as well as the actions of certain minor members of the government, such as Prasert Tharisawat, an official in the Government Propaganda Bureau who led the Thai Blood Group.

Notwithstanding the active participation of some government members, it can be seen that there was not a unified attitude or indeed policy when it came to the Catholic question. Differences in attitudes can be seen in the public response made by Luang Aduldejarat, the police chief, to the abuses that had been perpetrated against Catholics and other minorities under the aegis of the emergency measures. Thus, while some government officials may have actively campaigned against Catholics, there were others who were equally, if not more, influential who were in clear opposition to such campaigns.

As a direct consequence of the ambivalence of the government, there was no unified or consistent policy when it came to the Catholic question. This lack of consistency stands in stark contrast to the treatment of the Chinese during this period, whose discrimination was the subject of formal legislation. The inconsistent nature of the persecution was the direct result of this lack of formal policy where over the period 1940-5, the persecution manifested itself across the whole gamut of violence, ranging from extra-judicial executions, as in the case of Songkhon, to merely shouting abuse at the Vicar-Apostolic in Bangkok.

Finally, local conditions that existed before the 1940s were key additional factors in determining the nature of the persecution in their area. In certain areas, especially where Missions had not encountered major problems prior to 1940, anti-Catholic action did not extend further than verbal abuse or minor vandalism of churches. However, in other areas which had these pre-existing problems, the lack of a specific government policy did not prevent local elements from exploiting the situation, especially when the priorities of the government lay elsewhere. Thus, indirect policies such as the emergency measures of the 1940-1 Thai-French War, the Cultural Mandates, and the anti-Chinese legislation were used singly or in combination to justify attacks on Catholic interests.

VI

Manipulating Identities: National Identities and the Missionary

One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognizes the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty. In certain circumstances it can break down, at certain levels of civilization it does not exist, but as a positive force there is nothing to set beside it. Christianity and international Socialism are as weak as straw in comparison with it. Hitler and Mussolini rose to power in their own countries very largely because they could grasp this fact and their opponents could not.

- George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*

The Thai-French War, together with the ensuing persecution, brought many background conflicts to the fore. The most significant of these were the issues of Catholicism and national identity. The role of the French missionaries was transformed from being an asset, in their individual expertise in education and their ability to secure additional funding from the French colonial government, to being a major liability to the survival of the entire Mission. In appealing for funding from the French government, the French missionaries had emphasised their role in spreading the *gloire* of their motherland in Siam. Yet, at the same time, they were insistent in their loyalty to their adopted homeland. The two roles were obviously irreconcilable following the outbreak of armed conflict between their motherland and their adopted homeland. The one refuge remaining was their allegiance to the Catholic Church, but by the time of the persecution, the impression that the Mission of Siam maintained a close relationship with France had already been implanted.

Unlike their French counterparts, the Italian Salesians had not formed such an explicit connection with the government of their homeland. Neither had their motherland developed such a bad reputation among Thais, nor indeed in wider Asia.

At the very least the Italian government had not blockaded the Chao Phraya River with gunboats, demanding unjustified financial reparations and territorial concessions within the last few decades. Another possible factor was Italy's membership of the Axis but the importance of this is negligible: French Indochina's nominal alignment with the Nazi-backed Vichy government had done little to stop Thai and Japanese encroachment on French interests in Southeast Asia throughout the war. Nevertheless, although the Salesians in Siam had little, if anything, to do with Mussolini's fascist government, they were able to exploit their national identity by moving into areas where French priests were no longer welcome.

The consequent bitterness between the M.E.P. and the Salesians reveals much about the territorial nature of missionary efforts during this period, despite the profession of a common faith by the religious orders involved. Even when a semblance of normality returned throughout Thailand following the surrender of Japan, both the French and the Italian priests had lost out. If anything, the episode argued more strongly than ever for an acceleration of the handover of Mission operations to the indigenous clergy.

Indeed, given the Missions' multi-national and multi-ethnic makeup and their international connections, the emergence of Thai nationalist politics triggered major changes in attitudes within the Missions themselves. The change was reflected in the attitudes of the Thai priests and laymen towards the French leadership, and their insistence that the Mission become more 'Thai', with a greater role for the indigenous clergy, though not always for purely altruistic or even nationalistic purposes.

French Missionaries

No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second.

- Matthew 6: 24

A major issue that was raised by the Thai Blood Group, responsible for much of the uncontrolled persecution, concerned the loyalties of the foreign Catholic priests and how they had allegedly swayed their congregations with their pro-French bias and were acting as a “Fifth Column” for the French forces. More seriously, during the Thai-French War, it was rumoured that some priests had been involved in attacks on Thai territory.¹ These accusations echo some of the concerns that had existed in the northeast prior to the Thai-French War, as shown in Chapter IV. But they came into the official domain when they became part of court proceedings, as was the case with Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung who, among other things, was said to have exhorted his congregation to “pray for a French victory”, while other priests were accused of giving secret signals to enemy forces by flashing lights during the night.² Clearly, some Thai nationalists suspected the French missionaries: but where did the loyalties of the French missionaries actually lie? Were they really loyal to France, their country of birth? The answer to this question is complex, and has implications for the missionary movement not only in Thailand but around the world.

Admittedly, evidence regarding the French missionaries’ sense of their own identity is scarce, especially from the reticent Vicar-Apostolic Perros. There are no searing, soul-searching diaries or letters that detail the missionaries’ struggle with reconciling the work of the Catholic Church, their home countries’ policies towards

¹ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to M. Roger Garreau, Minister of France, 28 May 1941, 60/6/25.

² One priest, for example, was accused of soliciting military information and of flashing lights as a signal from his church – see B.A.A., Court Proceedings, 28 November 1940, *Beatification Documents* 171/1-6.

Siam, and their own feeling towards their adopted countries. Thus, it is difficult to be certain of what missionaries considered to be their 'true' identity, especially when they are conscious about addressing different audiences for different purposes. Nevertheless, there are several points that are clear, and in the case of the missionaries of Siam, they emerge most visibly *in extremis*.

With the exception of the northeastern region, the loyalties of the French missionaries went generally unquestioned by outsiders prior to the outbreak of the Thai-French War. Nevertheless, as early as the late nineteenth century, there was already some unease within the foreign missionary community itself. The ambiguous loyalty of the Mission of Siam was evident during celebrations involving high officials from colonial powers, particularly those from traditionally Catholic countries. At one such celebration in 1938 involving French and Spanish officials, Brother Ludovico Maria made the following observations:

How many times have I had a bad impression when I saw the French and Spanish flags flying in the wind on the towers of the cathedral... Does this represent France or the Holy See? I said to myself. This morning at the college, I had the same painful impression: at the top of the presidential chair there was a Spanish flag flanked by four French flags.³

Some priests were clearly uncomfortable identifying their work with a colonial power, or indeed any foreign nation. At the same time, there were others who had no such scruples and willingly associated themselves with the interests of their homeland. The latter group became a particular concern of the Holy See during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the colonial powers expanded and consolidated their territories. The concern is expressed mainly in papal encyclicals,

³ M.E.P.A., Dossier Bangkok, 1938.

firstly in *Neminem Profecto*, issued in 1845 during the pontificate of Pope Gregory XVI. This encyclical was followed by an even more emphatic one, *Maximum Illud*, issued in 1919 by Pope Benedict XV. Indeed, it had been the policy of the Propaganda Fide since 1659⁴ to discourage the formation of nationalistic attachments among missionaries. Its encouragement of the formation of indigenous clergy was also designed to prevent European-nationalist interference in ecclesiastical affairs. *Neminem Profecto* and *Maximum Illud* were merely reminders of this traditional policy. Indeed, *Maximum Illud* was especially scathing of “patriotic” European missionaries. Its cautionary note to foreign missionaries is eerily prescient of the problems that would be encountered by the Mission of Siam:

It would be tragic indeed if any of our missionaries forgot the dignity of their office so completely as to busy themselves with the interests of their terrestrial homeland instead of with those of their homeland in heaven. It would be a tragedy indeed if an apostolic man were to spend himself in attempts to increase and exalt the prestige of the native land he once left behind him. Such behaviour would infect his apostolate like a plague. It would destroy in him, the representative of the Gospel, the sinews of his love for souls and it would destroy his reputation with the populace. For no matter how wild and barbarous a people may be, they are well aware of what the missionary is doing in their country and of what he wants for them. They will subject him in their own way to a very searching investigation, and if he has any object in view other than their spiritual good, they will find out about it. Suppose it becomes clear that he is involved in worldly schemes of some kind, and that, instead of devoting himself exclusively to the work of the apostolate, he is serving the interests of his homeland as well. The people immediately suspect everything he does. And in addition, such a situation could easily give rise to the conviction that the Christian religion is the national religion of some foreign people and that anyone converted to it is abandoning his loyalty to his own people and submitting to the pretensions and domination of a foreign power.⁵

⁴ R. Costet, *Siam-Laos: Histoire de la Mission*, p. 424.

⁵ Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, 19, Society of the Divine Word, 30 November 1919, <http://www.svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm#114%20Local%20Clergy> [Last Access: 19 January 2009].

Given Papal concerns regarding this issue, it seems the problem of missionaries failing to reconcile their national roots with the work of the Mission was not unique to Siam. Yet, in the Siamese case, the interests of colonial powers and the interests of the Mission could not always be reconciled. French territorial acquisitions at the expense of the Siamese state were costing the Mission Siamese goodwill, especially in the northeast. Furthermore, given the secular movement within France itself during the early twentieth century, co-operation between the French government and the missionary orders was not always a certainty. As the Vicar-Apostolic noted in a 1944 report:

It is true that France, more than any country in the world, has sent her sons and daughters throughout the world to evangelise, but they are not the instruments of France for French politics or French propaganda. The proof is that France has all too often, alas, persecuted the Church, secularised the schools, expelled the religious, confiscated the property of religious orders while propagating atheism.⁶

Furthermore, some French diplomatic officials such as Jules Harmand, the French consul to Siam (1881-3), were ardently anti-clerical and critical of other French officials and the missionaries. For example, Harmand criticised his predecessors who gave the missionaries “deplorable habits and encouraged their encroachment upon the domain of the Siamese authorities to such an extent that they have become petty monarchs”. The missionaries, too, did not escape blame since in Harmand’s view they “behave like veritable rebels in a country where they should consider it their highest duty and their best policy to show respect for the law and for native custom”.⁷ The same criticism could be levelled against the activities of the Mission of Laos in the 1920s and 1930s. In administrative terms, Harmand also

⁶ B.A.A., Report of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1944 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 153.

⁷ P. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1995), p. 48.

contended that over three quarters of the routine administration of the consulate was taken up with conflicts arising from the Mission, while the king also complained about the activities of the missionaries during his first interview with the new consul.⁸ From Harmand's point of view, therefore, the missionaries were a major obstacle to a closer relationship with the Siamese government.

Nevertheless, by the time of Vicar-Apostolic Perros's ministry, an undeniable connection, both in terms of policy and finance, between the French colonial government and the Mission of Siam had been established. The origin of this co-operation can be found in the first years of Vicar-Apostolic Perros's ministry, during the First World War. As mentioned earlier, although Vicar-Apostolic Perros was appointed to his position in Bangkok in 1909, this did not prevent him from being mobilised for French military service at the outbreak of war in 1914 and being sent back to France. A series of letters survive concerning negotiations between the Deputy for French Indochina and the Ministry of War for the Vicar-Apostolic's release from military service, and they reveal much about the French government's attitude towards the position of the Catholic Church in Siam. The first letter, dated May 1915, was addressed to M. Marcou from M. Ernest Outrey, the deputy for French Indochina. Revealingly, in support of the Vicar-Apostolic's case, the deputy expressed the view that:

I am effectively convinced that he [Vicar-Apostolic Perros] will be able to render to France services that are more appreciable than the ones that he is currently rendering at Belfort.⁹

The Ministry of War agreed with the sentiments, even though it took almost a month to do so, and granted the Vicar-Apostolic a deferment until October of the

⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹ B.A.A., M. Outrey to M. Marcou, 14 May 1915, 65/1/22.

same year.¹⁰ The Vicar-Apostolic would have been under no illusion as to why the deferment had been granted. As M. Outrey wrote in the letter that informed the stranded Vicar-Apostolic of the decision:

You should not have any disquiet about the limit of the deferment that has been accorded to you, once you return to Bangkok it is unlikely that you will be subject to a new mobilisation, because the reason for this deferment was precisely the influential role you can exercise in Siam for the defence of French interests in that country.¹¹

However, what exactly these “French interests” were is not elaborated on in the letter. Did the French government intend the Vicar-Apostolic to use his influence to steer neutral Siam towards entering the war on the side of France and the Allies? Or to increase French influence in the region and block any attempts by the Central Powers to undermine Allied interests in the area? Would these activities compromise the Mission’s neutrality and thus its position and work in Siam?

As events turned out, the Vicar-Apostolic did not have to deal with these difficult questions. Indeed, according to the documents, he did very little to aid the French in Siam, since there was very little that needed to be done, or could be done in the face of British and Chinese commercial dominance in Siam. Furthermore, other prominent figures and groups in Thai society were already moving in a pro-Allied direction without requiring the encouragement or prompting of a French Catholic bishop, since international developments meant that Siam’s neutrality became less and less beneficial. By May 1917, King Vajiravudh was already set on declaring for the Allied forces,¹² even though there were indications that Germany and its allies were more popular among the general population, since its colonial adventures had not adversely affected Siam, unlike those of the French and the

¹⁰ B.A.A., French Ministry of War to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 12 June 1915, 65/1/27.

¹¹ B.A.A., M. Outrey to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 17 June 1915, 65/1/30.

¹² W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo!*, pp. 107-8.

British. Furthermore, the Germans were more open to social integration with the Siamese through their learning of the language (since few Siamese spoke German), intermarriage, and even naturalisation.¹³ However, at the time, in Thai society nobody could be more persuasive than the absolute monarch in combination with the international situation. As for the presence of the Central Powers, their influence in Siam was already minimal before 1914, and continued to diminish thereafter as its property was impounded and its citizens' liberty was curtailed by the Siamese authorities upon the formal declaration of war on 22 July 1917. Thus, apart from sending missionaries as interpreters for the token Siamese contingent deployed to the Western front in June 1918, it was largely business as usual for the Mission of Siam.

Nevertheless, the French government had obtained what it wanted, the entry of an additional ally into the war, albeit at a rather late stage, while the Vicar-Apostolic was able to resume his work in the Mission. This deal was only the beginning of the symbiotic relationship between the Mission of Siam and the French government. Considering the instructions of *Maximum Illud*, the dangerous flirtation of state and missionary interests should probably have ended with the conclusion of the Allied victory in 1918. On the contrary, it seems that the Vicar-Apostolic was keener than ever to involve the French colonial government in the activities of the Mission. As the Vicar-Apostolic noted in 1915, the Catholic Church "constitute the principal element of French action" in Siam.¹⁴ Indeed, after the war, the Vicar-Apostolic succeeded in identifying French interests with the primary activities of the Mission in education, charity, and evangelisation:

¹³ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁴ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Minister, 30 May 1915, 49/1/12.

...the French influence is not only exercised in our educational and charitable establishments in the capital, but also by the work of the missionaries in the provinces, where they are often the only Europeans.¹⁵

This claim appeared to have gained credence in the French colonial government since attacks (physical or otherwise) on the Mission's schools were portrayed as an attack on French interests. When new school regulations were passed by the government in September 1921, the Vicar-Apostolic felt he could call on the assistance of the French government, since the laws had precipitated an "exceptionally critical situation for the Catholic French Missions of Siam and Laos, not only from the religious point of view, but also that of the French".¹⁶

French assistance to the Mission was not limited to diplomacy but, as discussed earlier, extended to financial assistance. The French colonial government seemed convinced that the teaching of the French language and culture and support for the charitable institutions run by French religious orders would work to their interests. Certainly, the Vicar-Apostolic advertised the benefits of their indirect work for the French government, writing in 1939 that:

We will continue, with all our heart and our strength, to devote ourselves to our Works, honoured to be able to contribute a small part to the development of language and culture, and through that, the prestige of our dear fatherland.¹⁷

However, since the French funds were ear-marked for specific institutions, it is arguable that the French colonial government's conviction did not extend to the rest of the Mission's work. Also, it was notable that in the Mission's annual accounts, the French colonial government is not mentioned as a patron of the

¹⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to M. Outrey, 23 February 1918, 49/4/10.

¹⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to M. F. Pila, French Minister Plenipotentiary, 16 November 1921, 50/3/45.

¹⁷ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Minister, 14 December 1939, 55/1/82.

Mission of Siam, but the various religious institutions are. While there were legitimate accounting principles behind the non-disclosure, it is also possible that the Vicar-Apostolic knew he was in dangerous territory, especially in the light of the warnings of *Maximum Illud*.

Superficially therefore, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Thai Blood Group was right – there was a connection between the French colonial government and the Mission of Siam. Yet, the picture becomes complicated when the Mission's correspondence with the Siamese authorities is examined. The Vicar-Apostolic proved to be equally keen to court the interest of Siamese high society in support of its work. Indeed, to a Siamese audience, his patriotism seemed to lean more towards Siam, his country of residence for most of his life, than to his country of birth, which he had left when he was only 23 years old. This impression is created in letters such as the 1922 missive to King Vajiravudh on the occasion of his birthday:

Having made Siam our country of adoption, we have at heart the prosperity and happiness of the nation, and the noble examples set before us, serves as incentives to more strenuous endeavours on our part.¹⁸

Nor did this enthusiasm for his “country of adoption” waver with the change to the constitutional monarchy. In 1933, he wrote to Phraya Phahon:

...So I intend for the chronicles of Siam to record until the end of time that the Roman Catholics do not teach people to only love God, but they also teach them to be patriotic, even if they have to sacrifice their lives for the greater good.¹⁹

¹⁸ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), 1 January 1922, 59/2/10.

¹⁹ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Prime Minister Phraya Phahon, 27 December 1933, 53/3/38.

The sentiments were not one-sided. Indeed, the Siamese community often reciprocated in words and, sometimes, also in deeds. During the post-1932 period, praise was lavished on the work of the missionary schools during the Constitution celebrations and Thai government officials were still attending ceremonies, such as the funeral of Fr. Colombet in August 1933. The attitude had not changed much from the period of absolute monarchy. For example, in one of the replies to the Vicar-Apostolic's birthday wishes to the monarch in 1911, the Siamese Foreign Office had written on the monarch's behalf:

His Majesty desires me to express to Your Lordship his high appreciation of the important work with which the Catholic Church and Community in this country have done in promoting the educational and moral welfare of the people among whom they have laboured. The connection of the Catholic Church with this Kingdom is one of very old standing, and His Majesty not only recognises it as a connection fruitful of the best benefits to the public in general, but also regards members of the Catholic Mission as devoted fellow workers with himself in the cause of the country's progress.²⁰

Indeed, as the rise of Assumption College attests, these sentiments were often backed up financially. Such esteem for the work of the Mission, in turn, ensured its continuing smooth operation. At the same time, it also granted the Mission leadership access to influential communities, such as the Siam Society. In 1914 Vicar-Apostolic Perros was unanimously invited to join the Siam Society as an honorary member "in view of the fact that the Roman Catholic Mission since its establishment in Siam has favoured and contributed to scientific researches in the land in which its labours are concentrated".²¹

The strongest evidence of the Mission's dedication to Siam was its role in attempting to bring the Pétain government in to negotiations prior to the outbreak of

²⁰ B.A.A., Siamese Foreign Office to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 11 January 1911, 61/1/11.

²¹ B.A.A., Siam Society to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 23 March 1914, 48/6/11.

the Thai-French War. A letter to the French Minister of 29 September 1940 states that it had always been the policy of the Mission to maintain a harmonious relationship with the local authorities, but the Mission had become increasingly anxious "in view of the obstacles which, at this moment, threatens to disrupt the tradition of amity between our country of origin and Thailand our country of adoption". The letter then makes the following request:

If the demands of Thailand, which in essence is a simple rectification of the borders on the Mekong, do not prejudice the vital interests of our nation, we would be much obliged if you could push with all your strength for the maintenance of peace, justice, and honour for the two nations.²²

A further, more urgent telegram sent three days later on 2 October, addressed directly to the Pétain government, read:

The French Catholic Mission of THAILAND begs the French government to agree without delay to the amiable rectification of the borders on the MEKHONG between THAILAND and INDOCHINA. The affair is urgent and its settlement will honour the two countries with the Mission and we believe it will be without real difficulty for FRANCE.²³

In addition, a telegram along similar lines was sent to the Superior of the M.E.P. on the same day, highlighting the seriousness of the situation.²⁴ While the Vicar-Apostolic's efforts were ultimately fruitless, the telegrams and letters are revealing in their contradictions. The Vicar-Apostolic's identification of the Mission of Siam as the "French Catholic Mission" suggests that the Mission was firmly aligned with the interests of France. On the other hand, pressing for the alteration of the border between Thailand and French Indochina, at this stage, would have benefited Thailand more than France. Practically speaking, therefore, despite the

²² B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to French Minister, 29 September 1940, 55/2/38.

²³ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Pétain government, 2 October 1940, 55/2/38.

²⁴ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Superior of the M.E.P., 2 October 1940, 55/2/40.

Mission's claim to be the "French Thai Mission" it can be seen that *in extremis*, the Vicar-Apostolic preferred to support Thailand at the cost of France.

Furthermore, the Mission continued to insist on its own devotion, and the loyalty of its congregation, to Thailand, even in the face of active persecution. Certainly, there were worries that the French missionaries could abuse their hold over parishioners and turn them against their own country; but the Vicar-Apostolic's homilies and circulars contest this view. One circular from the 1940s insisted that:

The Catholic Church who willingly embraces all in her arms regardless of their nationality or status has a sacred duty, as the leader of humanity, to allow all to attain their eternal goal... The Church does not conspire and has not conspired to create disorder in the natural order... Every Catholic, though they differ in nationality and ethnicity, exist as the children of their motherlands and must love their own respective countries with the highest love. But in this time of crisis, they must be second to no other patriot in giving their lives for their countries if necessary.²⁵

Moreover, even when its priests were arrested or assaulted, the Mission did not turn to outsiders but appealed directly to the government for redress. Evidence for the Mission's dedication to Thailand, therefore, can be said to be as strong as that which attested to its loyalty to France.

Much of the apparent contradiction comes from the audience being addressed by the Vicar-Apostolic and his intentions. Clearly, when applying for funding from the French colonial government, it was a good ploy to emphasise the French patriotic credentials. On the other hand, to ensure the future smooth running of the Mission, it was a good idea to emphasise the benefits of missionary activities to Thai society and the patriotism of the Catholic congregation when addressing Thais. Both the Thais and the French were, in effect, being exploited by the Vicar-Apostolic.

²⁵ B.A.A., Parish Circular, Undated, 68/3/34.

Perhaps 'exploitation' is too strong a word, since the 'victims' did derive benefits. The French could be satisfied that the prestige of their *patrie* was being spread in a land over which they had little political and commercial influence, while the Thais obtained a wider access to European-style education and healthcare. The overwhelming concern for the Mission, it seems, was not loyalty to Siam or France but how they can be exploited to benefit the work of the Mission; and if everybody gains something through their co-operation and the synergy of interests, so much the better.

Ultimately, it was not the interests of Thailand or France that was foremost in the mind of the Mission but the welfare of Catholicism, its works, and the followers within its jurisdiction. Although *Maximum Illud* had forbidden such a close flirtation with nationalist interests, the Vicar-Apostolic's actions should be considered in the context of Thai political reality and the Mission's poor financial performance. The Thai political reality was that it was nearly impossible to initiate any major project without sponsorship or patronage from influential figures. At the same time, the Great Depression had placed further restraint on the Mission's already limited financial resources. Even during the more prosperous years of the 1920s, the situation had caused acute tension within the Mission leadership itself, between the Vicar-Apostolic and his procurator, Louis-August Chorin. The effects of the Great Depression and the deficit of the Mission between the years 1928 and 1939 on its work were potentially ruinous, with the Mission incurring heavy deficits as shown in Chapter II. Additional funds from anywhere during this period would therefore have been very welcome.

It has been said that "no man can serve two masters" but it seems that, by 1939, the Mission was trying to serve three: Thailand, France, and the Church. It

was a risky policy, which did allow the Mission to survive the 1930s, despite its financial problems. The ploy would probably have worked indefinitely too, if it weren't for the pesky nationalists. For the Vicar-Apostolic and his financially-challenged Mission in the late 1920s and 1930s, the lure of additional funds was perhaps too much to resist, and the agreement with the French colonial government was made. Undoubtedly, the pact was a Faustian one, but he hardly needed to have read the play, since the *Maximum Illud* had anticipated the outcome for some time.

Italian Missionaries

Fly from bad companions as from the bite of a poisonous snake. If you keep good companions, I can assure you that you will one day rejoice with the blessed in Heaven; whereas if you keep with those who are bad, you will become bad yourself, and you will be in danger of losing your soul.

- St. John Bosco

In contrast to their French colleagues, the Italian Salesians were able to exploit their nationality to their distinct advantage. Their possession of the separate Mission of Ratchaburi, legal and administrative separation, along with their dissimilarities from the French missionaries, allowed them to exploit the vacuum left by the expelled French priests, particularly in the northeast. Certainly, the Salesians knew from very early on what had befallen their French colleagues and their congregations. In December 1940, Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti wrote to his counterpart in the Mission of Siam assuring him of the Salesians' prayers for the M.E.P.-run Missions of Siam and Laos adding:

We are all aware of your and your confreres' pains and we ask the Lord to end the days of tribulation. In any event, the humble sons of [John] de Bosco are at your disposition, should they be able to serve you in any way.²⁶

Indeed, initially, the Italians proved more than useful to their beleaguered M.E.P. colleagues for two reasons. Firstly, in theory, they did not pose an additional danger to their parishioners due to their Italian nationality. Secondly, they were tolerated or even protected by the authorities, assisted by the fact that some of the Salesians were already acquainted with local officials. For example, one priest, Fr. Pinaffo, was an old acquaintance of the Governor of Ubon Ratchatani. The relationship was certainly beneficial for the Salesians, since a local Thai priest noted

²⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 8 December 1940, 44/4/41.

that: "The [district chief officer] and the chief of police were very polite with the two priests".²⁷ Together with their nation's history, that saw the absence of notable antagonism against Thailand, the Salesians were able to operate in regions from which the French had recently been expelled, purely through advantages that derived from their nationality.

At first, the Mission of Siam accepted the presence of the Salesian priests as a necessity. The Mission was induced to make the following agreement with the Salesians in April 1941:

1. The deputy Vicar-Apostolic will only have the power to appoint Salesian priests that have been approved by their Superior to parishes that have also been approved of by both the Superior and the deputy Vicar-Apostolic.
2. Once these priests have assumed their posts, they will have the right and responsibility to govern the Catholics of that parish and manage the assets of the parish.
3. The priests will hold their post indefinitely unless either party [the Mission of Siam or the Salesians] wishes to terminate the agreement, in which case they must inform the other party in advance.

Ostensibly, the agreement had been made because of "the few number of priests that are inadequate for the governing of all the parishes in the jurisdiction of the Mission of Bangkok",²⁸ but the note of desperation is palpable. The agreement in effect allowed the Salesians to gain footholds in what was traditionally M.E.P. territory. Undoubtedly the government's restriction on the movement of certain nationalities, including the French, in certain parts of the country was disrupting the operations of the Mission. After all, a shortage of priests was not a new phenomenon in the M.E.P.'s operation of the Mission of Siam and, in the past, it had been able to cope adequately without resorting to outside help. Similarly, the

²⁷ B.A.A., Fr. Khamchu to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 7 June 1941, 47/3/50.

²⁸ B.A.A., Agreement between Fr. Joachim Prakobkij, Provincial of the Mission of Siam and Fr. Juan Carretto, Superior of the Salesians in Thailand, 3 April 1941, 90/3/3.

Mission of Laos also requested Salesian priests to be sent to various posts in the northeast in October 1941.²⁹ The ascendancy of the Salesians in Thailand was confirmed by an April 1941 telegram from the Holy See that charged Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti to temporarily assist in the running of the Mission of Siam.³⁰

Initially, the beleaguered M.E.P. Missions were appreciative of the Salesians' assistance, commending their good work in the midst of great difficulties.³¹ This happy state did not last for long. Indeed, the "temporary" nature of the ascendancy did not deter M.E.P. priests from voicing their criticisms. The French priests disputed the Salesian vicar-apostolic's authority, especially over the running of the Mission of Siam. Particularly explosive was Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti's seeming reluctance to allow the return of French priests to the Mission of Siam following the cessation of the Thai-French War. Considering the fact that the signing of the peace treaty between Thailand and France did not end the persecution of Catholics, Pasotti was arguably right to have reservations. Nevertheless, it engendered suspicion among his M.E.P. colleagues and one M.E.P. priest, Fr. Pierre Moreau, was prompted to ask Mgr. Drapier, the Apostolic Delegate in Hué, Vietnam: "why our priests have to obey Mgr. Pasotti".

Indeed, in 1941, there appeared to have been a campaign among French priests, both inside and outside Thailand, to disregard the instructions of the Italian vicar-apostolic. Mgr. Drapier was sympathetic to the feelings of the French priests but, as Apostolic Delegate, he felt that he could not sanction such a campaign, stating that:

²⁹ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Gouin to Fr. Sinuan, 23 June 1941, 47/3/51, and Vicar-Apostolic Gouin to Fr. Theng, 3 October 1941, 47/3/59.

³⁰ B.A.A., Msgr. Montini to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 21 April 1941, 63/5/4.

³¹ B.A.A., Tha Khaek to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 5 June 1942, 47/4/10.

As much as I admire the ardour of your priests and their love for a country that is hostile to them, it is impossible for me to approve the disobedience of Mgr. Pasotti's directives.³²

The Apostolic Delegate's reasoning was that: "Mgr. Pasotti has, in effect, the powers of an Apostolic Delegate and that he was in charge of Catholic interests in the eyes of the government".³³ Furthermore, he also pointed out that the M.E.P. priests had no evidence against Pasotti, despite all their claims:

You have commented that I know very well the objections of the priests against Mgr. Pasotti and the Salesians; but you have remarked that you have no proof for your assertions and that the Holy See has allowed the maintenance of the status quo.³⁴

The correspondence does not explain what these claims were, but their explosive nature becomes clear in a scathing 1944 report drawn up by Vicar-Apostolic Perros:

We forgive [the indigenous nationalist priests] willingly when they come humbly to us and confide that they had been misguided by certain members of the Italian Mission of the Salesians. It seems to us that despite the conciliatory and peaceful roles they played, Mgr. Pasotti and Fr. Carretto... have failed their duty since they have encouraged the rebellion of Siamese priests against the French priests, and since they hold out that all of Siam will soon be solely their apostolic domain and that they will profit greatly from the French Catholic Mission's possessions and their millions.³⁵

Evidently Vicar-Apostolic Perros's attitude towards the Salesians had cooled significantly since their first arrival in Siam, and reflects a break with the Salesians. Given the date of the report, there is a possibility of a misunderstanding, arising from a repentant indigenous clergy using the Salesians as convenient scapegoats for their previous recalcitrance, after they saw that their cause had been lost along with that of

³² B.A.A., Mgr. Drapier, Apostolic Delegate, to Fr. Moreau, 22 August 1941, 90/3/13.

³³ B.A.A., Fr. Moreau to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 26 September 1941, 90/3/19.

³⁴ B.A.A., Mgr. Drapier, Apostolic Delegate, to Fr. Moreau, 22 August 1941, 90/3/13.

³⁵ B.A.A., Report of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1944 in V. Larqué, *En Thaïlande de 1940 à 1945*, p. 153.

Pibul and Imperial Japan. Nevertheless, for the M.E.P. priests at the time, the Salesians' perceived interference, not only in their administration but also in influencing the conduct of their indigenous priests, was tantamount to undermining the M.E.P.'s authority and thus their long-term hold on the Mission. If the claims were true, it provides an example of how foreigners could effectively utilise the indigenous nationalism to further their own interests. However, in the Salesians' case, the tactic was dangerous, considering the xenophobic tendencies of Thai nationalism during this period. Even if they had succeeded in removing their French counterparts from the missionary scene, it would not be surprising if the Salesians themselves later became targets for persecution because of their foreign nature.

Indeed, the Salesians encountered difficulties in the closing years of the Second World War precisely due to the changes in Italy's fortunes. The signing of the armistice between Italy and the invading Allied forces on 8 September 1943 marked Italy's abandonment of the Axis cause. Its subsequent declaration of war on Japan threw it further into the Allied camp. The Salesians were clearly worried about the implications of these developments and wrote to the Mission of Siam in September 1943 to work out a tentative arrangement should this happen:

I do not know if the surrender of Italy will have consequences for us. In any case, in the absence of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, I ask you strongly that some priests be sent to [Bangnokkhwaek] so that they can succeed us in various posts in case we need to depart.³⁶

In any event, the Thai government and other organisations were much slower in dealing with the Salesians.³⁷ One Salesian priest had been badly beaten by

³⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti to Provincial of the Mission of Siam, 9 September 1943, 44/4/57.

³⁷ In contrast, following Italy's surrender, the Japanese government proceeded to immediately intern those Italians within their territory who did not declare themselves for the Axis. Nevertheless, even those who declared for the Axis continued to be closely monitored by the *Kempeitai*.

members of the "Thai Blood" group³⁸ (most likely because he was mistaken for a French priest) but the central government was still disposed to granting exemptions to the Salesians. For example, their priests were still being granted permission to teach in schools in October 1943.³⁹ Nevertheless, some local authorities became reluctant to host Salesian priests in the way they had done previously. For example, even though five Salesian priests had been given permission to operate in the northeast by the police commander himself, the local police excused themselves by claiming that since the priests were operating in remote regions, the overstretched police force in the northeast found it inconvenient to provide protection for them, especially when the Ministry of Interior was becoming suspicious of the motives of the Salesian priests by as early as January 1942.⁴⁰ The solution of the local police after September 1943 was to 'deport' the priests back to the Mission of Ratchaburi for their convenience, as well as the 'convenience' of the local police.⁴¹

It is notable that an essentially bureaucratic rather than a nationalist excuse was officially used by the police to avoid hosting the Salesians. The case suggests that local officials were distancing themselves from foreigners who previously had been tolerated or even welcomed. Arguably, had the Pacific War dragged on, or had Japanese victory been assured, the active persecution of the Salesian held parishes would have been very likely. However, the lack of significant or wide-spread persecution of the Salesians, despite the fall of Italy, also suggests that local officials were keenly aware of international developments and did not wish to risk post-war reprisals from nations whose victory now seemed inevitable.

³⁸ M.E.P.A., *Compte-rendu* 1940-1946.

³⁹ B.A.A., Police General Aduldejarat to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 15 October 1943, 60/2/26.

⁴⁰ C.B.A., Interior Ministry to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Re: Italian priests spreading the Roman Catholic Religion in the Northeast, 14 January 1942, n. 11598/2485.

⁴¹ B.A.A., Assistant Police Commander to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 28 October 1943, 60/2/27.

The Salesians' success during the early years of the Second World War illustrates the importance of nationality, however superficial, in ensuring the safety of the missionaries and their congregation, and how, if the 1944 M.E.P. report is taken literally, nationality and nationalism could be used to further an organisation's interests. The same report also suggests that the Salesians recognised the inevitable result of Thai nationalism on the Mission – the establishment of a local hierarchy, free from foreign leadership. The clash with their French counterparts, who also recognised this inevitability, was over methods and timing rather than the principle. Examined in these terms, neither of the two competing religious orders can be said to have 'won'. The true victors were the parishioners who could continue to worship in safety and the indigenous priests who were now, more than ever, motivated to take the Mission into their own hands.

Thai Priests and Parishioners

น้ำขึ้นให้รีบตัก

When the tide is up, hurry to scoop up the water.

- Traditional Thai Proverb

The outbreak of controlled and uncontrolled persecution across Catholic parishes in Thailand left Thai priests and their congregation in a quandary. Many faced a stark choice between apostasy and remaining steadfast in their faith. Some travelled the safer path of apostasy (although many chose to return to Catholicism after 1945). Others, such as the martyrs of Songkhon village, remained true to their principles to the very end. At the same time, the Thai priesthood was confronted with the choice of either remaining loyal to the French leadership that had financed and nurtured them for the past few centuries or taking the opportunity to strike out on their own, or under the aegis of the Italian missionaries. For many of those who made the easier choice, the key factor in their decision was survival – of themselves and/or the parishioners under their care. Others, however, took the opportunity to voice their ambition for a greater role for the indigenous clergy.

Prior to the persecution period, such voices from the indigenous clergy were muted, if non-existent. The main reason for this silence was arguably the success of Vicar-Apostolic Perros's gradual top-down reform of the Mission. The question of transforming the Mission of Siam into an indigenously-run, as opposed to a foreign-run Mission, was a constant theme in the Vicar-Apostolic's ministry. The approach was in line with Papal encyclicals that strongly encouraged existing Missions to begin the handover to indigenous priests. The 1919 encyclical entitled *Maximum Illud* exhorted foreign missionaries to:

...make it his special concern to secure and train local candidates for the sacred ministry. In this policy lies the greatest hope of the new churches. For the local priest, one with his people by birth, by nature, by his sympathies and his aspirations, is remarkably effective in appealing to their mentality and thus attracting them to the Faith. Far better than anyone else he knows the kind of argument they will listen to, and as a result, he often has easy access to places where a foreign priest would not be tolerated.

Furthermore, the document was emphatic that indigenous priests were to be taught to the same exacting standards as foreign priests. They were "not to be trained merely to perform the humbler duties of the ministry, acting as the assistants of foreign priests. On the contrary, they must take up God's work as equals, so that some day they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people".⁴² The encyclical thus sounded the death-knell of the foreign-run Missions.

Given the difficulties encountered by French priests trying to penetrate Thai society, it made more and more sense that the rate of success could be improved through indigenous priests. Certainly this objective had become the ultimate vision of the Mission by 1934, when the Vicar-Apostolic wrote to the Rector of the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome (where some Thai priests had been sent for their formation) that:

We therefore must have priests who are zealous for the salvation of the souls, humble to counter the pride of the Buddhists, versed in knowledge of theology and the humanities – both philosophy and science so that they can be victorious against error and will not be demoralised by the appearance of failure.⁴³

The Vicar-Apostolic's aims were in accordance with a 1926 encyclical from M.E.P. headquarters, which urged its missionaries to: "No longer hesitate to give a

⁴² Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, 14-15, Society of the Divine Word, 30 November 1919, <http://www.svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm#114%20Local%20Clergy> [Last Access: 19 January 2009].

⁴³ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Rector of Pontifical Urbaniana University, 3 March 1934, 63/3/17.

place to indigenous clergy in the councils of each Mission", and gave further advice on the distribution of parishes:

Do not give to the indigenous clergy all the better parishes or the positions of trust, but a reasonable proportion of one and the other; and so give them just satisfaction for them to get used to exercising and carrying their responsibilities.⁴⁴

In practice, however, there was opposition among the ranks of the missionaries against a greater role for the indigenous clergy. In a 1927 report, the Vicar-Apostolic wrote:

I do not hide from you, Monsignor, that on this point I have a certain number of colleagues who have always believed that the moment has not come to 'push' the indigenous priests; it is a prideful belief more than anything else.⁴⁵

If the Vicar-Apostolic proved conciliatory towards the Thai authorities and their increasingly hostile new legislation, he certainly was not conciliatory towards his fellow missionaries. Indeed, if anything, the Vicar-Apostolic continued the process of supporting and giving ever larger roles to indigenous priests. The Mission's support for indigenous priests can be seen in its spending on the local seminaries, while the expansion of the role of indigenous priests was witnessed in their numerical supremacy in the eastern parishes. By 1920, there was only one European priest in some areas⁴⁶ and, as already discussed, with the exception of internal bickering, arguably normal in most communities, the eastern parishes were largely models of success. By 1939, all that remained was to secure the permission of the M.E.P. and the Propaganda Fide to set up an indigenous Mission, work out an independent method of financing the new Mission and, perhaps the most difficult in

⁴⁴ B.A.A., M.E.P. Encyclical, 5 March 1926, 67/3/3.

⁴⁵ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Monsignor Aiuti, 18 March 1927, 62/4/26.

⁴⁶ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Cardinal van Rossum, Propaganda Fide, 29 January 1920, 62/2/62.

the light of the internal politics of the diocese, find a leadership figure among the indigenous clergy to lead a new Mission of Chantaburi.

However, in 1939, the Mission was concentrating its efforts on the creation of a Mission in the north rather than in the east. The prioritisation of the north is understandable, given the rapid progress made by the missionaries there, even in the face of a longstanding Protestant presence. The persecutions, however, ended that project and instead pushed the prospects of the Mission of Chantaburi back to the fore, especially when the conclusion of the Thai-French War in favour of the Thais failed to end the threats against the Mission. Initially, the Vicar-Apostolic did not want to set up the first indigenous Mission in Chantaburi but to go further and set one up in Bangkok, in effect handing over the entire Mission to the indigenous clerics. The plan, however, was opposed by the Holy See, which was concerned for the long-term future of the Mission, arguing that such a Mission should instead “be set up in the best of conditions for its existence and long-term success”.⁴⁷ The objections were based on material considerations rather than principles and, while the decision may have safeguarded the interests of the Mission in the long-term, in the short-term it still left the Vicar-Apostolic in a vulnerable position.

The next best option, therefore, was a Mission in Chantaburi. Although it now had both the pretext and the will to set up the indigenous Mission in Chantaburi, the Vicar-Apostolic was again unable to act with urgency due to Church regulations. Decisions of this magnitude had to be relayed to Rome for approval and specific instructions had to be formulated and issued. Given the conditions inside and outside Thailand, this process was even slower than normal and it was only on 11 May 1944 that the Mission of Chantaburi was created – four years after the

⁴⁷ B.A.A., Apostolic Delegate of Indochina to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 30 December 1942, 66/2/89.

persecutions had started. The continuing difficulties are evident in the fact that Fr. Jacob Cheng (Changkoedsawang), a former student of Vicar-Apostolic Perros, was not formally consecrated to head the new Mission until the following year, on 11 February 1945, in the process becoming the first Thai bishop in the history of the Church. Just as the conclusion of the Thai-French War did not guarantee a sudden end to the persecution, the establishment of an indigenous Mission did not ensure the end of the government's negative attitude towards Catholicism across the country. It did, however, grant a reprieve to the eastern parishes, allowing them to argue that they were *de jure* and *de facto* no longer a part of the 'French' Mission of Siam while its priests were beholden neither to French nor Italian missionary orders but directly to the Holy See.

Even so, there still remained the arduous task of actually administering the new Mission. Undoubtedly, the task was made more difficult by the unfavourable atmosphere and, while some indigenous priests welcomed the opportunity to tackle the new responsibilities, others still preferred to be attached to the old Mission of Bangkok.⁴⁸ There was also the risk that promising priests would not deliver when they were appointed to the new posts, especially when circumstances, rather than careful planning, dictated the appointments. Certainly, this had been the outcome when the Vicar-Apostolic appointed Fr. Joachim Teppawan Prakobkij (Paul Theu) to the post of the Mission of Siam's Provincial. There was much that was promising about Fr. Joachim. From an Annamite family, he was able to speak Vietnamese, Thai, and two Chinese dialects with equal fluency. His record while administering Holy Rosary Church in Bangkok was encouraging and he enjoyed popularity among

⁴⁸ B.A.A., *Informationes quod futuram Missionem de Chantabun*, 13 July 1943, 55/5/25.

the parishioners and his colleagues.⁴⁹ All of these positive attributes were not enough to prevent disappointment. Reporting to the Apostolic Delegate in 1943, the Vicar-Apostolic wrote:

I have named as Provincial Fr. Joachim, who at this time enjoys the estimation of his colleagues due to his intelligence and age, but this nomination has not borne fruit; the new Provincial has disappointed all hopes.⁵⁰

Perhaps the Vicar-Apostolic had put too much hope in one man, since in January 1941 he also delegated his authority to Fr. Joachim, citing “the enmity between the governments of Thailand and France”.⁵¹ However, by the end of the year, the Vicar-Apostolic was obliged to resume his position, in public citing the conclusion of hostilities between Thailand and France as his reason for reassuming his old post.⁵² The 1943 letter suggests that the real reason for Vicar-Apostolic Perros’s return was that Fr. Joachim had “disappointed all hopes”. It seems that the short-lived experiment with the indigenous leadership had failed.

The failure was perhaps not surprising, given that the older generation of indigenous priests, to which Fr. Joachim belonged, was ill-equipped to deal with such a large responsibility all at once. At the same time, priests belonging to the more promising younger generation – a generation that had been educated overseas, in Penang or even as far afield as Rome – had not yet reached the maturity that such an important post required, especially in such a turbulent atmosphere. Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung belonged to this group, having been educated at the General College in Penang. Even more promising was Fr. Joseph Nittayo who had been educated first

⁴⁹ B.A.A., Report, Undated, 64/2/21.

⁵⁰ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to M. Drapier, Apostolic Delegate of Indochina, 17 January 1943, 55/5/2.

⁵¹ B.A.A., Mission of Bangkok Circular, 15 January 1941, 67/4/13.

⁵² B.A.A., Mission of Bangkok Circular, 8 December 1941, 67/4/15.

in Thailand and then to doctorate level at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. Along with an ability to speak four languages, his evaluation was also positive, noting his “sane judgement” and “perfect administration of a parish”, as well as recognition among his colleagues.⁵³ The only factor against him was age: at 33 in 1941, he was too young and inexperienced for the post of head of the Mission at a very difficult time,⁵⁴ and the Vicar-Apostolic voiced this concern in a report.⁵⁵ The Mission was thus caught between utilising priests who were mature, but had not been trained properly for the immense task, or using priests who had been trained but were largely untested. Arguably, had the Mission chosen the second option, the result of failure would have been more catastrophic. Apart from the damage to the Mission, the failure of the new generation would have led to the discrediting of a generation of carefully prepared priests, a loss that the Mission could ill-afford. The wiser choice was thus the former option.

All of these developments occurred with surprisingly little agitation from the indigenous parishioners and priests. As noted previously, indigenous voices calling for the creation of an indigenous Mission were muted, if non-existent, throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It is true that parishioners and priests became more vocal as the virulent Thai nationalistic propaganda took effect, but on further analysis, their demands remained largely local. In many cases, the demands did not originate from an intrinsic, or even new-found, hatred of the French leadership, but was born out of a need to counter hostile local claims against the parish. The demands of the

⁵³ B.A.A., Evaluation of Fr. Joseph Khiamsum Nittayo, Undated, 96/4/9.

⁵⁴ Vicar-Apostolic Perros himself, by modern standards, was young at the time of his appointment in 1909, being only 39 years old. In contrast, Vicar-Apostolic Cheng was 63 at the time of his appointment, while in modern times in countries such as the U.S., bishops were on average 48 years old at the time of their appointment. See T.J. Reese, ‘A Survey of the American Bishops’ at http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/church_studies/reese/america/cs-surv.htm [Last Access: 19 January 2009].

⁵⁵ B.A.A., Report, Undated, 64/2/21.

parishioners of St. Paul's Church in Paetriu for the reinstatement of two Thai priests to their parish in December 1941 could be seen in this light. During the period of acute crisis, Fr. Carrié, the original and French parish priest, had been replaced by the two Thai priests. However, after the atmosphere had calmed down, the French priest was reinstated much to the chagrin of the parishioners. The parishioners' petition to Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti revealed the consequences:

At present the parish is prospering with faith because of the Thai priests' efforts in persuading those who had lapsed to return. Then Fr. Carrié, who had previously overseen the parish, returned causing all the parishioners and the priests to fear that danger would come back, so much so that nobody would come to church as before while the two Thai priests have left because of the same fear.

The petition was emphatic that the persecution was the "consequence of the actions of the French priests and citizens", and that the two remaining churches in the area (St. Paul and St. Roch) had survived through the "co-operative efforts of the Thai priests and parishioners".⁵⁶ Superficially, the overwhelming concern of the parishioners in this case was survival, while remaining Catholic. The presence of Thai priests was conducive to addressing this concern, while the return of the French priest was seen as a liability.

A deeper examination of the parish history reveals another dimension, however. It appears that Fr. Carrié had not been popular among the parishioners prior to 1939. As early as 1932, when he first came to the parish, Fr. Carrié was already sparking complaints from the local community. Among other things, Fr. Carrié was accused of being authoritarian, gullible, overly interested in material goods and rich parishioners, and short-tempered, so much so that "parishioners fear

⁵⁶ B.A.A., Petition to Vicar-Apostolic Pasotti, 19 December 1941, 33/3/47.

him like they fear tigers".⁵⁷ The priest could have hardly endeared himself to his congregation by throwing around accusations of communism.⁵⁸ The experience with the new priest must have been disappointing considering the rapport the previous incumbent, Fr. Emile, had built with the parishioners. Some parishioners sent a petition to Vicar-Apostolic Perros calling for the reinstatement of Fr. Emile,⁵⁹ but this came to nothing and Fr. Carrié left his post only following the outbreak of hostilities between Thailand and France. In the light of this bad history between Fr. Carrié and his parishioners during the 1930s, it is therefore not surprising to find parishioners agitating for the appointment of an alternative priest. Nationalism in this instance provided an additional excuse, and also dictated the choice of Thai priests as the viable replacements.

This co-existence of legitimate demands and ulterior motives can also be seen in the agitation of some indigenous priests. One case that was well-documented was that of the case of Fr. Raphael Titra, an indigenous priest who was constantly clashing with his French superior throughout the first half of the 1940s. In 1940, a group of parishioners demanded that the Vicar-Apostolic rescind Fr. Raphael's transfer from their parish in the vicinity of Ayutthaya to Chantaburi. The strength of feeling was such that the parishioners had appealed to the local authorities to intervene. According to the district chief officer of Bangsai, who made the appeal to the Vicar-Apostolic:

After much consideration, I have seen that this priest is held in general respect among the Roman Catholic parishioners and is dedicated to the teaching and spread of the Roman Catholic religion. Apart from his religious activities, he has also supported the education of the sons and daughters of

⁵⁷ B.A.A., Parishioners of St. Paul to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 27 June 1932, 33/3/15.

⁵⁸ B.A.A., Fr. Carrié to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 26 February 1934, 33/3/17.

⁵⁹ B.A.A., Petition to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 3 September 1934, 33/3/19.

Roman Catholics. His departure will therefore be mourned by the Roman Catholics here.⁶⁰

The parishioner's actual petition to the district chief officer revealed more about the source of the priest's popularity. According to the petition:

1. He has managed and developed the parish's education according to the government's wishes.
2. He has encouraged patriotism within the community. For example he has persuaded parishioners to make donations in support of the government's efforts to reclaim the lost territories and has persuaded Catholics to purchase guns for the government.⁶¹

That a priest should have been responsible for raising funds for a war and providing weapons for the government would have been scandalous under any circumstances. That it was funding for a war in regard to which his superiors were desperately trying to steer the Mission into neutrality, placed the priest on a collision course with his superiors. Certainly, in such a clash, Fr. Raphael would have been cheered by his parishioners' resolution:

We, as Thais, wish to retain our honour as Thais and express our wish to have Thais rule themselves without foreign priests to rule over our spiritual lives, which would be an unnecessary smirch on our Thai honour.⁶²

On the surface, these demands for Thai autonomy were in line with the nationalistic sentiments at the time. However, once again, history allows a different interpretation. In actual fact, Fr. Raphael was proving to be an especially recalcitrant priest. Trouble had started well before the Thai-French War, for Fr. Raphael had been allegedly involved in sexual misconduct in 1936.⁶³ Problems occurred again in

⁶⁰ B.A.A., Khun Sririratket, district chief officer of Bang Sai to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 14 October 1940, 45/3/25.

⁶¹ B.A.A., Citizens of Tambon Maitra to district chief officer of Bang Sai, 12 October 1940, 45/3/25.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ B.A.A., Fr. Andre to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 23 September 1936, 30/1/33.

1939 when Fr. Raphael was due to be transferred to a parish in Chantaburi, but failed to move resulting in his suspension for disobedience.⁶⁴ This was the order that was still outstanding in 1940. It is noteworthy that nationalistic rhetoric was absent prior to the Thai-French War: certainly there is no evidence that Fr. Raphael or the parishioners protested the decision at the time it was originally made, in 1939. The absence suggests that there were other motives behind Fr. Raphael's resistance to the transfer order, the most plausible explanation being that the move from the Ayutthaya parish would also have entailed moving from the parish of the Immaculate Conception Church in Bangkok, which at the time was responsible for some of the Ayutthaya parishes. Fr. Raphael may have found the permanent move from a capital parish to a provincial parish, away from his established interests, undesirable.

The protests and appeals of the following years can thus be seen as the exploitation of nationalism for personal gain. Fr. Raphael's alignment with the Thai government and its nationalism was, in effect, a cover for his personal interests. This argument is reinforced by evidence of a further appeal from the district chief officer of Bang Sai, sent to the Vicar-Apostolic, requesting more of the income from the Ayutthaya parish's land to be ceded to Fr. Raphael. According to the petition, income from the land amounted to at least 1,000 baht per year. Ostensibly, the extra income was to go towards Fr. Raphael's efforts in running his school and for "nation building",⁶⁵ but, given the past histories of the parish and its priest, there are obvious reasons to doubt whether the money was to be used for the stated purposes.

The resistance of the Vicar-Apostolic to Fr. Raphael's demands led to the latter's ever closer alignment with the Thai government. Notwithstanding the

⁶⁴ B.A.A., Suspension Order, 29 December 1939, 45/3/24.

⁶⁵ B.A.A., District chief officer of Bangsai to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 15 December 1941, 45/3/34.

government's attitudes towards native Catholic priests at the time, he planned to work directly for the state,⁶⁶ and was acting as a go-between for the police and the missionaries by January 1941.⁶⁷ Despite the display of such patriotic fervour, he was still taken into police custody for questioning. Even more ironic was the fact that the incident appeared to have blocked his move to Chantaburi for the foreseeable future:

I have to inform you that the police have released me... I have testified to the police that I will not be going to Chantaburi and will on no condition have any contact with the French. So if I did go to Chantaburi I would be arrested for giving false testimony and be suspected as a Fifth Columnist.

The priest ended the missive with a cheeky request that the Vicar-Apostolic should contact him when he has "found the solution to this problem".⁶⁸ What eventually followed was another suspension for Fr. Raphael in 1942. It seems that the Vicar-Apostolic could not bring himself to defrock the priest, despite his chronic disobedience. It could be that the Vicar-Apostolic was generously holding out for repentance from his recalcitrant subordinate: but considering the support the priest had had from the local authorities and the parishioners in Ayutthaya, it was probably impolitic to defrock the priest, even if he had wanted to.

The two cases of the parish in Paetriu and Fr. Raphael's rebellion were not unique during this period; other parishes also demanded Thai priests and some Thai parishioners did not always co-operate with their French superiors during this period. For example, the parishioners of the Immaculate Conception parish in Samsen, Bangkok, came out with an announcement in November 1940:

Since the Thai (Catholic) Group of Samsen have considered that the Thai nation is the highest object of our worship and esteem and that the duty of

⁶⁶ B.A.A., Fr. Andre to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 4 November 1940, 30/2/25.

⁶⁷ B.A.A., Fr. Raphael to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 7 January 1941, 30/2/30.

⁶⁸ B.A.A., Fr. Raphael to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 16 January 1941, 30/2/33.

Thai citizens is to reinforce and support the Thai nation and its government in every way and in the light of the current political situation, we find it necessary to proceed rapidly to request the transfer of the French priest to allow a Thai priest who truly loves the nation to safeguard us. This action will be in accordance with the popular principle stating that "Thais should rule over Thais" as well as our happiness and collective safety.

Although the group was clearly influenced by the government's "Thailand for the Thais" campaign, they nevertheless added that they had no specific complaints against the French priests in the parish but were merely reacting to the conflict between Thailand and French Indochina.⁶⁹ Catholics at Our Lady of Lourdes parish in Pakkhlontalad also made similar demands but with the addition of allegations of misconduct by the resident French priest: he was alleged to have been fond of chatting with a female teacher until eight o'clock at night and of turning some of the congregation away from the Catholicism.⁷⁰

In the majority of cases, Thai nationalism was being used at the micro-level as a tool to pursue ulterior motives. National identity was used to either gain an advantage or to reduce the advantage of others in negotiations, and it acted as a cloak for both legitimate concerns, such as the parishioners' dislike of the parish priest, as well as illegitimate claims, such as Fr. Raphael's attempt to escape from ecclesiastical penalties for his misconduct. At the same time, it has to be noted that a remarkable majority of indigenous priests and communities remained steadfast in their Catholicism, even if some had to temporarily resort to the Italian, rather than French, leadership. In these cases, the survival of Catholicism appeared to be the dominant consideration for parishioners. The silence of the majority of indigenous priests, most of whom were deployed in the eastern parishes (where Fr. Raphael

⁶⁹ B.A.A., Announcement of the Thai (Catholic) Group of Samsen, Bangkok, 21 November 1940, *Beatification Documents*, 169.

⁷⁰ B.A.A., Roman Catholic Group petition to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, November 1940, *Beatification Documents*, 170/1-2.

refused to go) suggests that they were content with the arrangements made by their French superiors. Furthermore, it may also indicate the priests' self-awareness that they were not yet ready to take on the full responsibilities of an indigenous Mission, especially at such a difficult time. Some may have considered the possibility of setting up a 'patriotic' Church but the lack of will on the part of the Thai government to support or initiate these plans (as the Japanese military government did in the same period, and later Communist China did in the 1950s) not to mention the problems that a break with the Papacy would entail, ended such aspirations. The absence of these plans in the presence of the Japanese model also suggests that the Thai government was not serious about eradicating or, indeed, controlling Catholicism for its own ends.

The key role played by Thai nationalism in inspiring demands and defiance by certain priests is confirmed by the abrupt disappearance of nationalistic demands following the conclusion of the Pacific War. It suggests that, at best, those involved were trying to secure their vulnerable position against would-be persecutors and, at worst, were taking advantage of the situation. To paraphrase a Thai proverb, they were "hurrying to scoop up the water when the tide was up". The turning of the tide against the Axis powers and the subsequent fall of Pibul's government led to a sea-change in attitudes. For example, by 1947, the Vicar-Apostolic could report that Fr. Raphael Titra had repented of his wrongs which, apart from his disobedience, included fathering a child with a young convert in 1939, the event that appeared to have triggered the contentious transfer order in the first place. Matters were not to end that easily however, since the Vicar-Apostolic saw in April 1947 that:

The only way he [Fr. Raphael] could escape danger was to retire to a house of prayer, he understands that and wishes to take refuge in the monastery of Our Lady of Annam.

In effect, while the Vicar-Apostolic obtained the repentance he hoped for in Fr. Raphael, he would no longer tolerate such a turbulent priest in his jurisdiction. To make sure that Fr. Raphael actually departed for his new post, the Vicar-Apostolic went so far as to appoint a chaperone in the form of another priest who was “devoted to saving his colleague”, to stay with Fr. Raphael until his entry into the monastery in Vietnam, while thanking the abbot for “this work of charity of the first order”.⁷¹

So ended the saga of Fr. Raphael Titra. For better or for worse, the priest's dextrous exploitation of Thai nationalism and manipulation of his patriotic parishioners to further his own interests opened the eyes of the French leadership to the true vulnerability of its position in Siam. Indeed, to paraphrase George Orwell, patriotism was a powerful force, where no amount of explanation or innocence was going to prevent it from causing damage. Even if the French missionaries regained their pre-eminence in the short-term following the defeat of Japan, few believed that the position was sustainable in the long-term, especially if the missionaries genuinely cared for the well-being of their parish communities. Their previous dominance in the management of the Mission, even if they had managed its affairs reasonably well, had led to the mistaken impression that Catholicism was a ‘French’ religion, and had placed thousands of their converts in danger and had even led to the death and injury of many. If the persecution taught the French missionaries anything, it was that the only sure method of preventing the re-occurrence of the persecution

⁷¹ B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros to Abbot of Notre Dame d’Annam, 29 April 1947, 30/2/58.

was to end the centuries old role of the French in the Mission of Siam and turn the rest of the Mission over to indigenous priests as soon as possible.

Conclusion

The 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything.

- Friedrich Nietzsche

In conclusion this chapter has demonstrated that for practical purposes, the concept of identity is fluid and was exploited by the various nationalities within the Mission according to changes in domestic and international political circumstances. These changes in circumstances did not have a uniform effect on the Missions instead they had differing effects on the composite elements of the Mission. This phenomenon was demonstrated by the roles the Italian Salesians, who were in charge of the Catholic mission in western Siam, and the indigenous priests and congregation played during this period.

During the 1930s, the influence of the Salesians was mainly restricted to the west of Siam. However, in the course of the 1940s, as the French missionaries were literally forced out of their former mission territory as a consequence of the 1940-1 Thai-French War, the Salesians were able to exploit their Italian identity in the face of public anti-French sentiments, to expand their influence. The total dominance of the Salesians in Thailand was only prevented by the fall of Italy to Allied forces in September 1943.

At the same time, the anti-foreign element of Pibul's nationalism, as embodied in the Cultural Mandates, the Heroic Virtues, and government slogans such as "Thailand for the Thais" was used by some indigenous priests and their congregation to push for greater autonomy from the French missionaries, particularly in areas outside the east of the country, which had not enjoyed *de facto* autonomy prior to 1940. However, there was also an element of opportunism where, in certain cases, appeals to Thai patriotism were actually a method for avoiding persecution

from the non-Catholic community, ecclesiastical discipline or self-enrichment. In these cases, it was more opportunism rather than principles at work.

French identity during this period also proved to be just as flexible. The French missionaries actively courted the support of both the Thais and the French. Indeed, to both parties, the missionaries' French identity was an asset from the 1910s to 1940. To the Thais, the French missionaries were another force of modernisation, specifically in terms of educational and health provisions, while to the French the missionaries were a possible method of exerting French influence in a country where there was otherwise an insubstantial French presence. While emphasising its qualities differently depending on the audience they were addressing, the French missionaries were, in reality, only interested in gaining the Catholic Church an advantage.

The radical change in the fortunes of the French missionaries after 1940 (from being close to the elite, as demonstrated in the Bangkok section of Chapter III, to being suspected as Fifth Columnists) illustrates the fluidity of identity during this short period of Thai history and how it was exploitable for material gains according to circumstances. At the same time, these changes also reflected changes in value as to what was acceptable in terms of "Thainess" over time. In the 1910s, 1920s, and even up to the late 1930s, it was acceptable for foreigners to be involved in national development and the economy. This attitude is reflected in the high tolerance and even appreciation of the work of the Catholic missionaries, as well as the presence of foreign advisors in the Thai government. This value clearly changed under the first Pibul government which, through the Cultural Mandates, advocated a greater role for Thais as opposed to foreigners, regardless of whether they were westerners or Chinese.

VII

Conclusion

The Catholics were suffering because of us.

- Vicar-Apostolic Gouin of Laos, 1941

With the victory of the Allies in 1945, much of the anti-Catholic persecution was brought to an abrupt end.¹ Nevertheless, in a practical sense, the implications of the persecution continued to reverberate for many years after, while, in a theoretical sense, the persecution held some serious implications with regard to the defining of Thai identity. In long-term history, the persecution of the 1940s could perhaps be considered as an anomaly in the history of the Catholic Church in Thailand akin to the incidents that occurred during the reigns of King Narai and King Taksin, as illustrated in Chapter II. However, in the short-term, the thesis has also demonstrated that this 'anomaly' had a firm historical basis and, in hindsight, its occurrence was arguably predictable, especially if the local conditions pre-1939 are taken into account.

Less predictable perhaps were the effects of the central policy in the run-up to and during the persecution itself. Judging by the reaction of the chief of police, Aduldejarat, who condemned the abuses of the emergency measures (Chapter V), even some members of the central government, it seemed, were caught off-guard by the unexpected repercussions stemming from its war-time measures which, by the standards of the time were mild. According to the central policy, French citizens were never required to leave the country – they should have done so only if it was more convenient for them to leave than to travel to Bangkok. Furthermore, in the

¹ Most of the violence and vandalism ended, but isolated incidents of discrimination, especially in schools, continued up to December 1945.

event that they did travel to Bangkok, there was no formal system of internment and these measures were revoked soon after the conclusion of the armed conflict with French Indochina in 1941.

Nevertheless, it was precisely these policies that created the opportunities for local elements to express their discontent with their local Catholic presence, especially if their relationship with the Missions had been fraught prior to the outbreak of the Thai-French War in 1940. The thesis has shown in Chapter IV that the northeast was already problematic in this regard, with tensions running high, spurred on by the previous actions and intransigence of the Mission of Laos. Indeed, these local elements were further encouraged to see Catholics as 'enemies of the state' by policies that were intended to increase war-time vigilance, but ultimately ended up fostering a poisonous atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia, particularly towards anything that was perceived to be remotely 'French'. Furthermore, even in areas which may not have had a fraught relationship prior to 1940, economic incentives proved to be the decisive factor in motivating anti-Catholic action. Such arbitrary seizure of property was effectively covered by 'patriotism' and justified with reference to both the open and 'secret' policies of the Leader. The fact that these abuses went against the stipulations of the 1932 Constitution that guaranteed freedom of religious belief and which remained in effect at the time suggests that, despite it being the foundation of the new ruling elite's legitimacy, it was in practice unable to safeguard the rights it was meant to enshrine.

Local conditions can, therefore, be said to have amplified and prolonged the persecution. At the same time, particularly in areas without a noticeable French presence (most notably the west and the east) or a notable prior history of problems pre-1940 (such as in the north and Bangkok) local conditions served to dampen the

possibility of violent persecution. This is not to say that these regions were immune from persecution: the Salesians were assaulted when they began administering the territories outside their jurisdiction – arguably because the perpetrators mistook them for being French, while Vicar-Apostolic Perros was in fear of his life for some time, so much so that he wrote a last will and testament in 1943.²

However, the fact that the missionaries in these areas were not systematically expelled or officially subjected to worse treatment, as in the cases of Songkhon or Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung, is indicative of the fact that the central government never intended to persecute the Catholics. This situation directly contrasted with the fate of the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos during the same period. In March 1945, the Japanese arrested and secretly executed Fr. Marie-Joseph Gouin, the former Vicar-Apostolic of Laos (1922-43), along with two other priests, Fr. Henri Thomine (the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos, 1944-45) and Fr. Jean Thibaud (the Provincial of Laos), leaving their corpses by the roadside.³ The deaths of the three priests were clearly aimed at destroying the leadership of the Mission of Laos. That the same did not or was not allowed to occur in Thailand reflected the first Pibul government's lack of real hostility towards the missionaries.

Equally, the disjunction between the expectations of the central government and the actual implementation of its policy also highlights the weak and dysfunctional relationship between the central state and its local agents, despite earlier efforts at centralisation during the absolutist and constitutionalist regimes. Firm links between the centre and the village level of administration were established only by the 1914 Local Administration Act. In theory the village would

² The will left his personal property to the M.E.P. or the Mission of Bangkok to the exclusion of all other heirs, including members of his family, B.A.A., Vicar-Apostolic Perros's last testament, 12 March 1943, 141/4/8.

³ B.A.A., 'In our Missions of Siam and Laos', 21 November 1945, *Beatification Documents*, 248/1.

be subject to the centre,⁴ but as the circumstances surrounding the later persecution of the Catholics illustrated, the opposite appeared to be true. Local police and authorities were quite willing and able to defy or bypass government orders in the pursuit of their own local policies and interests. Later observations of village-level government show the dynamics of how village-level administration treated the French priests and Catholics during this period, where the local authority 'could retain his authority so long as he could appear to lead a strong community which he protected from powerful outsiders whose interests peasants thought were opposed to theirs'.⁵ In the 1940s, the Catholics with their alleged links to the powerful French colonialists could arguably be categorised as 'powerful outsiders'.

The disjunction between central policy and its implementation becomes even more apparent following the revocation of the emergency measures that were introduced for the duration of the Thai-French War. Despite the revocation and condemnation of the abuses by prominent members of the government, the persecution nevertheless continued for several years afterwards, suggesting that the government did not have a firm grasp on the country. The implication of this situation is ironic: it is that of a purportedly dictatorial government that, in reality, was not fully in control.

This dysfunctional relationship may also have some parallels with more recent Thai history, especially during times of prolonged crises such as the Communist insurgency (c. 1965-82) or even the more recent 2003 War on Drugs that was launched by prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (9 February 2001-19 September 2006). Among Thaksin's many electoral promises was the pledge to eradicate the drugs trade, particularly in methamphetamines. Many were cheered by

⁴ Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 1994), p. 101.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

his promise that the trade would be eradicated within three months of the start of the campaign.⁶ The following months saw the implementation of a ruthless suppression programme. Provincial authorities were given targets that had to be met and various police agencies were threatened with transfers if they did not work (or be seen to be working) fast enough. Arrests, asset seizures, deaths of alleged drug dealers and other statistics were heavily publicised in media outlets. By the end of the first three months of the campaign, more than 2,600 people were dead.⁷

Despite the overwhelming popularity of the campaign,⁸ there was disquiet. Domestic and international human rights organisations criticised the policy's ruthlessness, alleging that a significant proportion of those killed had little to do with the drugs trade.⁹ The impression was bolstered by botched raids, such as the one initiated by Yongyuth Tiypairat¹⁰ and some 50 police commandos in Ayutthaya's Bang Sai district on 7 July 2004, which produced nothing except a public relations disaster.¹¹

In a chilling echo of the Catholics' experience in the 1940s, there has also been speculation that some of the extra-judicial executions had more to do with local interests than the suppression campaign and that, once again, the central government's policy was used merely as a cloak for local abuses of power. Pasuk Phongpaichit has compared the situation during the 2003 War on Drugs to the anti-

⁶ Pasuk Phongpaichit and C. Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, 2004), p. 160.

⁷ Bangkok Post, 11 December 2003.

⁸ Despite the vocal misgivings of the human rights organisations, Thaksin's popularity actually rose. According to one poll, 90 percent were in favour of the campaign; see, *The Nation*, 24 February 2003.

⁹ *The Nation*, 2 December 2003.

¹⁰ At the time of the raid, Yongyuth Tiypairat was the prime minister's secretary in the Thaksin government (2001-6). He had been acting on an anonymous tip-off that the house in question was a drugs factory. Nevertheless, by 2006 he was the Minister for Natural Resources and the Environment. He later became the House Speaker on 21 January 2008, resigning a month later in response to a charge of electoral fraud filed by the Election Commission.

¹¹ *The Nation*, 25 January 2008.

communist campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s, by quoting Andrew Turton who argues that:

Extra-judicial killings include those of persistent offenders carried out with the approval sometimes of whole communities, which are tolerated by the police; those carried out by the police themselves, other than with legal sanction... In this case the victim is often someone who has been critical of local power interests, and whose death is passed off as being that of a communist suspect, or alternatively, as having been caused by communists.¹²

This situation seems to be an echo of the experience of the Catholics in the 1940s, except that instead of appealing to anti-French rhetoric, the local authorities had switched to cloaking their illegal activities behind anti-communist measures.

Naturally, the circumstances surrounding the Catholic persecution in the 1940s, the Communist insurgency during the Cold War, and the War on Drugs in the twenty-first century are completely different. At the same time, there seems to be similarities in the interaction between central policies which, intentionally or not, gave a free hand to local authorities to act in their own interests, indeed in ways that may have been contrary to the original intentions of the government. However, in all the situations, the role of the local government apparatus was essential.

At the same time, the thesis has also shown that the description of a weak or dysfunctional relationship can also be applied to the Missions and their local agents, especially with regard to the northeast. Some problems in the northeast, namely the conflict over the oath of allegiance ceremony, had already been encountered by the Mission of Bangkok and negotiated solutions were already in existence. However, the thesis has demonstrated in Chapter IV that, though these solutions existed, they were simply not known or always observed by the local agents of the Church, by the agents of the state, and in some cases, neither party knew of the existing solution that

¹² Pasuk Pongpaichit and C. Baker, *Thaksin*, p. 163.

had been approved by both the Church and the state. With regard to the issue of the oath of allegiance, this ignorance arguably contributed to local suspicions that the Catholic Church was not encouraging national loyalty but, indeed, was actively working against it.

Moreover, this situation was exacerbated by the awkward administrative arrangement between the Mission of Siam and the Mission of Laos, which did not conform to national boundaries. Consequently, whereas the Mission of Siam was familiar with the methods and avenues available for smooth negotiations with the Siamese government, the Mission of Laos was needlessly antagonistic. Part of the reason for this antagonism may have simply been ignorance of Siamese procedures and sensibilities on the part of the Mission of Laos, as a result of it being more used to administering French-controlled areas. But as the tri-partite negotiations (between the Missions of Siam, Laos, and the Siamese government) over the law governing the slaughter of cattle has shown, there were also disturbing hints of colonial pretensions among the local agents of the Mission of Laos, an element that was notably absent in the Mission of Siam, despite it being similarly dominated by a French leadership. If this situation was problematic in the 1930s, it became an outright danger for both Missions in the 1940s.

An additional element revealed in the Catholic experience during this period was the possibility of national identities being exploited for concrete gain. Anderson and Gellner have argued that national identity is essentially 'imagined', that is, an artificial construct: Anderson defines the 'imagined community' as "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the

image of their communion”¹³ while Gellner argues that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist”.¹⁴ However, in his brief examination of Siamese nationalism under King Vajiravudh, Anderson does not mention the role of religion. Instead he sees the policies of King Vajiravudh as an excellent illustration of the characteristics of ‘official nationalism’ which he defines, as the “willed merger of nation and dynastic empire”.¹⁵ In the Siamese case, this merger can be seen most clearly in the promotion of the three original pillars of Nation, Religion, and Monarchy where the institution of the monarchy was linked with the well-being of the nation.

In addition, Anderson notes that in the Siamese case, this merger was “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalisation or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community”.¹⁶ What Anderson refers to as the “emerging nationally-imagined community” were the large and economically influential Chinese communities that had established themselves in Siam during the last wave of migration in the nineteenth century. Anderson argues that these new Chinese with their continuing concern with the politics of mainland China (where the Qing dynasty would be swept away in 1911-2) despite their long-term residency in Siam, republicanism, and inability to integrate into society, posed a direct threat to the traditional Siamese ‘dynastic principle’. Rather than focusing on the effects of this policy, Anderson concentrates more closely on the general processes through which nationalistic policies were put into place, namely: compulsory state-controlled primary education; state-organised

¹³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, London, 2006), p. 6.

¹⁴ E. Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1972), p. 168.

¹⁵ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 86.

¹⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 101.

propaganda; official rewriting of history; militarism; and the identification of the dynasty with the nation.¹⁷

This thesis has thus taken a different approach in examining the actual effects of the policies or 'inventions', focusing specifically on the element of religion. As Chapter I discusses, King Vajiravudh elevated the position of Buddhism in the national consciousness, linking it through the three pillars with the monarchy and the nation. Yet, despite this elevation, the monarch's religious policy was nuanced. Other religions, most notably Christianity and Islam, continued to be tolerated and even actively supported by the royal institution. Thus Catholic schools and institutions continued to be favoured. What Buddhism had achieved under King Vajiravudh was effectively the position of being the first among equals among the religions of the Siamese nation, which fulfilled King Vajiravudh's wider purpose of promoting Buddhism as a religion that was as profound as any in the West or, indeed, the wider world. More significantly it had also merged itself into the nation, along with the monarchy.

As indicated in Chapters II, III, and IV, the 1932 revolution and its aftermath had no significant impact on this religious arrangement. It is true that relations between the Mission of Siam and the constitutional government cooled but arguably this situation was due to the lack of personal and institutional ties between the two organisations and general political turbulence, rather than to a conscious policy. How, therefore, can the shift in the position of Buddhism from being the first among equals to becoming the official *sine qua non* of Thainess be explained?

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

The answer to this question can arguably be found with reference to the reign of King Taksin (1776-82). The regime of King Taksin and Pibul's first government had to address one similar issue: the establishment of legitimacy in the face of weakened institutions and national turbulence. King Taksin was a commoner who lacked blood-links to the ruling dynasties of Ayutthaya while his fledgling kingdom remained under threat from the Burmese. Similarly, in the late 1930s Pibul found himself in charge of a nation with severely weakened traditional institutions at a time of great external pressure, namely from Imperial Japan.

For Pibul, the existing pillars of the nation at such a volatile time were of small comfort. Nation was always a nebulous concept. The institution of the monarchy had been significantly weakened and its figurehead, King Ananda Mahidol, was still a schoolboy in faraway Switzerland. The Constitution, for all the state-sponsored celebration surrounding it, had done nothing to protect the rights of political prisoners, never mind the religious minorities. It was essentially a powerless piece of paper and Pibul publicly said as much when he termed the charter that had been the main focus of the 1932 revolution as merely a 'notebook'. Thus, to strengthen his hold on power and to increase his legitimacy, Pibul added a Fifth Pillar – the Leader thereby giving rise to slogans such as 'Obey the Leader and the Nation will prevail'. This attempted linkage between the Leader and the well-being of the nation was perhaps another "willed merger of nation and dynastic empire".

However, the addition of this fifth pillar by itself was insufficient to buttress Pibul's legitimacy as the Leader, especially given the weakness of the other institutions and in the face of external threats. The solution used by Pibul was similar to that of King Taksin – he turned to religion, specifically Buddhism. King Taksin had tried to achieve this through the imposition of traditional as well as more

esoteric Buddhist ceremonies. However, this policy had led to anger among both the Buddhists as well as the ethnic minorities, with disastrous consequences. Pibul's approach was somewhat different and involved the elevation of Buddhism to being an essential part of Thainess as espoused in the Heroic Virtues. This policy had the advantage of being relatively simple to promote, in contrast to the policies of previous monarchs such as King Mongkut who had embarked on a series of reforms within Buddhism. Furthermore, the policy could also be built on the secure foundations that had already been laid by King Vajiravudh.

Apart from the legitimacy factor, there are also other explanations for Pibul's emphasis on Buddhism. The first is that Buddhism was being used as a unifying factor not only internally but also externally as a buttress for the pan-Thai movement where Buddhism may have been one of the few common factors between the Thais of Thailand and their ethnic Tai brethren beyond the border in the lost territories that were being claimed by the Pibul government. The second explanation is that Buddhism was being consciously employed as a bulwark against Japanese intrusion into internal Thai affairs. For example, in 1942 Pibul justified the controversial signing of the Thai-Japanese alliance inside the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, a procedure unprecedented in the history of Thailand, by arguing that:

We knew that the Japanese were obliged to do one thing. They had to demonstrate that they respected Buddhism so that Asians, most of whom are Buddhists, will trust them. Since we have nothing else to rely on, we have to rely on the Buddha. Signing this treaty in front of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha will be a better way to force the Japanese to respect the treaty... The Japanese will fear that if they infringe on the independence and sovereignty of Thailand in violation of the treaty that was signed in front of the Emerald Buddha, all Buddhists in Asia will hate them".¹⁸

¹⁸ Thamsuk Nummond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok khwang thi song* [Thailand in the Second World War] (Saitharn, Bangkok, 2005), pp. 31-2.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. Yet, even this additional elevation was not sufficient to precipitate a violent persecution against Catholics and other minorities. The additional elements were the Cultural Mandates, in particular the second that was issued in July 1939, stipulating that Thais should not act as agents for foreign organisations or sell land to them. Given the weakening of the institutions of the Monarchy and the Constitution, as well as the ascendancy of the cult of the Leader, it is not surprising to see the Cultural Mandates, which were viewed as the direct policies of the Leader, superseding everything else.

Even so, the persecution of religious minorities in July 1939 was far from inevitable. The Cultural Mandates could still be interpreted as being directed against the Chinese rather than all religious minorities. The decisive catalyst for the persecution of the Catholics was the 1940-1 Thai-French War, which provided the central government with the opportunity to delineate the conflict along national as well as religious lines (for example, Buddhist Thailand or Catholic French-Indochina/France). Together with the war-time emergency measures, this ideological modification furnished local elements with the necessary justifications to act against the 'French' Catholics, even though this may not have been the original intention of the central government.

Given the pre-existing tensions in the northeast, the vulnerability of the Catholic congregation there becomes abundantly clear given the factors examined above. That the persecution did not occur in the 1930s was arguably due to the fact that the central government had no conscious policy advocating such a persecution, while Buddhism, at that time, remained a dominant but not the central factor in Thai identity, as during the reign of King Vajiravudh. Before December 1938, religion acted as a marker. In the case of Catholicism, it was a clear marker of differences.

But how these differences were interpreted differed significantly according to the geographical area. In Bangkok, they marked those who were bringing modern education to the nation and, for those who knew the history of Catholicism in Thailand, they marked a community that had long been a component of Thai society. However, in the northeast and closer to the border, Catholicism became a marker of foreignness, specifically of French loyalty. Thus, being a Catholic in the capital may not have been a problem, but being Catholic in the northeast, close to the border to 'Catholic' French-Indochina definitely was.

Concepts of identity were thus not monolithic and could vary according to their context in space and time, despite their 'imaginary' nature. As Chapter VI of the thesis has shown, these concepts could be and were exploited for economic or social gain by all levels of the government, and not just by the elite. An obvious example of the exploitation of nationalistic ideas by the top tier of the government was the use of the idea of a pan-Thai identity by some members of the government to encourage support for actions against French Indochina.¹⁹ The success of this initiative arguably cemented the first Pibul government's grip on power.

On the other hand, the thesis clearly demonstrates in Chapter V that the local administrations and members of the non-Catholic communities also exploited the same idea but mainly for private economic or social gain. The ability of locals to dextrously exploit fluid international and domestic situations suggests a political awareness that, certainly at the time, was seriously underestimated. Indeed, even before the revolution in 1932, ironically its promoters had agreed with the private

¹⁹ Luang Vichitvatakarn and his writings were instrumental in this endeavour. However, there was some conflict within the government at this stage, where Luang Vichit's plays were temporarily banned while negotiations for non-aggression pacts with France and Britain were taking place. On the one hand, Pibul was conscious that he may lose support if he did not exploit the weakness of the French, and on the other hand stood to gain politically if he was successful in taking back the 'lost territories'. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 144.

deliberations of the absolutist regime they had overthrown that the Siamese people were too immature to govern themselves, since most of the population consisted of illiterate peasants, while the middle class lacked political and intellectual initiative.²⁰

Yet the events before and during the war years suggest that the local authorities and the communities under their control had become much more than that by the outbreak of the Thai-French War in November 1940. The Catholic experience showed that the local authorities and communities were acutely aware of distant events and how a situation could be turned to their advantage or disadvantage. They appeared equally adept at assessing both domestic and international events, and were able to exploit the macro-level policies imposed by the government to their advantage at the micro-level, and impose their own interpretations on central policies.

Furthermore, as Chapter VI demonstrated, the exploitation of national identities was not restricted to the realms of the state. Elements within the Mission of Siam itself were exploiting their distinct national identities in different ways, according to the political circumstances of the time. At first, the French missionaries were able to exploit their own identity to solicit additional funding from the government of French Indochina. However, following the outbreak of the Thai-French War in 1940, their identity became more a liability than an asset. Similarly, the Italians were able to exploit their separate identity to preserve the integrity of their missionary efforts in Thailand, while at the same time expanding their interests in a country that had been dominated by French missionaries. Finally, the Thai priests who had hitherto displayed no inclination to take over the administration of the Mission used the situation to make their demands. However, as Chapter VI has

²⁰ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand* (University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1991), p. 12.

shown, these demands can also be explained with reference to local contexts and private interests rather than purely through ideological factors.

It should also be noted that the divisions along lines of national identity were also not as clear cut as might have been expected. The French leader of the Mission of Siam did not always support the French cause, as demonstrated in his demands for the Pétain government to negotiate with the Thai government in September-October 1940. On the other hand, the French government did not always unconditionally support the efforts of the missionaries. Indeed, given the passage of the 1905 French law on the separation of the church and state, the French central government was perhaps more inclined to be unsupportive of the missionaries. Nevertheless, if the French central government was reluctant to render such support, it seemed that its representatives in French-Indochina was willing, as can be seen in the financial assistance it gave to the work of the Mission of Siam.

From very early on, Mission authorities were conscious of the role identities played in bringing about the persecution, with Vicar-Apostolic Gouin, the head of the Mission of Laos, writing in 1941 that “the Catholics were suffering because of us”.²¹ Consequently, the Church worked hard in the following decades to eliminate this vulnerability by finally establishing an indigenous hierarchy. The Mission of Laos, which had been so problematic in the 1930s and 1940s, was divided into the Prefecture Apostolic of Tha Khaek on the Laos side, while the Thai side became the Vicariate Apostolic of Tha Rae on 21 December 1950. Thus Mission jurisdiction in northeastern Thailand now conformed to national boundaries. A further Vicariate Apostolic and Prefecture Apostolic were subsequently erected in Ubon Ratchatani and Udon Thani in 1953. In 1960, the Mission of Tha Rae was renamed, becoming

²¹ B.A.A., Tha Kaek to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 1 August 1941, 47/3/53.

the Mission of Tha Rae and Nong Saeng, which was elevated to the status of an archdiocese five years later. Significantly, by 1953, the Mission of Tha Rae had an indigenous leadership in the person of Bishop Michael Mongkhol On Prakhongchit (1953-8). In contrast, the Mission of Bangkok would not have an indigenous bishop until 1965, indicating the priority the Church gave to rectifying its previously vulnerable position in the northeast. Furthermore, in a reflection of the legacy of the historical separation of the Mission of Laos from the Mission of Bangkok, the Archdiocese of Tha Rae and Nong Saeng maintained its independence from Bangkok, and dioceses in the northeast, namely Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchatani, and Udon Thani, answer to Tha Rae and not Bangkok. Nevertheless, in practical terms, co-operation between the two archdioceses and the local authorities to the present day is much smoother than during the ministry of Vicar-Apostolic Perros.

Other reforms subsequently followed in the areas less affected by the persecution. Chiang Mai, which had fared better, was made a Prefecture Apostolic in its own right on 17 November 1959. However, the arrangement was only temporary since the Missions of the west, east, and north became suffragan dioceses of the newly elevated Archdiocese of Bangkok on 18 December 1965. Early in the same year, Bangkok had obtained its first indigenous bishop, Joseph Khiamsun Nittayo (1965-72), one of the Thai priests who had been educated in Rome. In the 1940s, Vicar-Apostolic Perros saw the young priest's potential, but he had been deemed too young to take charge. Considering Vicar-Apostolic Perros's pre-1940 attitudes towards the indigenous clergy, these reforms would have occurred in time without the persecution. But undoubtedly the persecution accelerated and influenced the process. Judging by the later lack of public antagonism towards this advance and

the fading perception of Catholicism as being a 'French' religion, the reforms should be considered a success, a success that would not have been possible without the foundation that had been laid by Vicar-Apostolic Perros.

VIII

Epilogue

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
 And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,
 That sometime grew within this learned man.
 Faustus is gone. Regard his hellish fall,
 Whose fiendish fortune may exhort the wise
 Only to wonder at unlawful things,
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,
 To practice more than heavenly power permits.*

- Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

The theoretical implications stemming from the persecution of the Catholics in the 1940s has been analysed in the last chapter. To complete the story, the thesis will end with an exposition of the aftermath for the state and the Church.

The State

Why, I asked Mother, was Father pro-Japanese?

"We were not pro-Japanese", she said firmly, "Your father hated the Japanese. But what could we have done? They had infiltrated everywhere. If we had taken up arms, it would have been a disaster. There would have been too many lives wasted. Thailand was harmed far less than its neighbours. It was a life under shame – that is what it was, a life under shame. But we preserved ourselves".¹

- Sirin Phatanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl*

In justifying his extreme, and sometimes bizarre, nationalist measures after the fall of his government, Pibul appealed to national interests. According to some newspaper articles published after the defeat of Japan, all of the measures were intended to reinforce and preserve Thai national identity against Japanese encroachment. Thus the encouragement of western dress was to prevent Thais from taking up the kimono.

¹ Sirin Phatanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994), p. 186.

Spoons and forks were acting as national defences against the invasion of Japanese chopsticks, while the new version of the Thai language was a foot-dragging measure to prevent the Japanese from forcing Thai schoolchildren to learn Japanese, a measure that was allegedly being backed by the Japanese Education Ministry.² After all, how could the local population take up a new language when they had not even mastered the new form of their own? If the protection of Thai national identity had indeed been his real objective, then Pibul was successful; at the end of the war the Thais had not taken to wearing kimonos and neither was there a popular movement to bring the accoutrements of Japanese culture into the daily lives of most ordinary Thais.

Yet while Pibul's nationalism formed the dominant theme of the early 1940s, reflecting his political ascendancy, other visions of the nation were not entirely forgotten. As Baker argued, the formulation of Thai nationalism during this period was evolutionary rather than revolutionary.³ It was therefore possible for alternatives to Pibul's brand of nationalism to continue to exist, but not dominate.

Thus, royalist visions of the country persisted and were evident in instances of individual resistance, notably by Queen Savang Watthana.⁴ On being told by government officials that her name was too masculine according to the new government regulations and that she should change it, the consort of King Chulalongkron (Rama V) gave a terse reply: "My name was bestowed to me by His Majesty [King Chulalongkorn]; His Majesty knew full well whether I am a woman

² Thamsuk Numnond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok khrang thi song* [Thailand in the Second World War], pp. 103-4.

³ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, pp. 105-39.

⁴ Born in 1863 to King Mongkut and Chao Chom Piam, she became the royal consort of her half-brother, King Chulalongkorn. She was the mother of Crown Prince Vajirunhis (1878-95) and Prince Mahidol (1892-1929). Crown Prince Vajirunhis died before he could succeed, but she lived to see her two grandsons, King Ananda Mahidol and King Bhumibol Adulyadej succeed to the throne. She died in 1955. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 374.

or a man".⁵ Government officials met her wrath again when they requested that she wore a hat and be photographed for the government's "Hats lead the nation to power" campaign. The queen responded: "Every day you've bothered me so much that I feel I'm no longer free. Now you've come to interfere with my hair... I won't wear it. If they want me to wear it, they can put it on my severed head for themselves".⁶ On both occasions, the government officials retreated. Clearly, despite the political eclipse of royalists, some royals remained too formidable for even the Leader to trifle with.⁷ On a wider basis, royalists also played a large role in organising the British branch of the Free Thai resistance. Certainly, the resurgence of royalist sentiments was evident in the post-war government with the rapturous reception given to the returning king, Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII), who returned to the country in December 1945, and the dominance of the royalist Democrat Party in the post-war Assembly. Symbolic too was the renaming of the country. Once again, for another brief moment from 1945 to 1948, Thailand would be known as Siam.

Despite the policies of Pibul's first government and the resurgence of royalist factions in government, the constitutionalist version of Thailand did not fade away either. If the Catholic experience illustrated anything, the spirit of the 1932 Constitution remained in existence, even during the persecution period, although it no longer was a dominant theme. The Vicar-Apostolic did not appeal to personal connections when confronting the persecution but to the principles enshrined in the

⁵ Thamsuk Numnond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok khrang thi song*, p. 93.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷ Officials, however, met with more success in Chao Chom Phra Prayurawong, a minor wife of King Chulalongkorn. She, together with the wife of Prince Aditya, the President of the Council of Regency, spear-headed the hats and clothing campaign to great success. See Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier* (Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1995), p. 119.

Constitution. Certain quarters of the Thai public were also still willing to stand up for these principles, as evinced by articles in the *Thai Ekaraj* newspaper.⁸

As for Pibul himself, his past and subsequent relationship with the Catholic Missions appears to reinforce his reputation for fickleness and opportunism. When he returned to power on the back of a military coup in April 1948, there was to be no more anti-French (and thus by implication, anti-Catholic) rhetoric. Indeed, in religious terms, Thai Christians and Muslims could not have asked for more from the second Pibul government. The annual budget now had allowances for supporting Christianity and Islam,⁹ and the resources of the state were put at the disposal of Muslims wishing to go on the Hajj to Mecca. The plan for the Grand Masjid in Pattani, which has since become a centre of Islamic intellectual life, was also approved by the second Pibul government.¹⁰

The changes in Pibul's political approach were no less radical. Instead of promoting himself as the nation's paramount Leader, as in his first government, which would have reminded the population of his unpopular actions during the war years and his association with the Japanese,¹¹ he gradually turned to the United States and its version of democracy as the new model for Thailand. It was this mercurial quality that condemns him in the eyes of many of his critics, but arguably it was also these qualities that made him a great politician, one who could overcome his arch-nemesis, Pridi. He displayed this quality to the very end, when he sent two

⁸ The newspaper's stance may have caused it to be shut down and censored. No copies are kept at the Thai National Library, and the only evidence of the newspaper's existence are the translations of its articles in the *Bangkok Times*.

⁹ Buddhism also continued to be a major agenda of the second Pibul government. The construction of Phutthamonthon, the largest Buddhist space in Thailand, in Nakhon Prathom province, was initiated during his second government as part of the wider celebration of the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's parinirvana. However, the implementation of these policies had none of the violence seen in his first government.

¹⁰ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, p. 140.

¹¹ B.J. Terwiel, *Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1980), p. 24.

of his advisor's children to China to open a 'back door' for negotiations,¹² despite his anti-communist and anti-Chinese policies, while in the last weeks of his life in exile in Tokyo, the former strongman even contemplated a reconciliation and political alliance with Pridi against the military faction of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1959-63)¹³ and his heir, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-73).¹⁴ The formation of the alliance would have meant a sensational healing of rifts between the original 1932 revolutionaries and the formation of a formidable political alliance.¹⁵ Negotiations between Pridi and Pibul continued after the death of Sarit Thanarat in 1963, but abruptly ended with the sudden death of Pibul on 11 June 1964.

Like old generals, old nationalisms never quite died. It was the case with the Buddhist-orientated strain of Thai nationalism. It re-emerged briefly during Pope John Paul II's visit to Thailand in 1984,¹⁶ when a small group of Buddhist fundamentalists came out to protest against the Catholic Church, accusing them of expanding in Thailand at the expense of Buddhism.¹⁷ More recently, in 2007, there were prominent efforts by Buddhist monks and some members of the public to

¹² Sirin Phathanothai (seven years old at the time) and her 12 year-old brother were secretly sent to China as a token of the second Pibul government's goodwill in 1956. They became wards of Premier Zhou Enlai. The two were children of Sang Phathanothai, one of Pibul's close advisors and also the writer of the "Nai Man and Nai Kong" radio show in the 1940s, which he wrote as part of his responsibility as the government spokesman for the first Pibul government. Following the exile of Pibul and the arrest of Sang Phathanothai for his pro-Beijing stance under the Sarit government, the children were stuck in China, and were subsequently caught in the tumult of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

¹³ Born in 1908, Sarit was a career army officer. He commanded the army in Bangkok during the 1947 coup and the Palace Rebellion. He was the deputy defence minister in 1951, the head of the army in 1954, and became field marshal in 1956. In 1957 he led the coup that toppled Pibul and subsequently led another one in 1958, where he installed himself as prime minister. He died in 1963. See C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 286.

¹⁴ Born in 1911, Thanom was another career army officer turned politician. He was the right-hand man of Sarit Thanarat and was prime minister in 1958 and from 1963-73. He was deposed in a mass uprising on 14 October 1973, after which he went into exile. His return as a monk in 1976 contributed to the massacre of leftist students who were protesting his return on 6 October 1976, and the consequent resurgence of the military in Thai politics. See C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 287.

¹⁵ Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994), pp. 188-9.

¹⁶ The visit was the first by a Pontiff to Thailand.

¹⁷ Archives des Missions Étrangères, *Asie Religieuse 2005: Chiffres et Données*, (Églises d'Asie, Paris, 2005), p. 142.

enshrine Buddhism as the official state religion. The campaign had gained momentum and was thwarted only when, in a rare public intervention, Queen Sirikit spoke out against the idea, stating that she “did not want Buddhism to be involved in politics, which was often dirty”.¹⁸ Had the campaign been successful, it would have raised some old awkward questions regarding Thai national identity and its relationship with religion. It is perhaps an irony of Thai politics that the elevation of Buddhism as the official state religion would almost inevitably lead to the creation of a most un-Buddhist state.

Even so, the stipulations of the Constitution, whatever they may be, may ultimately turn out to be irrelevant, as Pibul and the Catholics in the 1940s, as well as the witnesses of the 2006 coup would observe, the paper of the Constitution has never carried much weight against raw political or military power. Indeed, despite Pibul’s late democratic approach, the “hellish fall” of the constitutional order had already taken place prior to and during his first government. Observers are left only to wonder at how different Thailand would be today had the constitutional order been allowed to “grow full straight”.

¹⁸ *The Nation*, 12 August 2007.

The Church

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

- Lewis B. Smedes

The immediate, collective concern for the Missions following the fall of Pibul's first government was the fate of the prisoners who still languished in jail for alleged Fifth Columnist activities. Fr. Nicolas had already died in prison, but he was only one of several priests who had been incarcerated following false accusations. In the first instance, royal pardon was sought and was initially rejected by the Interior Ministry of the Thawi Bunyaket¹⁹ government (31 August–17 September 1945) that "saw no reason to grant the pardon".²⁰ However, the Mission had procured itself an ally in the form of R.S.O. Sudchamlong, who saw the splits in the short-lived government and so submitted the petition again directly to the prime minister and cabinet. The royal pardon was subsequently approved by the prime minister and the cabinet, including the Interior Minister, just prior to their resignation on 17 September 1945.

While ministerial politics may have been involved in the delay of the royal pardon by the Bunyaket government, the succeeding Seni Pramoj²¹ government (17 September 1945–15 October 1946) saw a different reason to delay the process. In its haste to free the prisoners, the Mission appeared willing to ignore the legal implications and consequences of accepting the royal pardon. In practical terms, it is true that the prisoners would have been freed sooner but, in legal terms, it would also

¹⁹ Born in 1904, Thawi Bunyaket studied agricultural science in France, where he also joined the promoters' group. He was the cabinet secretary from July 1939–February 1943 and was a member of the Seri Thai leadership. He died in 1970. See J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, pp. 377–8.

²⁰ B.A.A., R.S.O. Sudchamlong to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 11 September 1945, *Beatification Documents*, 245.

²¹ Seni Pramoj was born in 1905. A great grandson of King Phra Phuttaloetla (Rama II), he was educated at Worcester College, Oxford. As ambassador to the U.S. in 1941, he refused to formally deliver Pibul's declaration of war on the Allies. The leader of the Seri Thai movement in the U.S., in 1946, he co-founded the Democrat Party, which has since become Thailand's oldest political party. He served three brief terms as prime minister: 1945–46, 1975, and 1976. He died in 1977. See C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 286.

have implied that the prisoners were truly guilty of the offenses for which they had been convicted – that of being Fifth Columnists. Thus, with a royal pardon, the prisoners and the Catholic Missions would potentially never be able to rid themselves of the stain of being “Fifth Columnists” in the public imagination. If the Vicar-Apostolic did not recognise this damaging legal implication at the time, others in the government certainly made the distinction and, in the interests of the Church, pushed instead for an amnesty for prisoners tried by military courts in the course of the Thai-French War.²²

With the prisoners freed, the Mission was left with the task of clearing the damage the persecution had created. In the short term, churches and schools had to be reopened, refurbished, or totally rebuilt. Land that was rightfully owned by the parishes had to be reclaimed from those who had illegally taken possession of it. On this front, at least, the Mission was not without resources. Following the conclusion of war in the Pacific, the Mission received a massive financial stimulus from the Propaganda Fide. On 7 October 1946, the Propaganda Fide dispatched more than 1.6 million French francs to the Mission of Siam, much of which was used to resettle the returning missionaries (800,000 francs), while other substantial portions went to seminaries (320,000 francs) and to support the Mission of Laos (195,000 francs). Even with this large expenditure, the Mission was still left with a surplus of just over 300,000 francs for that financial year.²³

The immediate material, post-war needs of the Mission were thus taken care of but the missionaries still had to re-evaluate their long-term future. Pibul’s brand of nationalism had unleashed a wave of hatred against the French missionaries and their ‘agents’, the indigenous priests and congregation. The sharp drop in the

²² B.A.A., R.S.O. Sudchamlong to Vicar-Apostolic Perros, 6 October 1945, *Beatification Documents*, 246.

²³ B.A.A., Prospectus Status Missionis, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

number of Catholics was a testament to the effects of this strand of nationalism. In 1940, the number of Catholics stood at 36,127²⁴ but by 1946 the number had decreased to 26,132 – a drop of almost 10,000 or 30 percent.²⁵ Yet, amidst the violence, there were also reasons for hope. In spite of the threats, the violence, and the harassment, many Catholics remained true to their faith. Even those who converted out of fear, soon reconverted back to Catholicism once it was safe to do so. By 1947, numbers had grown by over 2,600 from the low of the previous year.²⁶

As for the informal networks the Mission had painstakingly built through its schools, they too survived. Although the networks were not strong enough to save the Mission and its congregation from the persecution, they were sufficient for a certain number of its schools' alumni. Some of the alumni from Fr. Colombet's Assumption College went on to be active in the Seri Thai movement. One old Assumptionist, Payoum Chantaraka, became a captain in the police, and assisted in the 'arrest' of fellow old Assumptionist, Puey Ungpakorn.²⁷ In actual fact, the police captain helped put Puey's group in contact with India and Pridi Phanomyong, from their place of supposed detention. Furthermore, Japanese attempts to interrogate the 'prisoners' were scuppered by their own Japanese interpreter, B. Hatano, who also happened to be an old Assumptionist and a childhood friend of Puey. It turned out that rather than strictly performing his duties, Mr. Hatano saw fit to 'translate' Puey's barefaced and rather unconvincing lies into something more plausible to the Japanese authorities, thereby saving his childhood friend, something that greatly

²⁴ B.A.A., Prospectus Status Missionis, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16.

²⁵ B.A.A., Prospectus Status Missionis, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

²⁶ M.E.P.A., Compte-rendu, 1940-48.

²⁷ Dr. Puey Ungpakorn later became the Governor of the Bank of Thailand in 1959-71 under the government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1959-63) and the second government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-73), from where he greatly influenced the modern development of Thailand. He also became the rector of Thammasat University from 1973-76. Following the 6 October 1976 incident, he was driven into exile by mobs of right-wing extremists. He died in exile on 28 July 1999.

amused him even decades after the event.²⁸ Even if the network had not served the Church during its time of need, at least it served the people it had taught and cared for.

When Pibul returned to power as the figurehead of the military coup on 8 November 1947 (re-assuming the position of Prime Minister in the April of the following year), Catholics could be forgiven for fearing a return of persecution. But times and political allegiances had changed. Pibul's mantra was no longer anti-western or irredentist, but anti-communist. The one element of continuity in the second Pibul government was its discrimination against the Chinese, a policy that now interlocked with anti-communist policies.²⁹ Chinese schools were once again restricted, the alien tax was increased, remittances were curbed, laws restricting Chinese employment were reintroduced, the Nationality Law was readjusted to impede naturalisation, and Chinese operas were banned in Bangkok.³⁰ However, if the second Pibul government had any remaining doubts with regard to the loyalty of the Catholics in the now re-named Thailand, this did not manifest itself. Indeed, relations became cordial and Brother Hilaire Touvenet, the headmaster of Assumption College, was even photographed having a friendly conversation with the erstwhile Leader. The Catholic Mission of Thailand, it appears, was willing to forgive, even if Pibul would rather just forget.

As for Vicar-Apostolic Perros, the year 1947 also marked the year of his retirement, leaving Fr. Louis-Auguste Chorin as his 'unexpected' successor. The war had left both the Vicar-Apostolic and the Mission greatly drained. Even if some

²⁸ Samakhom Assumption, *Assumption Prawat 150 Pi* [150 Years of the History of Assumption College], (Samakhom Assumption, Bangkok, 2003), pp. 942-3.

²⁹ C. Baker and Pasuk Pongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p. 145.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

apostates did reconvert as soon as it was safe to do so, it was clear that great efforts would have to be made to reconstruct the Mission to its pre-war material position. Nevertheless, Vicar-Apostolic Perros did leave several lasting legacies, the most important of which was arguably the introduction of a Catholic presence to Chiang Mai and northern Thailand, as well as the establishment of educational institutions there, such as Montfort College and Regina Coeli School. It was to Chiang Mai that Vicar-Apostolic Perros retired, after being named an assistant to the Pontifical Throne. He was to remain there until he was admitted to St. Louis Hospital in Bangkok, where he died on 27 November 1952 at 82 years of age.

Chronology and Appendices

Chronology (1909-47)

- 1909** *Feb.* Death of Vicar-Apostolic Jean-Louis Vey. René Perros succeeds as the new Vicar-Apostolic of Siam.
- Jun.* Bangkok's Chinese merchants stage a general strike against the government's decision to levy a head-tax on the Chinese that was equal to that paid by the native Siamese. The strike is suppressed by the police.
- Nov.* Pope Benedict XV issues the papal encyclical, *Maximum Illud*, which encouraged a greater role for the indigenous clergy and the separation of ecclesiastical and national-political interests in Missions around the world
- 1910** *Jan.* Vicar-Apostolic Perros is formally consecrated at the Holy Rosary Church, Bangkok.
- Oct.* Death of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). His son succeeds to the throne as King Vajiravudh (Rama VI).
- 1911** *Jun.* King Vajiravudh establishes the Royal Pages' School, a private school under royal patronage, supported by the Privy Purse. After his death, the school became known as Vajiravudh College and continues to operate to the present.
- Oct.* The Wuchang Uprising occurs in Hubei province, China. It marks the start of the Chinese Revolution that was to overthrow the ruling Qing dynasty.
- 1912** *Feb.* Puyi, the last Qing Emperor of China, is forced to abdicate. The Republic of China is established.
- An attempted coup by junior military officers fails but nevertheless encourages King Vajiravudh to make administrative and personnel reforms
- Apr.* Resignation of Marie-Joseph Cuaz, Vicar-Apostolic of Laos, which is in charge of Catholic missionaries in northeastern Siam. Fr. Constant-Jean-Baptiste Prodhomme succeeds him as the Vicar-Apostolic.
- 1913** *Mar.* King Vajiravudh issues a decree introducing surnames to Thai society for the first time. However, it would be many years before all Thais, particularly in the rural areas, were to have surnames.
- Apr.* Law establishing the National Savings Bank proclaimed.
- 1914** *Jul.* The First World War breaks out in Europe. The Vicar-Apostolic and other French priests are mobilised and are obliged to return to France.

King Vajiravudh publishes "The Jews of the Orient" essay, comparing the unassimilated Chinese population in Siam with the Jews in Europe.

Aug. Siam declares her neutrality in the World War.

1915 *Jun.* Vicar-Apostolic Perros gains the permission of the French War Ministry to return to his post in Siam.

1916 *Nov.* King Vajiravudh announces the adoption of a new "dynastic" name – Rama. As he is the sixth monarch of the dynasty, he takes the title Rama VI.

1917 *Mar.* Tsar Nicholas II of Russia is forced to abdicate.

King Vajiravudh founds Chulalongkorn University the first, and currently, oldest university in Thailand.

Apr. The United States declares war against Germany.

Jul. Siam joins the First World War on the side of the Allies.

Sept. The red, white, and blue national flag of Siam is introduced. It remains in use to the present day.

Nov. The Bolshevik Revolution takes place in Russia.

1918 *Jun.* A 1,300-man expeditionary force consisting of an ambulance section, a flying squadron, drivers, and mechanics is dispatched from Siam to France. Some Catholic missionaries act as their interpreters.

A law on private schools is enacted. The law requires all students in private schools to be taught to read, write, and understand Siamese and instructed in patriotism as well as in Siamese history and geography. The law was aimed at the assimilation of the Chinese ethnic minority, but also affects the Mission schools.

Jul. The former Tsar Nicholas II and his family are executed in the basement of Ipatiev House in Ekaterinberg.

Nov. Proclamation of the armistice, ending the First World War.

1919 *Jun.* The Treaty of Versailles is signed in France. Siam is included as a victor nation signatory.

1920 *May* The first returning contingents of the Siamese expeditionary force arrives back in Siam.

Aug. Death of Vicar-Apostolic Prodhomme. Fr. Ange-Marie-Joseph Gouin

- officially succeeds him as the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos in April 1922.
- Dec.* A new treaty is signed with the United States, where it conditionally surrenders all fiscal and extraterritorial rights in Siam.
- 1921** *Oct.* The Compulsory Primary Education Act came into effect. It stipulated that all boys and girls from age seven to fourteen had to attend school.
- 1922** *Jan.* Death of Pope Benedict XV.
- Feb.* Cardinal Achille Ratti is elected Pope. He succeeds as Pope Pius XI.
- 1925** *Feb.* A new treaty is signed with France, where it conditionally surrenders all fiscal and extraterritorial rights in Siam.
- Jul.* A new treaty is signed with Great Britain, where it conditionally surrenders all fiscal and extraterritorial rights in Siam. Within the next year, all other remaining treaty powers followed suit.
- Sept.* Birth of Prince Ananda Mahidol, the future Rama VIII, in Heidelberg, Germany to Prince Mahidol and Mom Sangwal Mahidol (later Princess Mother).
- Nov.* Death of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). He left no male heir, and thus his younger brother succeeds as King Prajadhipok (Rama VII).
- 1926** *Dec.* The Mission of Siam signs an agreement with the Salesians, ceding its western parishes and properties to the Salesians, thereby unofficially setting up Siam's first non-French Mission there.
- 1927** *Feb.* The first meeting of the Promoters' group to end the absolute monarchy takes place in Paris. Seven people are present, including Pibul and Pridi Phanomyong.
- Dec.* Birth of Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej, the future Rama IX, in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Prince Mahidol and Mom Sangwal Mahidol.
- 1929** *Oct.* The Wall Street Crash triggers the start of the global economic depression.
- 1930** *Jun.* The Mission "sui iuris" of Ratchaburi is formally established in the west of Siam. Fr. Gaétan Pasotti is appointed as the superior of the new Mission.
- 1931** *Feb.* Fr. Lucien Mirabel is stationed at Chiang Mai, marking the start of the Catholics' first formal missionary efforts in the north of Siam.
- 1932** *May* Siam abandons the gold standard.

- Jun.* The Promoters successfully carry out a bloodless coup against the absolutist government. The system of government changes to a constitutional monarchy. A provisional draft Constitution comes into effect and Phraya Manopakonnitithada becomes Siam's first prime minister.
- Dec.* After some minor amendments suggested by King Prajadhipok, the permanent 1932 Constitution comes into force.
- 1933** *Feb.* Pridi presents his controversial draft of the national economic plan.
- Mar.* The cabinet rejects Pridi's economic plan by a vote of 17-4.¹
- Apr.* Pridi leaves for France, following the heated opposition to his national economic plan which was branded as "communistic". A large, friendly crowd sees him off.
- The Act concerning Communism is drafted, establishing a penalty of up to ten years' imprisonment or the payment of a fine if a person is found guilty of writing, publishing or disseminating communist ideas.
- Jun.* Phraya Phahon leads a successful coup against the Phraya Mano government. Phraya Mano is exiled to Penang, where he dies in 1948. Meanwhile, Phraya Phahon establishes himself as prime minister for the next five years.
- Aug.* Death and funeral of Fr. Colombet, founder of Assumption College. Two thousand mourners, including the prime minister, senior officials, and the diplomatic corps attend
- Sept.* Pridi returns to Siam and is appointed to the cabinet as a minister without portfolio.
- Oct.* The Bovoradej Rebellion begins. The rebels are motivated by a mixture of thwarted ambitions and monarchism. Pibul successfully leads the counter-attack and the rebellion is eventually crushed. Prince Bovoradej escapes into exile to French Indochina.
- Nov.* The first elections under the constitutional regime are held. Approximately 10 percent of the population were involved in the voting.²
- 1934** *Jan.* King Prajadhipok leaves for Europe to get medical treatment for cataracts. He was never to return to Siam.

¹ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 41.

² D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 239-40.

- Mar.* Pridi is cleared of charges of communism and becomes the interior minister.
- May* The Mission "sui iuris" of Ratchaburi is elevated to a Prefecture Apostolic.
- Jun.* Pridi founds the University for Moral and Political Sciences, better known today as Thammasat University.
- Oct.* While still in England, King Prajadhipok informs the government of his wish to abdicate.
- Nov.* A government delegation is dispatched to England to persuade King Prajadhipok not to abdicate.
- 1935** *Jan.* Vicar-Apostolic Perros founds a new seminary in Sri Racha, Chonburi province.
- Feb.* An assassination attempt against Pibul fails.
- Mar.* King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) abdicates while in England. As he had no male heir, the Assembly invites his ten-year-old nephew, Prince Ananda Mahidol who was studying in Lausanne, Switzerland at the time to succeed as King Rama VIII. Prince Ananda accepts the invitation and a Council of Regents is appointed by the government.
- 1936** *Feb.* Pridi becomes the minister of foreign affairs.
- 1937** *Nov.* The second elections under the constitutional regime are held. This time, the franchise was extended to everyone above the age of twenty. A total of 26 percent of the population voted.³
- 1938** *Sept.* The government is challenged in the Assembly over the transparency of its budget allocations. It is subsequently defeated by 45 votes to 31, with most of the assembly members having left for the weekend. Consequently, Phraya Phahon announced the dissolution of the Assembly and the holding of new elections.
- Oct.* Canton falls to Japanese forces.
- Nov.* A second assassination attempt on Pibul fails.
- King Ananda Mahidol returns to Siam for the first time as monarch.
- The third election is held. Half of the representatives, most of whom were critical of the government, were re-elected.⁴

³ D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 240-1.

⁴ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 106.

- Dec.* Phraya Phahon resigns, citing health reasons. Pibul succeeds him as prime minister.
- 1939** *Jan.* King Ananda Mahidol returns to Switzerland.
- The 'Songsuradet' Rebellion is suppressed. Pibul uses the rebellion as a pretext to arrest his political opponents who end up exiled, imprisoned, or executed.
- Feb.* Death of Pope Pius XI.
- Mar.* Cardinal Giovanni Pacelli is elected Pope. He succeeds as Pope Pius XII.
- Jun.* Pibul officially changes the country's name. Siam becomes Thailand as the first of the *Ratthaniyom* (Cultural Mandates) is issued.
- The Japanese capture Swatow (Shantou), the home of many of the Chinese immigrants in Thailand.
- Jul.* All portraits of King Prajadhipok are removed from official buildings; people are encouraged to display portraits of Pibul instead.
- Pibul issues his second Cultural Mandate, forbidding Thais to act as agents for foreign organisations and selling land to them.
- Aug.* Pibul issues his third Cultural Mandate, which abolished all ethnic distinctions. Thus, labels such as Thai-Malays, Thai-Chinese, Thai-Annamese etc. become obsolete as all of these are now to be called "Thais".
- Sept.* The Second World War breaks out in Europe as Germany invades Poland.
- Pibul issues his fourth Cultural Mandate, making it compulsory for the public to stand and salute the flag when it is being raised in the morning at 8.00 am and lowered at 6.00 pm. They must also know the new national anthem. These measures are still active to this day.
- Nov.* Pibul issues his fifth Cultural Mandate, encouraging the consumption of domestically-produced goods.
- Dec.* Pibul issues his sixth Cultural Mandate concerning the lyrics of the national anthem.
- 1940** *Mar.* Pibul issues his seventh Cultural Mandate encouraging the public to participate in nation building.
- Apr.* Pibul issues his eighth Cultural Mandate regarding the royal anthem.

- Jun.* Britain and France sign non-aggression pacts with Thailand but France falls to the Nazi Blitzkrieg before the treaty could be ratified.
- Pibul issues his ninth Cultural Mandate which introduced new regulations to the Thai language and states the duties of a good citizen.
- Sept.* The Assembly votes, by a two-thirds majority, to extend the terms of its appointed members. The 1932 Constitution had only provided for a ten-year transitional period for the non-elected members.
- Oct.* Protests begin in Bangkok, demanding the return of the "lost territories" in French Indochina. These territories were lost to France following the 1893 Paknam incident.
- Nov.* Fighting breaks out between Thailand and French Indochina, with both claiming that the other party was the aggressor.
- French citizens in Thailand, including Catholic missionaries, are ordered to vacate the border areas within 48 hours, marking the beginning of the anti-Catholic persecution.
- Dec.* Philip Siphong, the headmaster of the school in Songkhon is assassinated. The police under Nai Bunlue proceed to extra-judicially execute six other women, thereby creating the Seven Martyrs of Songkhon.
- 1941** *Jan.* Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung is arrested for ringing church bells. He is later sentenced to fifteen years in prison for alleged Fifth Columnist activities.
- Vicar-Apostolic Perros delegates his authority to Fr. Joachim Teppawan Prakobkij, the Provincial of the Mission of Siam.
- French naval forces sink three Thai gunboats and one destroyer off Si Chang island.
- A ceasefire mediated by Japan is signed between France and Thailand.
- The emergency measures against French citizens that were promulgated at the start of the Thai-French War are rescinded.
- Pibul issues his tenth Cultural Mandate, regulating the dress code of the public. Thais were no longer allowed to walk barefoot, men must wear shirts and trousers while women must wear gloves and hats.
- Apr.* The Prefecture Apostolic of Ratchaburi is elevated to the status of a Vicariate Apostolic.
- May* The Treaty of Tokyo, a Japanese mediated peace treaty is signed between France and Thailand. Thailand gained two provinces in Laos,

and most of northwestern Cambodia. However, these areas were to be demilitarised and it had to pay a compensation of 6 million baht to France.⁵ The treaty satisfied neither party but increased Japanese influence in the area.

Death of former King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) in England.

Sept. Pibul issues his eleventh Cultural Mandate regulating the daily schedule of Thai citizens. Thais must eat on time, no more than four meals a day, be conscientious at work, take no more than an hour's break in the afternoon, and should use free time in the evening for socialising, study, or meditation.

Dec. The Japanese attack Pearl Harbour. Simultaneously, they also attack the Pacific islands, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Siam at nine points. After some armed resistance, Pibul orders a cease-fire and allows Japanese forces free passage through Thailand in return for assurances that Thai independence would be respected. A military alliance with Japan was concluded in the same month.

Vicar-Apostolic Perros re-assumes his authority as the Vicar-Apostolic of Siam.

The British battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and cruiser HMS *Repulse* is sunk by Japanese forces off the east of Malaya.

Pridi is 'promoted' to the position of regent.

1942 *Jan.* Thailand declares war on Great Britain and the United States. The Thai ambassador in Washington, Seni Pramoj, refuses to deliver the declaration to the U.S. government and sets up the Free Thai (*Seri Thai*) resistance movement.

Pibul issues his twelfth and last Cultural Mandate, which calls for better protection for children, the elderly, and the disadvantaged.

Feb. Singapore falls to the Japanese.

May Thai forces bomb Kengtung, the capital of the eastern Shan states, and a few weeks after invades the area with the Northern Army. The area is formed into "The Original Thai United State".⁶

Jun. The U.S. Navy inflicts a decisive defeat on the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Battle of Midway.

Oct. Bangkok and the central plains suffer their worst floods in 25 years.

⁵ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 191.

⁶ J.A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand*, p. 235.

- 1943** *Jan.* The Germans and Italians are defeated in North Africa, while Soviet Russia gains victory at Stalingrad.
- Jul.* Resignation of Vicar-Apostolic Gouin. Fr. Henri-Albert Thomine succeeds him as the Vicar-Apostolic of Laos.
- Sept.* Italy surrenders to the Allies and subsequently declares war on Japan. The Salesians in Siam prepare to evacuate.
- 1944** *Jan.* Fr. Nicolas Kitbamrung dies of tuberculosis in Bang Khwang prison, Bangkok.
- May* The Vicariate Apostolic of Chantaburi in the east of Thailand is formally erected. Joseph Cheng becomes the first indigenous bishop of Thailand.
- The *Viratham khong Chat Thai* (Heroic Virtues of the Nation) are issued by Pibul. Among them, the stipulation that "Thailand is a nation that worships the Buddhist religion like life itself".⁷
- Jun.* The Allies capture Rome and lands on Normandy.
- Jul.* The Tojo government in Japan resigns.
- The Assembly rejects Pibul's plans to move the capital to Petchabun in the northeast of Thailand and the construction of a "Buddhist City". Subsequent to the defeat of the bills, Pibul tenders his resignation but retains his position as commander in chief of the armed forces. Khuang Aphaiwong is appointed prime minister.
- Aug.* Khuang 'demotes' Pibul by stripping him of the post of commander in chief and transferring him to the inactive post of superior advisor to the armed forces.
- 1945** *Mar.* The Japanese carry out a coup against the French administration of French Indochina and successfully encourages Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to declare their short-lived independence from France.
- Vicar-Apostolic Thomine, the former Vicar-Apostolic Gouin, and Fr. Jean Thibaud, the Provincial of the Mission of Laos are arrested by the Japanese in Laos. They were later executed and their bodies left by the roadside.
- May* Berlin falls to the Allies, ending the war in Europe.
- The Allies capture Rangoon.
- Jun.* Allied planes drop fifty parachute-loads of medicines in broad

⁷ Thamsuk Nuamnond, *Muang Thai samai Songkhram lok*, p. 100.

daylight at Sanam Luang, in the heart of Bangkok.

Aug. The Japanese surrender following the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war in the Pacific.

Khuang Aphaiwong resigns, citing his association with the Japanese in the past year. The Assembly votes for Thawi Bunyaket to succeed as interim prime minister for 17 days until Seni Pramroj can arrive in Thailand to take his place.

Sept. Thailand is renamed Siam, it remains thus until 11 May 1949, when the country is once again re-named Thailand under the second Pibul government (1948-57).

Thawi Bunyaket resigns, Seni Pramroj becomes prime minister.

King Ananda Mahidol reaches his majority, the regency ends.

Oct. Seni Pramroj resigns as prime minister and calls a new election.

Pibul is detained as a war criminal.

Dec. King Ananda Mahidol returns to Thailand to a rapturous public reception. Pridi is formally named Senior Statesman.

Siam and Britain ends the state of war with a peace treaty.

Sporadic anti-Catholic incidents continue up to this month.

1946 *Jan.* The first post-war elections are held. Parties aligned with Pridi are elected to power, but the Assembly elects Khuang Aphaiwong as prime minister for the second time.

Mar. Khuang Aphaiwong resigns and Pridi is forced to take up the premiership.

Pibul is acquitted of all charges of war crimes.

Apr. The Democrat Party is founded by Seni Pramroj. This political party currently remains the oldest in Thailand.

May The 1946 Constitution is drafted and comes into force. For the first time, a bi-cameral legislature is introduced with a fully elected lower house, which would subsequently elect members of the upper house.

Jun. King Ananda Mahidol is found shot dead in his bedroom under mysterious circumstances. The Assembly invites his younger brother, Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej, to succeed to the throne as King Rama IX.

- Aug.* Tired of being linked to the unsolved death of King Ananda Mahidol, Pridi Phanomyong resigns as prime minister. Luang Thamrongnawasawat succeeds him.
- Oct.* The territories Siam gained in the May 1941 Treaty is returned to France. In turn, France withdraws its threat to veto Siam's membership of the United Nations.
- Dec.* Siam becomes the 55th member of the United Nations following its repeal of the 1933 anti-communist law, thereby avoiding a veto of its membership by Soviet Russia.
- 1947** *Apr.* Luang Thamrongnawasawat successfully survives a no-confidence vote against his government.
- Fr. Claude Bayet is appointed as the new Vicar-Apostolic of Laos.
- Jul.* Vicar-Apostolic Perros retires. The Mission of Bangkok's Procurator, Fr. Louis-August Chorin succeeds as the last Vicar-Apostolic of Bangkok.
- Nov.* The army seizes control of the government in a coup, with Pibul as their figurehead. Pridi spends a week in hiding before being spirited out of the country by British and American agents to Singapore.
- With the support of the Democrat Party, Khuang Aphaiwong becomes prime minister for the final time. Following Khuang Aphaiwong's resignation in April 1948, Pibul begins his second and last term as prime minister. He remains in power until he is ousted in a military coup in September 1957.

Appendix A

I The Kings of Bangkok (Chakri Dynasty)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Phra Phutthayotfa (Rama I) | 6 April 1782–7 September 1809 |
| 2. Phra Phutthaloetla (Rama II) | 7 September 1809–21 July 1824 |
| 3. Phra Nangklao (Rama III) | 21 July 1824–3 April 1851 |
| 4. Mongkut (Rama IV) | 3 April 1851–1 October 1868 |
| 5. Chulalongkorn (Rama V) | 1 October 1868–23 October 1910 |
| 6. Vajiravudh (Rama VI) | 23 October 1910–26 November 1925 |
| 7. Prajadhipok (Rama VII) | 26 November 1925–2 March 1935 (abdicated) |
| 8. Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) | 2 March 1935–9 June 1946 |
| 9. Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) | 9 June 1946– |

II Prime Ministers of Thailand (1932-57)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Phraya Manopakonnitthada | 28 June 1932–20 June 1933 |
| 2. Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena | 21 June 1933–11 September 1938 |
| 3. Plaek Pibulsongkhram | 16 December 1938–1 August 1944 |
| 4. Khuang Aphaiwong | 1 August 1944–31 August 1945 |
| 5. Thawi Bunyaket | 31 August–17 September 1945 |
| 6. Seni Pramoj | 17 September 1945–15 October 1946 |
| 7. Khuang Aphaiwong | 31 January 1946–24 March 1946 |
| 8. Pridi Phanomyong | 24 March 1946–23 August 1946 |
| 9. Luang Thamrongnawasawat | 23 August 1946–8 November 1947 |
| 10. Khuang Aphaiwong | 10 November 1947–8 April 1948 |
| 11. Plaek Pibulsongkhram | 8 April 1948–16 September 1957 |

Appendix B

I Vicars-Apostolic of Siam (1669-2009)

1. Louis Laneau, M.E.P.
2. Louis Champion de Cissé
3. Jean-Jacques Tessier de Quéralay
4. Jean de Lolière-Puycontat, M.E.P.
5. Pierre Brigot, M.E.P.
6. Olivier-Simon Le Bon, M.E.P.
7. Arnaud-Antoine Garnault, M.E.P.
8. Esprit-Marie-Joseph Florens, M.E.P.
9. Jean-Paul-Hilaire-Michel Courvez, M.E.P.
10. Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix, M.E.P.
11. Ferdinand-Aimé-Augustin-Joseph Dupond, M.E.P.
12. Jean-Louis Vey, M.E.P.
13. René-Marie-Joseph Perros, M.E.P.
14. Louis-August Chorin, M.E.P.

- Archbishops of Bangkok -

15. Joseph Kiamsun Nittayo
16. Cardinal Michael Michai Kitbunchu
17. Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij

- 4 July 1669–16 March 1696
- 19 January 1700–1 April 1727
- 1 April 1727–27 September 1736
- 28 August 1738–8 December 1755
- 8 December 1755–30 September 1776 (transferred)
- 30 September 1776–27 October 1780
- 10 March 1786–4 March 1811
- 4 March 1811–30 March 1834
- 30 March 1834–10 September 1841 (transferred)
- 10 September 1841–18 June 1862
- 9 September 1864–11 December 1872
- 30 July 1875–21 February 1909
- 17 September 1909–12 July 1947 (retired)
- 10 July 1947–29 April 1965

- 29 April 1965–18 December 1972 (resigned)
- 18 December 1972–14 May 2009 (retired)
- 14 May 2009–

II Vicars-Apostolic of Laos/Tha Rae/Tha Rae-Nong Saeng (1899-2005)

1. Marie-Joseph Cuaz, M.E.P.
2. Constant-Jean-Baptiste Prodhomme, M.E.P.
3. Ange-Marie-Joseph Gouin, M.E.P.
4. Henri-Albert Thomine, M.E.P.
5. Claude-Philippe Bayet, M.E.P.
6. Michael Mongkhol On Prakhongchit
7. Michel Kien Samophithak

12 May 1899–26 April 1912 (resigned)
 2 June 1913–20 August 1920
 27 April 1922–1 July 1943 (resigned)
 13 July 1944–21 March 1945
 10 April 1947–7 March 1953 (transferred)
 7 May 1953–18 December 1958
 12 February 1959–18 December 1965

- Archbishops of Tharae-Nongsaeng -

8. Michel Kien Samophithak
9. Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On
10. Louis Chamniern Santisukniram

18 December 1965–6 March 1980 (resigned)
 6 March 1980–4 May 2004 (retired)
 1 July 2005–

III Vicars-Apostolic of Ratchaburi (1931-2005)

1. Gaétan Pasotti, S.D.B.
2. Pietro Luigi Carretto, S.D.B.

1931–3 September 1950
 12 April 1951–18 December 1965

- Bishops of Bangnokkhwaek/Ratchaburi -

3. Pietro Luigi Carretto, S.D.B.
4. Robert Ratna Bamrungtrakul
5. Joseph Ek Thabping
6. John Bosco Manat Chuabsamai
7. John Bosco Panya Kitcharoen

18 December 1965–26 June 1969 (transferred)
 26 June 1969–28 April 1975 (transferred)
 2 October 1975–12 February 1985
 25 November 1985–24 July 2003 (resigned)
 18 March 2005–

Appendix C

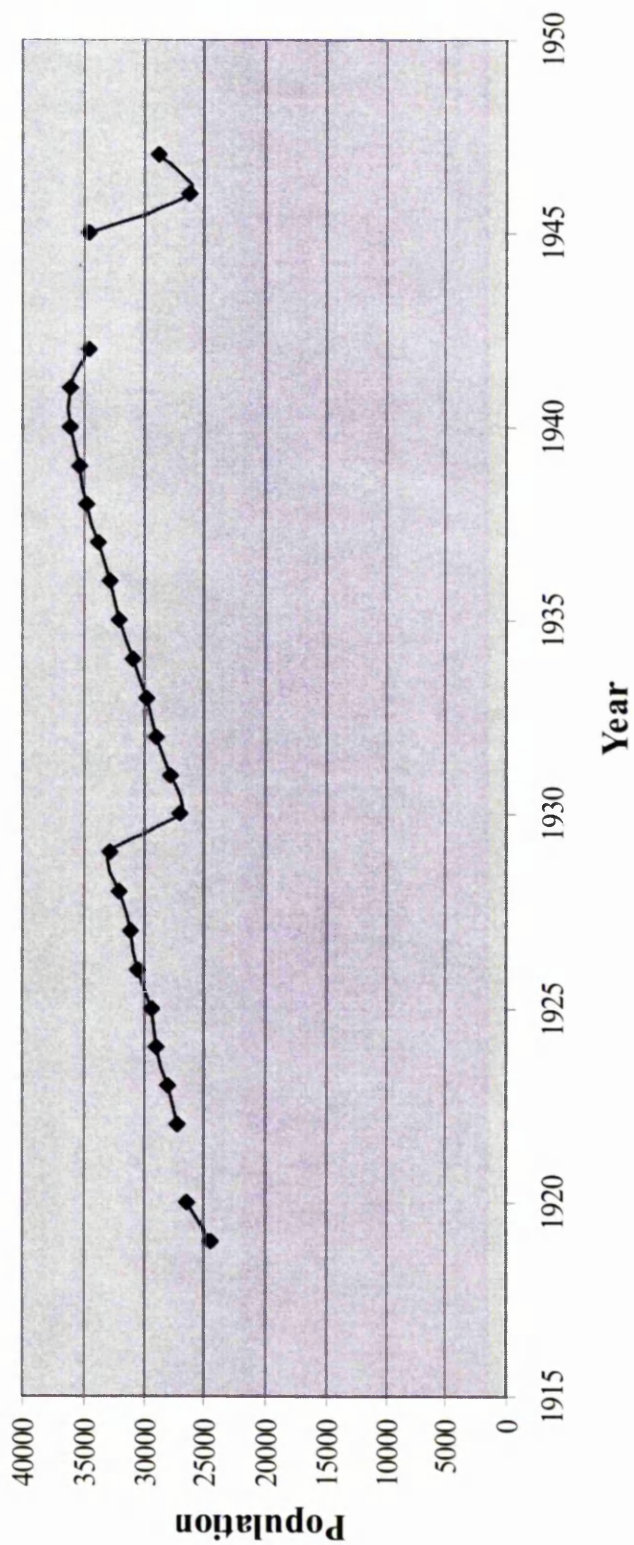
Catholic Population in the Mission of Siam, 1917-47^{*}

Year	Catholic Population
1917	
1918	
1919	24400
1920	26462
1921	
1922	27260
1923	27931
1924	28847
1925	29405
1926	30457
1927	31080
1928	31950
1929 [¶]	32800
1930	26900
1931	27811
1932	29025
1933	29709
1934	30913
1935	32103
1936	32910
1937	33801
1938	34729
1939	35269
1940	36127
1941	36127
1942	34500
1943	
1944	
1945	34500
1946	26132
1947	28783

^{*} Source: B.A.A., 10 May 1919, 62/2/44, 31 July 1920, 107/2/3, 31 July 1922, 62/3/34, 31 July 1923, 62/3/44, 1 August 1924, 62/3/63, 31 July 1925, 62/4/7, 31 July 1926, 64/1/3, 31 July 1927, 64/1/32, 31 July 1928, 64/4/46, 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19, and M.E.P.A., Compte-rendu, 1940-48.

[¶] Reports for the years 1929, 1931, 1941, and 1945 were missing, therefore the "Previous year's population statistics" of the following years' reports were used instead. Thus, statistics for 1929 can be found in the 1930 report, and so on.

Catholic Population in the Mission of Siam, 1917-47



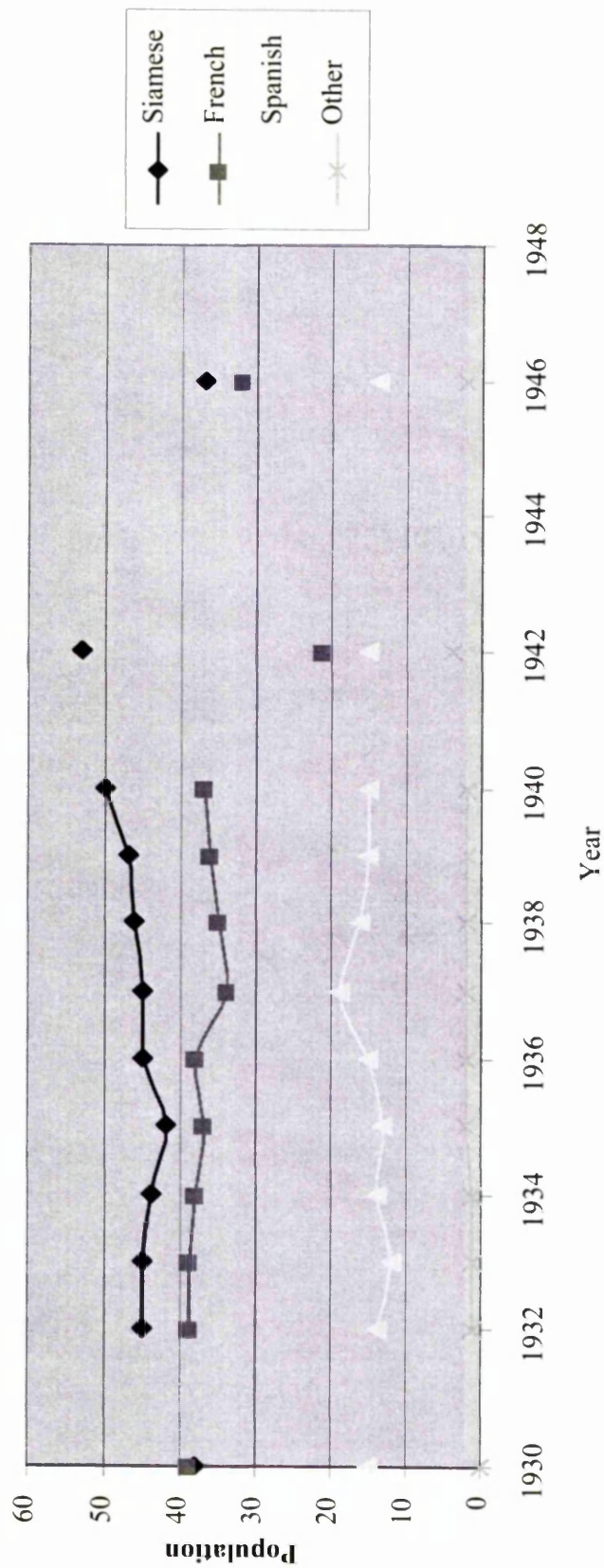
Appendix D

Population of Priests in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-46*

Year	Siamese	French	Spanish	Other	Total
1930	38	39	15	0	92
1931					
1932	45	39	14	1	99
1933	45	39	12	1	97
1934	44	38	14	1	97
1935	42	37	13	2	94
1936	45	38	15	2	100
1937	45	34	19	2	100
1938	46	35	16	2	99
1939	47	36	15	2	100
1940	50	37	15	2	104
1941					
1942	53	21	15	4	93
1943					
1944					
1945					
1946	37	32	14	2	85

* Source: B.A.A., 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

Population of Priests in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-46



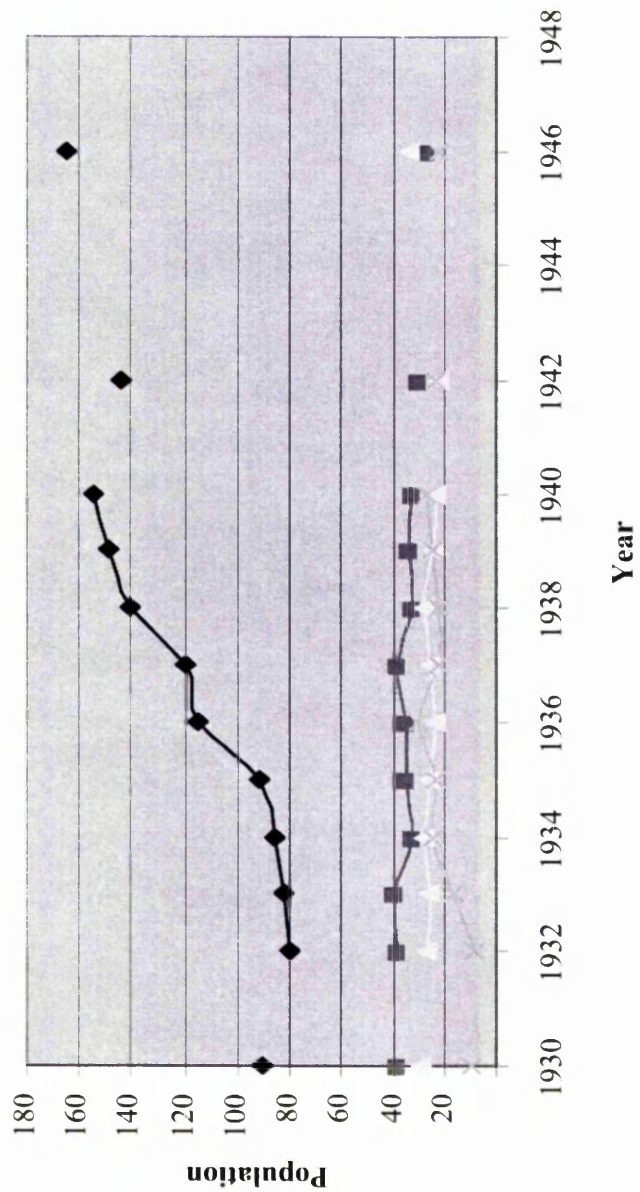
Appendix E

Population of Nuns in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-46*

Year	Siamese	French	Other Asian	Other European	Total
1930	91	38	29	9	167
1931					
1932	80	38	27	8	153
1933	83	40	26	16	165
1934	86	32	28	24	170
1935	92	35	26	23	176
1936	115	35	23	30	203
1937	120	38	26	22	206
1938	141	33	28	22	224
1939	149	34	24	24	231
1940	154	32	23	27	236
1941					
1942	144	30	22	23	219
1943					
1944					
1945					
1946	165	27	34	22	248

* Source: B.A.A., 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

Population of Nuns in the Mission of Siam by Nationality, 1930-46



Appendix F

Mission of Siam Social Works, 1922-30*

Hospitals

Year	Number	Male patients	Female patients	Total
1922	5	49	24	73
1923	4	49	24	73
1924	4	60	35	95
1925	4	162	56	218
1926				
1927	4	148	77	225
1928	4	145	60	205
1929				
1930	4			

Foundling Hospital

Year	Number	Adopted by guardians	Adopted by Christians	Total
1922	7	37	139	176
1923	7	31	210	241
1924	4	23	154	177
1925	4	19	179	198
1926				
1927	4	12	188	200
1928	4	18	157	175
1929				
1930				

* Source: B.A.A., 31 July 1922, 62/3/34, 31 July 1923, 62/3/44, 1 August 1924, 62/3/63, 31 July 1925, 62/4/7, 31 July 1927, 64/1/32, 31 July 1928, 62/4/46.

Appendix G

Mission of Siam Social Works (1930-46)*

Hospitals

Year	Number	Beds
1930	4	40
1931		
1932	4	40
1933	4	40
1934	4	40
1935	4	40
1936	4	40
1937	4	40
1938	4	40
1939	4	40
1940	4	40
1941		
1942	4	40
1943		
1944		
1945		
1946	4	100

Nursing Homes

Year	Number	Residents
1930	1	8
1931		
1932	1	20
1933	1	16
1934	1	17
1935	1	12
1936	1	8
1937	1	9
1938	1	8
1939	1	10
1940	1	10
1941		
1942	1	8
1943		
1944		
1945		
1946	1	6

* Source: B.A.A., 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

Pharmacies, 1922-46*

Year	Number	Consultations
1922	5	54
1923	2	133
1924	1	126
1925	1	402
1926		
1927	1	385
1928	1	365
1929	1	316
1930	1	970
1931		
1932	1	1280
1933	1	1344
1934	1	900
1935	1	1500
1936	1	1850
1937	1	1925
1938	1	2325
1939	1	2410
1940	1	3510
1941		
1942	1	3200
1943		
1944		
1945		
1946	1	3800

* Source: B.A.A., 31 July 1922, 62/3/34, 31 July 1923, 62/3/44, 1 August 1924, 62/3/63, 31 July 1925, 62/4/7, 31 July 1927, 64/1/32, 1929, 110/2/12, 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

Orphanages, 1922-46*

Year	Number	Male	Female	Total
1922	24	231	442	673
1923	24	276	411	687
1924	24	232	394	626
1925	24	242	409	651
1926				
1927	24	187	369	456
1928	24	165	327	492
1929				
1930	17	176	238	414
1931				
1932	12	191	356	547
1933	12	203	329	532
1934	12	183	316	499
1935	12	154	291	445
1936	12	163	280	443
1937	12	180	352	532
1938	12	157	371	528
1939	12	179	293	472
1940	12	157	252	409
1941				
1942	12	63	116	179
1943				
1944				
1945				
1946	7	46	87	133

* Source: B.A.A., 31 July 1922, 62/3/34, 31 July 1923, 62/3/44, 1 August 1924, 62/3/63, 31 July 1925, 62/4/7, 31 July 1927, 64/1/32, 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

Appendix H

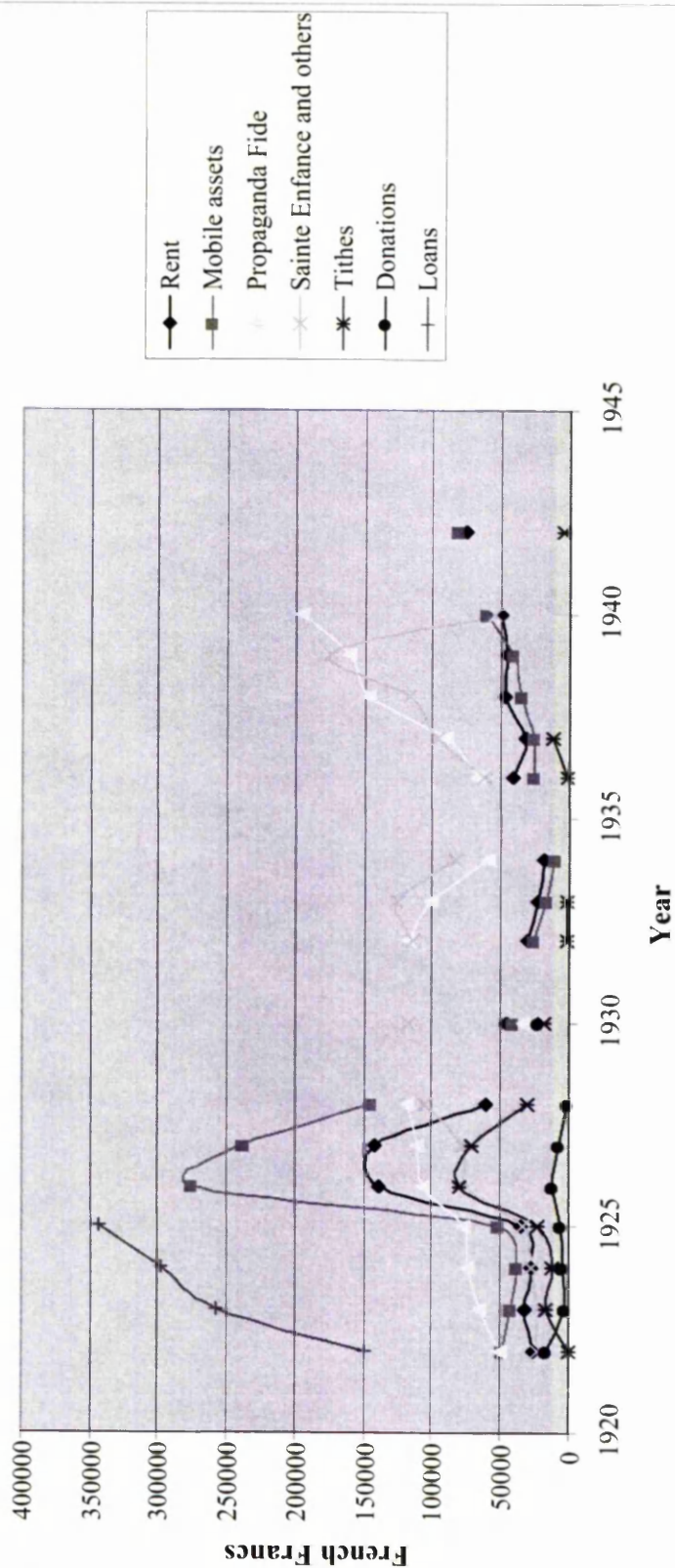
Mission of Siam Income (French Francs), 1922-47*

Year	Rent	Mobile assets [†]	Propaganda Fide	Sainte Enfance and other institutions	Tithes	Donations	Loans	Total
1922	25200	48076	49100	23000	412	15747.5	150000	311535.5
1923	30600	42443	63450	23000	16651	3031	256392	435567
1924	26880	36797	73400	27000	11400	4944	297060	477481
1925	33950	50008	76300	33000	21881	6556.4	343000	564695.4
1926	138200	275000	105400	73600	78500	11475	0	682175
1927	142000	237000	111000	76600	70500	8000	0	645100
1928	60000	145000	118000	104000	30000	2000	0	459000
1929								
1930	45000	40000	32357.26	117000	18000	22000	0	274357.26
1931								
1932	30000	25000	116883	113000	1940	0	0	286823
1933	22000	16000	100000	125000	1180	0	0	264180
1934	18000	10000	58710	82000	0	0	0	168710
1935								
1936	40000	25000	65000	60500	2000	0	0	192500
1937	32000	25000	89000	96000	11446	0	0	253446
1938	47000	35000	147000	116250	0	0	0	345250
1939	45000	40000	160500	175000	0	0	0	420500
1940	50000	60000	195000	53500	0	0	0	358500
1941								
1942	75000	80000			4107			159107
1943								
1944								
1945								
1946	60000	45000	1644000	45000				1794000
1947								

* Source: B.A.A., 31 July 1922, 62/3/34, 31 July 1923, 62/3/44, 1 August 1924, 62/3/63, 31 July 1925, 62/4/7, 31 July 1926, 64/1/3, 31 July 1927, 64/1/32, 31 July 1928, 64/4/46, 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

[†] Includes income from industry and business investments.

Mission of Siam Income, 1922-42



Appendix I

Mission of Siam Expenditure (French Francs), 1922-30*

Year	Missionary Living costs	Seminary	Schools	Catechumen	Travel	Tax	Maintenance	New buildings	Interest repayment	Other	Total
1922	43530	33610	50739	0	8400	2530	4000	0	16934	6500	166243
1923	51320	25828	47762	26460	5096	2310	3000	0	13899	8770	184445
1924	51320	24125	44392	24336	0	2310	0	0	14160	8400	169043
1925	55840	37690	60425	34160	0	2345	0	0	19124	1950	211534
1926	165800	140000	62500	0	17000	6000	25000	125000	0	40000	581300
1927	180000	150000	70000	0	23000	8000	30000	40000	0	40000	541000
1928	200000	160000	95000	0	26000	8000	35000	48000	0	50000	622000
1929											
1930	200000	145000	100000	0	18000	8000	10000	50000	0	40000	571000

* Source: B.A.A., 31 July 1922, 62/3/34, 31 July 1923, 62/3/44, 1 August 1924, 62/3/63, 31 July 1925, 62/4/7, 31 July 1926, 64/1/3, 31 July 1927, 64/1/32, 31 July 1928, 64/4/46, 30 June 1930, 64/1/7.

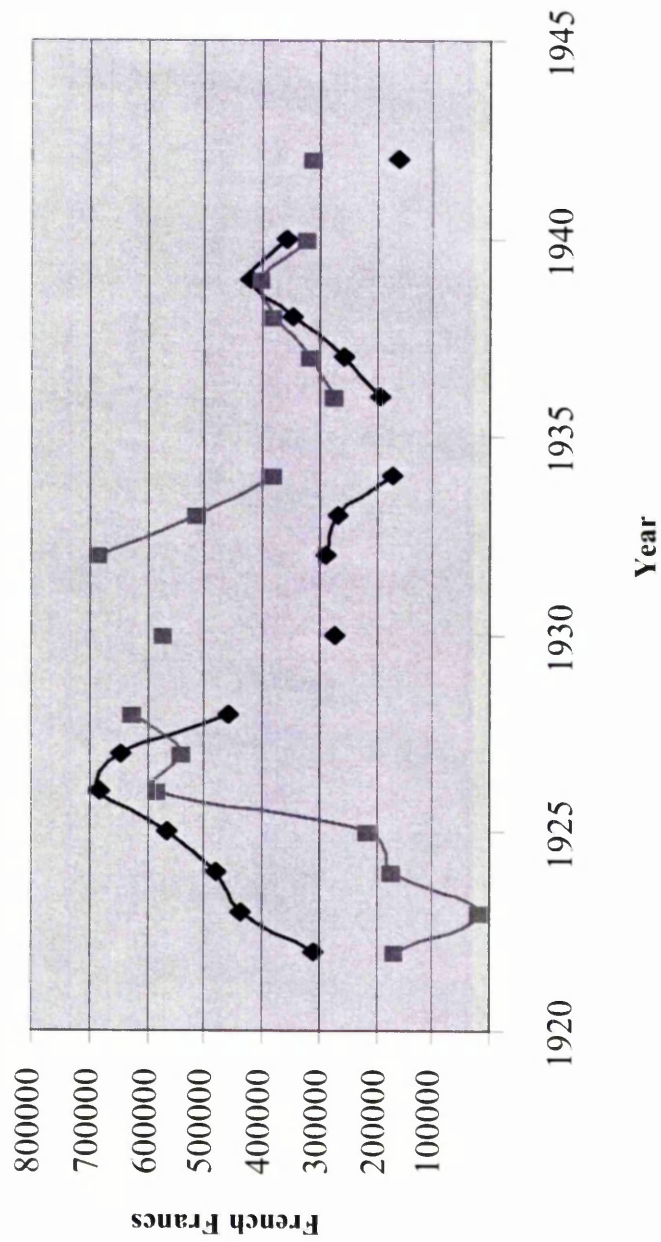
Mission of Siam Expenditure (French Francs), 1930-46*

Year	Missionary Living costs	Seminary	Schools	Catechumen [†]	Travel	Tax	Maintenance	New buildings	Interest repayment	Other	Total
1930	200000	145000	100000	0	18000	8000	10000	50000	0	40000	571000
1931											
1932	250000	130000	120000	0	15000	8000	60000	87800	12200	0	683000
1933	260000	110000	100000	0	15000	5000	14560	0	8160	0	512720
1934	230000	80000	60000	0	6000	3000	0	0	0	0	379000
1935											
1936	150000	70000	20000	0	30000	4200	0	0	0	0	274200
1937	170000	90000	40000	0	8000	4200	0	0	0	0	312200
1938	190000	130000	30000	0	24000	4500	0	0	0	0	378500
1939	210000	120000	53000	0	15000	4500	0	0	0	0	402500
1940	175000	110000	17000	0	12000	4500	0	0	0	0	318500
1941											
1942	140000	140000	12000	0	20000	0	0	0	0	0	312000
1943											
1944											
1945											
1946	800000	320000	28000	0	149760	0	0	0	0	195000	1492760

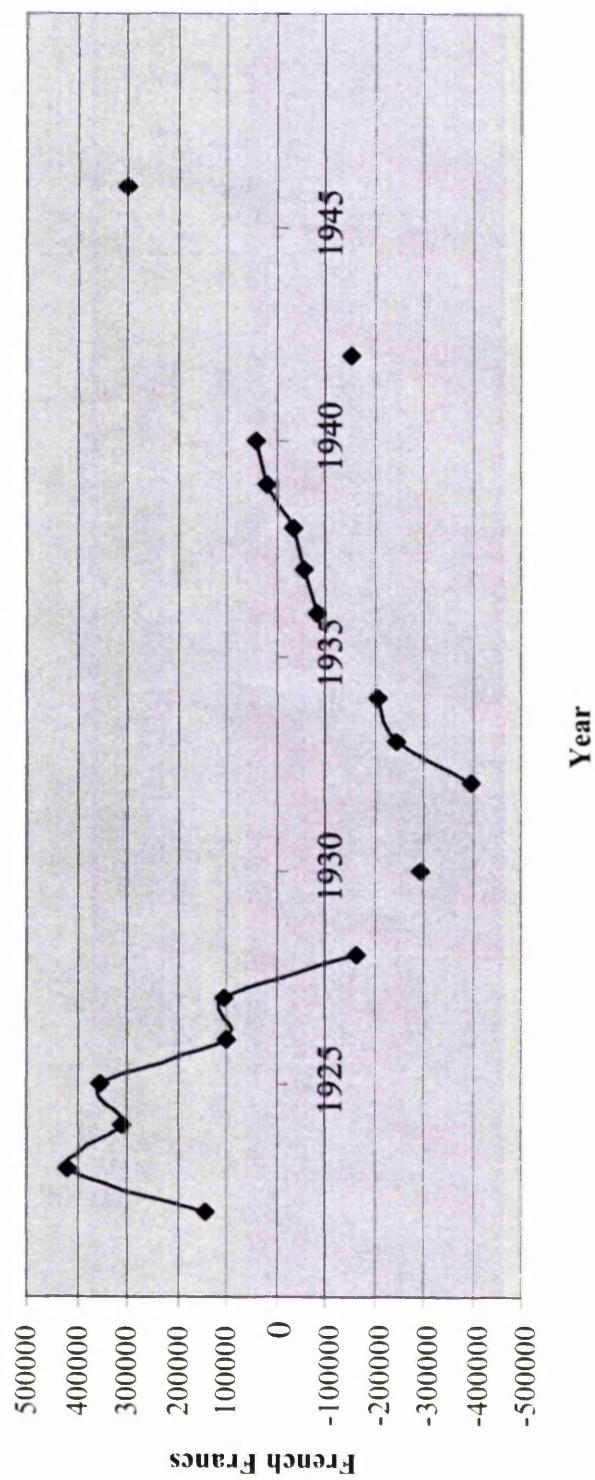
* Source: B.A.A., 30 June 1930, 64/1/7, 30 June 1932, 64/1/15, 30 June 1933, 64/1/17, 30 June 1934, 64/1/23, 30 June 1935, 64/1/26, 30 June 1936, 64/2/2, 30 June 1937, 64/2/7, 30 June 1938, 64/2/10, 30 June 1939, 64/2/13, 30 June 1940, 64/2/16, 30 June 1942, 64/2/18, 30 June 1946, 64/2/19.

[†] Series not included in chart.

Mission of Siam Total Income/Expenditure, 1922-42



Mission of Siam Surplus/Deficit, 1922-46



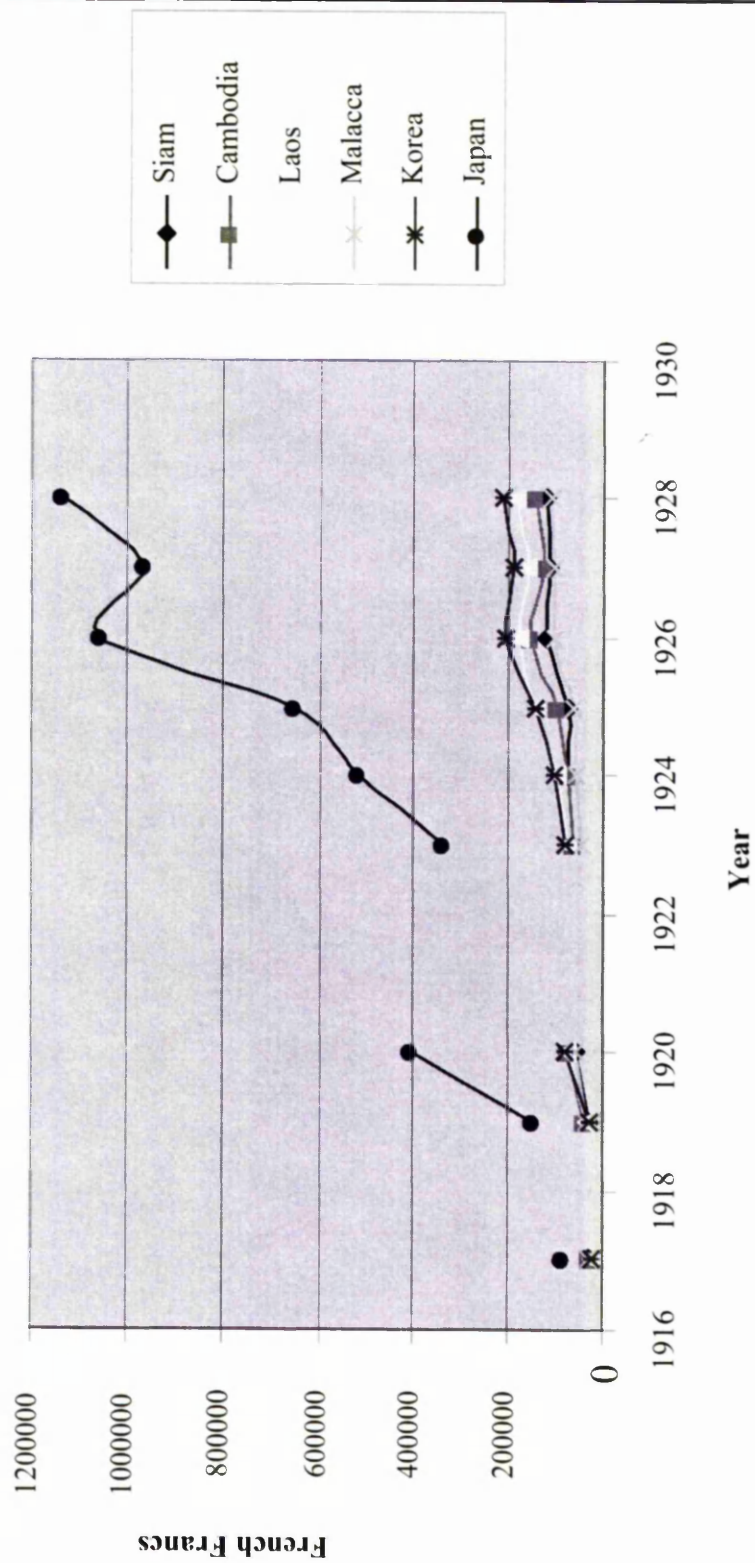
Appendix J

Propaganda Fide Subsidies by Country/Territory (French Francs), 1917-28*

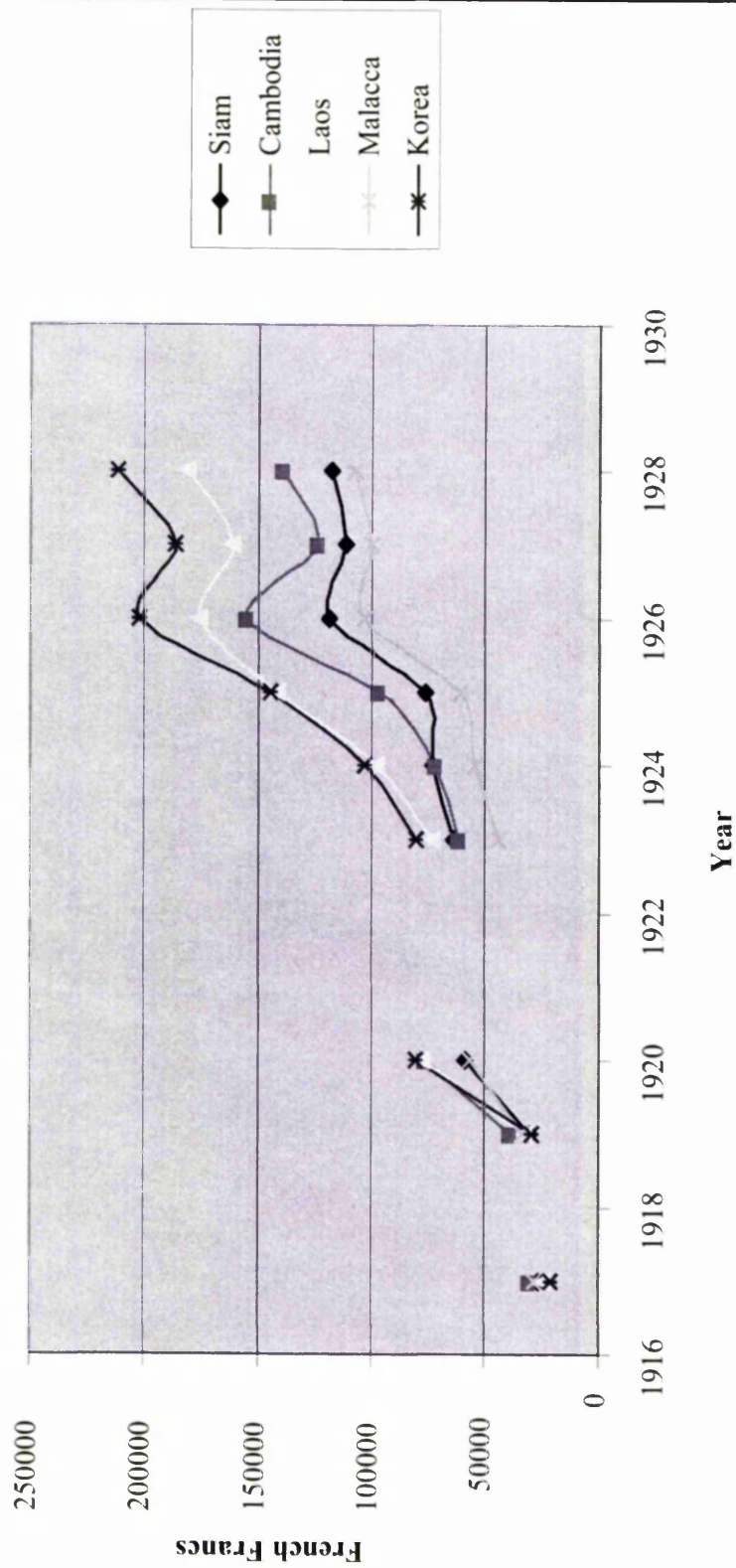
Year	Siam	Cambodia	Laos	Malacca	Korea	Japan
1917	25740	30360	23760	27720	21220	84480
1918						
1919	30720	38740	32240	33000	29440	150100
1920	58800	75800	76700	55800	79900	402400
1921						
1922						
1923	63450	61350	73300	43600	80600	337400
1924	73400	72100	98300	54200	103200	518650
1925	76300	96500	141400	60600	144900	654000
1926	119000	155000	176000	103000	202000	1058000
1927	111000	124000	161000	100000	186000	967000
1928	118000	140000	181000	107000	211000	1135000

* Source: B.A.A., 13 July 1917, 107/4/10, 24 July 1919, 107/4/34, 9 July 1920, 107/5/8, 22 June 1923, 107/5/23, 8 June 1924, 107/5/29, 9 June 1925, 107/5/35, 19 May 1926, 107/5/50, 13 June 1927, 107/6/7, 3 June 1928, 107/6/13.

**Propaganda Fide Subsidies by Country/Territory (including Japan),
1917-28**



**Propaganda Fide Subsidies by Country/Territory (excluding Japan),
1917-28**

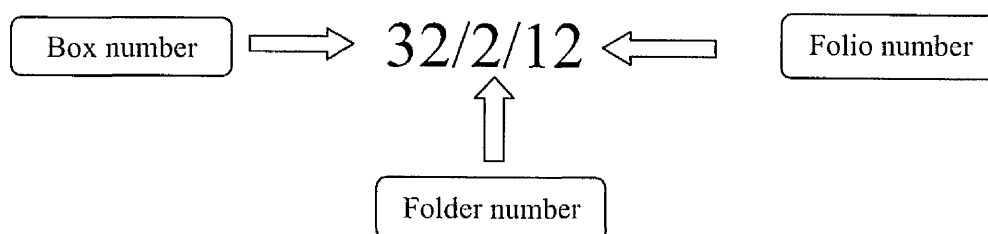


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The archive is well-organised and the documents there range from the Ayutthaya period to the end of the Vicariate of Vicar-Apostolic Chorin – the last before the establishment of a local hierarchy. All of the documents are arranged by parish location, subject matter, and date, and are referenced in a similar, straightforward manner:



The exceptions are the beatification documents of Fr. Nicholas Kitbamrung and Fr. Larqué's report. These are not part of the indexed system, but are available to readers on request.

It is anticipated that in the near future some, if not all, of the documents in the archives will be made accessible on-line. However, for access to the actual documents, visitors will need the permission of the Archbishop of Bangkok (currently Archbishop Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij) or his secretary.

Sakon Nakhon Mission Archives (S.N.M.A.), Sakon Nakhon, Thailand

The beatification documents for the Seven Martyrs were sent here after the completion of the ceremony. However at the time of writing, they and the relics kept with them, have not been formally organised and catalogued. Indeed, prior to this research, the documents and relics had been presumed lost for some time. It is anticipated that this collection will be properly organised in the near future. For now, access can be obtained through contact with the local archbishop (currently the Most Rev. Louis Chamnien Santisukniran) or the Mission secretary, Fr. Prayoon Pongpit.

Missions Etrangères de Paris Archives (M.E.P.A.), Paris, France

The annual reports (*compte-rendu*), are bound, each book covering a two-year period, with the exception of the years 1940-47, which are collected in one book and, in the case of Thailand, only contains the report from the year 1947. Each book contains the reports from every M.E.P. Mission in the world and is well-indexed.

Documents other than the annual reports, such as letters, have been arranged by country, year, and volume and are accessible on microfilm. For access to the

actual archive, visitors will need to contact either the Director of the Archives, Fr. Gérard Moussay, or his assistant Ms. Brigitte Appavou.

In addition, further information on the archives as well as individual biographies and obituaries of M.E.P. priests are available in a searchable on-line database at:

<http://archivesmep.mepasie.net/recherche/index.php>

The Collection of Fr. Bruno Arens (O.M.I.), C.B.A.

The private collection of Fr. Bruno Arens, a priest of the Missionary Oblates of Mary the Immaculate (O.M.I.), consists of copies of Thai state papers from the Thai National Archives, as well as copies of documents from the Bangkok Archdiocese Archives. Currently Fr. Bruno is the director of the O.M.I.'s Good Shepherd Hmong Centre in Lomsak, Nakhon Sawan Province.

Given the difficulty that may be encountered in accessing this source, it is suggested that researchers apply themselves directly to B.A.A. or the Thai National Archives, where the original documents cited by the thesis from this collection can also be accessed.

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