

CHURCH ARCHIVES IN HONG KONG

Friday, March 25, 1994

**THE ARCHIVES OF PROPAGANDA FIDE IN ROME
CONCERNING THE HONG KONG CHURCH FROM 1841**

LOUIS HA



CENTRE OF ASIAN STUDIES, THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG.

THE ARCHIVES OF PROPAGANDA FIDE (AP) IN ROME CONCERNING THE HONG KONG CHURCH FROM 1841

- Louis Ha

The Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide in Rome are situated in the Propaganda Fide Building at Piazza Spagna in Rome. The historical documents of over three hundred years are open for researchers of higher degrees. Please read the appendix of this article for the "Rules governing the use of the archives" of AP.

The Congregation of Propaganda Fide is established in 1622 as the central and supreme body responsible for the spread of the Catholic faith. Its twofold purpose is to achieve union with the Protestant and Orthodox Churches and to promote and organize missions among the pagans.

From the very beginning, the documents of the congregation are jealously kept in Rome under the supervision of competent persons. During the French occupation Napoleon had the entire Archives transferred to France but after his downfall the archives were brought back to Rome. A number of precious volumes were therefore lost and have never been rediscovered. Some were found in Vienna and were restored to the congregation in 1925.

Free access to documents in Vatican Archives by scholars is now an established policy. It was not so before. However, as early as 1822 a young Protestant scholar was allowed to copy documents in the registers of Pope Honorius III (1216-1227). According to Owen Chadwick, the author of the book "Catholicism and history", the three most important moments in the history of history are the disclosure of three groups of Vatican documents: namely the records of Galileo's trial (1633), the minutes of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the letters to and from Borgia, Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503).

In 1883, Pope Leo XIII ordered to let scholars consult freely Vatican documents up to 1815, yet he withheld the permission to consult the Borgia documents. A complete openness took place only in 1921 when all the letters of Borgia were open to public. Today by the Papal order of 1985 Vatican archives up to 1922, the end of the papacy of Benedict XV, are available for consultation. Further extension in the future depends entirely on the will of the incumbent Pope. According to tradition, the next extension of consultation period will be up to at least 1939, the end of the papacy of Pope Pius XI.

Documents collected by the AP open to public are arranged by two different systems: one before 1893 and the other after.

Collections from 1622 to 1892 are arranged in the following nine basic sections:

1. Acta: the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Cardinals and other members of the Congregation.
2. SOCG: the original documents referred to in the general meetings.
3. CP: papers of special commissions which include also the special commission on questions of China and the East Indies (Acta CP) and the original documents from the special commission on the Indies and China (SOCP).
4. SC: documents referred to in the weekly meetings.
5. Audiences with the Holy Father.
6. Briefs and bulls.
7. Instructions.
8. Decrees.
9. Letters.

Other than the above sections, there are 10 lesser collections in smaller quantity yet not less important. The one specially related to Hong Kong is the "Archives of the Procure of the Congregation in the Far East".

In 1705 the Papal Legate, Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon, established in Canton a Procure for the missions in China. At first the duties of the procurator were mainly to administer the properties of the congregation and to make the subsidies available to the missions. Later on the procurator became the trusted representative of the congregation for all the missions of the Far East and occupied a central position in missionary strategies. From 1841 onwards, the procure was moved to Hong Kong and was attached to the prefect or the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong. With the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation in China in 1922, and the subsequent death of the then procurator in the following year, the duties of the Procurator were assumed by the Apostolic Delegate. Unfortunately, most of the documents of the procure archives are in deplorable condition and cannot be consulted yet.

In 1893 a new system was adopted in arranging the collections. Protocol numbers and Code numbers are used. First of all, each document receives a Protocol number according to the order in which it is received. At the same time it also receives a code number (Rubrica) according to its content. The code numbers 1 to 62 stand for the subjects while the numbers 101 to 126 the geographical division. The Documents are then bound according to the succession of Code numbers

under the division NS (New Series).

In the consultation room, there are 136 volumes of indexes of three inches thick. Of which 45 are on Letters, 28 on Audiences and 10 on documents referred to on weekly meetings (SC). All indexes are written by hand. Fortunately the computerization of the indexes is now in process.

Documents in AP concerning Hong Kong are abundant. Last year, I have spent three weeks, six days a week, thumbing over the pages of the indexes copying only those concerning Hong Kong till 1900. Over one thousand titles were copied, some with a summary of the content in Italian. A copy of the list in 35 pages will be passed around for your reference. The list is far from being comprehensive. I intend to visit Rome again in the coming May to complete the work. Very probably, microfilmed copies of documents concerning the Hong Kong mission will be brought back to our Diocesan archives. You are welcome to consult them when available.

Documents are mainly related to persons in charge of the mission during that time: Joset, Feliciani, Ambrosi, Raimondi with the exception of Forcade.

Theodore Joset (1841-42) was the pioneer to establish the Catholic mission in Hong Kong, who experienced the expulsion from Macao by the Portuguese authorities. Documents from AP testify on this incident.

Documents related to Anthony Feliciani (1842-47, 50-55), who was in charge of the mission on a temporary basis for ten years, show the deliberation and hesitation of Propaganda on the choice of a missionary group to take charge of Hong Kong. Feliciani also re-established a working relationship with Macao and started to petition Papal decorations for persons deserving recognition. One document shows that Feliciani encountered the problem of taking the oath of loyalty to the British Government (1852) and asked for advise from Rome.

Augustine Forcade (1847-50), a French missionary for Japan, was put in charge of the mission in Hong Kong. He brought in help from the French missionary society of Paris and the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres. Mysteriously no correspondence was found related to him. Only four documents concerning his appointment and resignation were indicated in the index.

A lot of the documents related to the Italian diocesan priest Louis Ambrosi (1855-67) are dealing with the conflict between the St Paul Sisters and the "Italian" mission. Ambrosi also invited the Canossian Sisters to Hong Kong and made proposals to Rome for the choice of missionary group which would take charge of the Hong Kong mission.

During the period of Timoleon Raimondi (1867-1894), the documents show that

main consolidation work was done and development of the mission was in full swing. So much so that in 1874 the Hong Kong Catholic mission was erected by Rome as a vicariate Apostolic with more autonomy from the procure of the congregation. This also signifies that Rome has made its definite decision on choosing the Italian missionaries of Milan to be in charge of Hong Kong mission. The subsequent question was whether to maintain the procure of Propaganda Fide in Hong Kong. It was solved by assigning another person as the procurator of Propaganda starting from 1874.

The Roman documents also testify to the dispute with the Colonial Government on wedding registration (1875) and on religious teaching in Catholic schools (1877). During Raimondi's period the publications "HK Catholic Register" was launched in 1877 and the synod of missionary bishops held in 1880. The selling of procure properties without prior authorization occurred in 1881. This means that the line drawn between the mission and the procure was not clear enough. Finally there was the master piece of Raimondi for the mission in having the Cathedral built (1883-88).

Some letters in Latin from Chinese priests are preserved in the AP, so are some letters to Propaganda in Chinese by the Catholics. Communications from the mission to Rome took some three to four months. Yet sometimes questions were asked on very minute details of the Church life such as whether the colour of the vestment of the deacon and subdeacon should be the same with the celebrating priest for high Mass or whether Catholics from Macao residing in Hong Kong should observe the fast and abstinence according to the custom in Macao. These all show a different mentality of the last century from us, but they also show the close link between Rome and the mission.

* * *

Bibliography:

Owen Chadwick: Catholicism and history: the opening of the Vatican archives, Cambridge University Press, 1978.

N. Kowalsky - J. Metzler: Inventory of the Historical Archives of the congregation for the evangelization of Peoples or "Propaganda Fide", Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Rome, 1988.

N. Kowalsky: L'Archivio della Sacra Congregazione "de Propaganda Fide" de i suoi Archivisti (Roma, 1964) in Annales 1963-64, Pont. Universitas Urbaniana, Roe, 1964, 38-53.

J. Metzler: Das Archiv der Missionsprokur der Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in Canton, Macao und Hong Kong. In "La conoscenza dell'Asia e dell'Africa in Italia nei secoli XVIII e XIX. Vol. II, Napoli 1985, 75-139.

J. Metzler: Indici dell'Archivio storico della S. C. de Propaganda Fide. In Eunte Docete 21, Pont. Univ. Urbaniana, (Rome 1968) 109-130.

J. Metzler: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum. 350 Years in the Service of the Missions. Vols I/1, I/2, II, III/1, III/2 (Freiburg 1971-1976)

Appendix.

II.

RULES GOVERNING THE USE OF THE ARCHIVES

1. The Archives of the Congregation are private and therefore they are not open to the public. To have access to the documents therein, one has to obtain a special permission by writing an application for admission to His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect

2. In the request for admission, the applicant must specify the subject and the purpose for the research he or she desires to make in the Archives. The letter must indicate in particular, his or her full name, profession or title, permanent address and the address in Rome; it must also be accompanied by a letter of recommendation of an institute of sciences or any person of authority. However, every permission granted expires on the 1st of August when the Archives are closed for the summer holidays, but is renewable every time the scholar wishes to return to the Archives for further research.

3. The study hall of the Archives is open from 9.00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. every day from Monday through Saturday.

4. The Archives are closed in the months of August and September and on all feastdays and holidays observed in the offices of the Congregation.

5. The consultation of the documents is allowed up to 1922.

6. To order the volumes the applicant has to fill in the forms provided for this purpose.

7. Only three volumes at a time may be ordered.

8. The volumes of the Archives must be treated with the most diligent care; therefore, it is absolutely prohibited:

a) to apply Scotch tape or paste even thin or transparent paper on the documents;

b) to lay any weighty material, paper or notebook, on the volumes while writing;

c) to make any corrections, write or make notations on the documents.

Furthermore, all are requested to abide by the following recommendations:

a) never to transfer the materials in the Archives to the Library or vice versa;

b) to observe absolute silence in the vicinity of the Archives study hall; if it is necessary to speak with the personnel on the subject of study, communication must be done as briefly as possible and in low tones;

c) to point out to the personnel of the Archives, any volumes in need of restoration or binding, damaged documents or loose pages, etc.

9. The permission obtained to consult the documents in the Archives, ipso facto, includes permission to order microfilms of the same.

10. Microfilms of entire volumes or considerable parts of them may not be ordered without special permission.

11. In ordering microfilms, one must fill in the blank forms provided for this purpose.

12. Photographing the documents is absolutely forbidden.

13. A «Nulla Osta» from the Congregation for the Evan-

gelization of Peoples is required for the right to publish the documents.

14. Those who have made use of the documents of the Archives are kindly requested to send two copies of their publication to the Congregation.

15. The Archivist of the Congregation is held responsible for the faithful and strict observance of all the particulars of these Rules.

16. Nonobservance of the norms herein described may cause permission given to make research in the Archives of the Congregation to be withdrawn.

Sgd. Agnelo Card. Rossi, Pref.
† D. S. Lourdasamy, Sec.