

Extract from a letter from M. de Govéa, bishop of Peking, dated July 23, 1801.

In 1800, there was a violent persecution against Christianity in Korea. Some thirty people were martyred. Frightened by the large number of Christians, the Korean court urged the regent to order a general search for all Christians, and the complete extinction of the religion of Jesus Christ. This princess issued a cruel edict. Several hundred of the faithful were arrested and taken to court. Mr. Jacques Velloz, who had entered Korea in 1794, was among them. He had been betrayed by an officer who, pretending to be converted, asked to be baptized. Brought before the courts, he was asked his name, his homeland, who had introduced him, etc. Mr. Velloz gave no answer. Mr. Velloz didn't answer a word of the questions, the clarification of which could have been prejudicial to religion and Christians. However cruelly his judges tormented him, he remained firm in his confession of faith. He had the courage to preach to his judges, and never ceased to exhort the neophytes, his fellow prisoners, to remain steadfast in their faith in Jesus Christ. In the interrogations they were made to undergo, they referred to the answers of the missionary, whose faith they wished to imitate and whose fate they wished to undergo.

Because of its importance, the case was referred to the queen. One of the king's four ministers dared to plead, in her presence, in favor of the Christian religion. The diversity of opinion among the ministers caused much unrest in the palace. Finally, a sentence was passed against the Christian religion and its followers. The minister defending the religion, who was probably a hidden Christian, a neophyte from the royal city, and other leading mandarins, were hanged in private, with a silk cord. The missionary and twenty or so of the principal Christians had their heads cut off; another died in torment, and many of the common Christians were exiled.

This happened in April 1801. But the persecution did not cease, and the fervor of the neophytes did not slow down. In October, they sent a Christian to bring me letters recounting the persecution, and to ask for a priest. But when he reached the frontier, he was taken by the governors and sent to the court. He remained steadfast in his faith, and had his head cut off along with two other Christians who accompanied him. Letters were found sewn into his clothes, providing details of the Korean church.

The King of Korea wrote to the Emperor of China. He described the Christians as rebels whose aim was to change the religion of Confucius and introduce a European one. He asserted that this religion had entered Korea through the channel of the Europeans in Peking. Finally, he assured us that one hundred European ships were coming to take over Korea, and asked the emperor to come to his aid if they did. The emperor, by a very special Providence, replied to the king that the Europeans of Peking were incapable of forming any plot against Korea; that, in the nearly two hundred years that there had been Europeans in Peking, they had never done anything reprehensible: he persuaded him not to believe the words of people already dead, and recommended that he have his governors guard his borders well. We only know these details from a letter from the King of Korea, published in the Peking Gazette, with the Emperor's reply.

No neophytes came from Korea with this year's embassy. We also learned something from the gentiles. We cannot sufficiently admire the merciful conduct of Providence over the Church of China. If the emperor had taken the Korean king's letter differently, there would have been cruel persecution in China, and especially in Peking.