

OBLATES ALONG THE MEKONG

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OBLATE
HERITAGE

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by
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OBLATES ALONG THE MEKONG

The Northern Laos Mission, entrusted to the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate from 1935 to 1975, has undergone a stormy history similar to the entire country. Laos indeed, was long involved in war, beginning with the Second World War, and was not to be free from it until 1975. There was the Japanese war, the Indo-China war, the French war and the American war, lasting for almost forty years, with the entire country a prey to the harsh struggles of factions aggravated by the uncontrollable forces of the geo-political world.

The Country

A country deprived of a maritime outlet, wedged between China in the North, Vietnam in the East, Cambodia in the South and the Kingdom of Siam in the West, it was thanks only to the French protectorate at the end of the last century that it did not to fall under the boot of its enterprising neighbours to the East and West. The Second World War gave it paradoxically, with a rather artificial unity, an independence which it used badly finishing eventually under the yoke of triumphant communism in 1975.

Laos consisted of a medley of people, among whom the Lao people dominated. Its population, which in the middle of the century had only three million inhabitants, had no real unity, be it ethnic, political, cultural or religious. The principal link between the provinces of the North and those of the South, more than one thousand kilometres apart, is the Mekong river. The Laos people settled on the banks of this majestic river and in the low valleys of its tributaries. The Laotian peasant built his house there on piles and cultivated "sticky" rice in flooded rice-fields. It was also along the river that the most important towns were built: Louang-Prabang, the royal capital which guards the Prabang, the statuette of Buddha, the royal palladium; Vientiane, the principal city, the administrative capital; further to the South still, Savannakhet and Paksé. The indigenous people lived in the mountains of the North and

on the high plateaux of the South. In the North, there were various Sino-Tibetan tribes who moved South as they felled trees for their traditional culture of stubble-burning for rice, maize. The principal source of revenue was opium poppy. Each tribe had its own language, only a few knowing enough Laotian for commerce and somewhat loose relations with the authorities.



The Popular Democratic Republic of Laos

From the religious point of view, the Laotians are Buddhists. The former village society was built around the temple and the community of monks, but the mountain populations remain attached to their traditional beliefs and do not easily accept the setting up of a temple in their village. Even as the Laotian religion is still strongly impregnated with old beliefs and practices that Buddhism

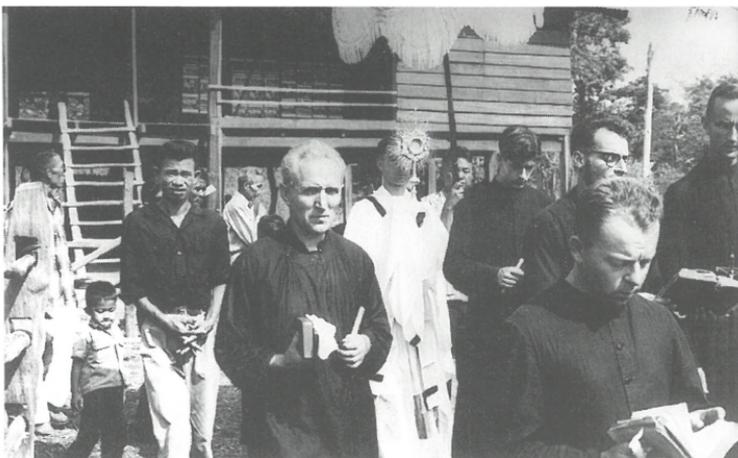
was wary of destroying, it is still true that Buddhism is the national religion, at least up to the fall of the monarchy. The motto, constantly repeated at school as in political discourses, states: “*One nation, one religion, one King*”.

The belated evangelization of the country is explained on the one hand by its distance, difficulty of access, climatic and cultural conditions, and also on the other hand by the general history of the Missions. There were indeed attempts of evangelization from the XVII century - from Siam at a period when the two banks of the Mekong were still Laotian, from Cambodia going upriver or from Tonkin. One of these attempts permitted a Italian Jesuit, Father de Leria, to stay five years between 1642 and 1647, but without success, under the reign of King Soulinavongsa, the Laotian Sun-King. The Fathers of the Foreign Missions from Paris, who worked in Siam from 1662, also sent out missionaries to this country which was in their jurisdiction, but again the effort was a failure. Then came the suppression of the Jesuits, and the years of the French Revolution, which were bad times for the Missions.

It was only with the great missionary surge in the second half of the XIX century that a serious effort of evangelization could be started. It was after 1880 that missionaries succeeded in setting foot in the country. Leaving Bangkok and reaching Mekong, the Fathers of Foreign Missions of Paris founded the Mission of Laos which covered the territories adjoining the two banks of the river. The Mission of North-East of Haut-Laos or Choa-Laos, which were reached from Vietnam, remained attached to the Vicariate Apostolic of Thanh-Hoa until 1958. Evangelization began slowly, the Northern part of the country receiving a missionary visit only every now and then.

It was to remedy this state of affairs that the Fathers of Foreign Mission of Paris requested that another Institute be put in charge in a territory separated from the Mission of Laos and which would include all the Northern part of the country. Several Institutes declined to accept responsibility,

but the Oblates finally accepted it in 1933. It is worthy of note that it was the first mission of the Congregation in a country under French Colonial Administration.



Corpus Christi in Laos.

The Oblates in Laos

In January 1935, the first group of Oblates arrived in Laos. There were three Fathers; the Superior Jean Mazoyer, a veteran of twenty years of missionary work in Ceylon, and two young priests, Etienne Loosdregt from France, and Jean-Paul Brouillette from Canada. They reported that in the course of his first reconnaissance journey undertaken the previous year, Father Mazoyer had wept on realizing the difficulties which awaited the missionaries in that country. And he could not guess what the circumstances of the war and the wickedness of men would add to the natural obstacles!

In the territory which was given for their apostolic activity there existed two well established sections: the rural district of Paksane which included among its villages the first Christendom of Northern Laos, Ban-Keng-Sakod, on the bank of the Mekong, and the urban Christendom of Vientiane practically entirely composed of Vietnamese, and Annamites as they were then called. It was therefore necessary to set about studying the languages at once.

Happily the group increased rapidly. A diocesan priest Father Thomas Nantha was ordained 1935, and some missionaries arrived from France, Canada and Belgium. In 1938, the Mission was sufficiently developed to be raised to Prefecture Apostolic, the first entirely Laotian ecclesiastical constituency. Bishop Mazoyer was named the Prefect. He had fourteen priests with him, thirteen of whom were Oblates, and a Brother, Paul Mary, who arrived in 1937. The remarkable effort of the Congregation allowed them not only to maintain the existing posts, but especially to open others with a resident missionary, chiefly at Louang-Prabang and Xieng-Khouang. Moreover, some priests went into the bush where promising contacts were made at Phak-Beuak, some three days boat and track journey away from Paksane, and at Nong-Het to the East of Xieng-Khouang.



Typical Village in the midst of the Jungle.

Effects of War

All this growth was to be stopped with the beginning of the war which disorganized the Mission and deprived it of any reinforcements until 1947. The cutting of all relations with Europe was the cause of serious financial problems. From the beginning of the war, several French fathers were mobilized. The war with Siam in 1940 did not have as dramatic consequences as in the Mission of the South

which occupied the two banks of the Mekong. In December 1940, the persecution on the Siam bank led to the martyrdom of the seven beatified Catholics of Song-Khone. In Laos even, the Japanese occupation restricted much of the movements and activities of the missionaries. From 1943, the two Canadian Fathers were interned in Vietnam, a mild internment in the house of the Redemptorist Fathers at Hué, but that reduced accordingly the active personnel of the Mission. Yet at this period, the French Administration which nominally depended on the Vichy government, pledged allegiance to the Axis forces, and was able to assure a certain protection for the French national citizens.

The Japanese

Everything was going to change starting from March 9, 1945 when the Japanese military attack allowed the Nipponese to take control. That meant the arrest of all French missionaries, with the exception of those who went underground. Bishop Mazoyer, who was in Xieng-Khouang, was taken to prison to Vinh with the priests of the sector. Others were interned in Vientiane. The personnel of the Mission was then reduced to two Laotian Priests, Fr. Vien, and a brother of Fr. Nantha, who was ordained in 1943. Once again the Mission of the Oblates was less effected than that of the South which witnessed two French bishops, the Vicar Apostolic and his predecessor, and two priests massacred by the Japanese (March-August 1945).

The troubled period which lasted beyond the Japanese surrender (August 15, 1945) allowed the Viet-Minh communists to take advantage and declare independence from Vietnam. This was soon to be imitated by a Laotian copy who began to make itself known under the name of "*Pathet Lao*" ("*Lao Country*") or "*Lao Issara*" ("*Free Laos*"). This resulted in the slow reconquest of the country by the French army which came up the valley of the Mekong. It was a very confused situation, with the Chinese occupation of the provinces from the North, which was to be a long time returning to normal. The return of the Apostolic Prefect occurred some months later, while

The French War

troubles of all kinds were the lot of the missionaries who remained in the country even after their freedom from Japanese prisons. Some had to go to Thailand, the new name for Siam since 1939. One priest at Paksane was charged with high treason, (which was quite untrue), and risked being French court-martialled. From Louang-Prabang, Fr. Georges Kolbach walked to Kunming, the capital of the Chinese province of Yunnan. His injuries resulted in him leaving Laos for more than ten years and remaining severely handicapped for the rest of his life.

At least the war, finally ending in Europe, seemed to be of benefit to Asia, as new missionary reinforcements were able to give new vigour to a young Mission struck too soon by the hazards of international politics. But this only seemed true, since from 1946, in spite of the agreements signed between Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese communist chief, and the French government, a new period of disorders which history remembers under the name of the First Indochina War or the French War, began. The Mission however started with a new burst of energy, thanks to the arrival between 1947 and 1952 of fifteen Oblates one of whom was a Brother. The most noteworthy developments concerned the Minor Seminary of Paksane, opened in 1942 during the war, under the name “De Mazenod Institution”. It was a simple straw hut to shelter the seminarists, while the Fathers lived as best they could in the old mission house. It took some years before a permanent structure was built in 1956. The beginnings were difficult, but with a promise of rapid expansion of the mission among the minority groups, at first the Hmongs with Fr. Yves Bertrais especially in the Louang-Prabang sector, then the Khmuh, the poorest, on the banks of the Plain of the Jarres (Xieng-Khouang) with Frs. Louis Morin and later Jean Subra.

Seeing the progress of the Mission over the years, it was not unusual that the question of a Vicariate Apostolic should arise. This was done in 1952. The pioneer, Bishop Jean Mazoyer, aged 70, had retired, and Fr. Etienne Loosdregt, O.M.I. being named the first bishop of Laos.

The motto chosen by the new bishop expressed a deep conviction and a wish: the conviction that the certitude of faith and true peace can only come from God, and the wish that this peace be finally realized in a country which had not known it for thirteen years. The motto read: "*Peace to God*". Was this wish, in the form of a prayer, going to be fulfilled? The situation appeared more and more precarious when heavy communist attacks threatened Louang-Prabang, and later Xieng-Khouang from North Vietnam. However, victory without appeal from Diên Biên Phủ would put an end to this war. It was at least a bright interval which would foresee the Geneva agreements (July 1954) between France and Viet-Minh.

Progress: Italian Oblates

There arrived then the most peaceful years of the Oblate Mission in Laos. The Vicariate expanded from the province of Sam-Neua to the Vietnam frontier, the seminary yielded its first fruits with the ordination of two first priests trained there in December 1958 after the communists had returned it to the national community. This was no doubt a premature attempt of a major seminary, which unfortunately came to a sudden end, and the major seminarists had to continue their formation eventually in Vietnam or Europe. A new missionary district was to begin in Nam-Tha on the borders of China. It was in reply to the growing needs that the Oblate Congregation decided to send some Italian missionaries to Laos. This influx of new men from November 1957 permitted a rapid development in the Northern part of the Mission evidenced in 1963 by the creation of the Apostolic Vicariate of Louang-Prabang with Bishop Leonello Berti, O.M.I., as the first bishop. However, at that moment the Church became caught up in tragic times. It is useful briefly to retrace its development.

The Communist Movement in Laos

Although linked to the Vietnamese movement on which it relied for its origin, the Laotian communist movement had quite a different history. In Vietnam, it was a question of a rigid movement, not allowing any compromise, strongly organized around a party which demanded adherence,

whose leader was known to everyone. Its territorial base was quite determined since it was a question of an internationally recognized State which made no mystery of its ultimate objective: to reunify the entire country under its exclusive control. In Laos everything was different. Here everything is blurred, at least in appearance. One advances blindly: the movement does not say its name, the true leaders are not known. The word “*communist*” never appears. If the old name “*Lao Issara*” is understood a little, like in the beginnings of the movement, it is the name of the political shop window which prevails over “*Nèo Lao Hak Sat*” or “*Patriotic Front*” in the pay of a totally eclipsed party which will only come out in the open once the seizure of power is definitely achieved.



Lao Dwellings high in the Mountains.

The army is usually designated by the expression “*Pathet Lao*”, but many prefer “*Lao Viét*” denoting that the troops operate in liaison with the Vietnamese or even under their command. They themselves are presented as “*The Brothers*” (“*Ai Nong*”), especially when they made incursions into the villages for propaganda or provisions. Moreover, the links are never broken with the official national union government formed in 1962, even though in the following year the ministers of the Front walked out in

protest. The fiction of national unity is maintained and the posts left empty are never filled.

As a sign symbolic of this paradoxical situation at Vientiane the seat of the government which they opposed in the countryside, the "Pathet Lao" military permanently maintained a detachment which would never be used, even at the time of the various coups d'état which periodically shook the factions of the right. This national union government was recognized by all countries so much so that they maintained at Vientiane ambassadors to both sides: the ambassador of the United States, who seemed to act as the true Pro-Consul, and that of Southern Vietnam and those Northern Vietnam, China and the USSR. All seem to get along well and achieve something. This was why the preliminary talks which allowed the opening of the Paris Conference on Vietnam were held at Vientiane.

But at the same time and very early in 1959, military pressure became more pronounced and the zone controlled by the Pathet Lao military continued to expand, while those areas where effectively the authority of the central government was exercised, shrank. However, it was quite difficult to be sure who controlled what. The country resembled a leopard skin - a patch of this and a patch of that.

**Attitudes of
the People
faced with
the spread
of the
Communist
movement**

It must not be forgotten that, at the end of the '50's, Laos was a poor country, deprived of means of communication. The real revolution was the arrival of the transistor, and communist propagandists knew how to make the most of this. Apart from a fringe of scattered urban population, composed especially of students, the Laotians, who were essentially farmers, were not very highly politicized. They wanted only one thing: peace. Guerrilla warfare brought the opposite. People were enrolled in the army, there was insecurity everywhere, entire villages had been moved. The Laotians had no sympathy for the Vietnamese and wanted no regime which was harsher than Hanoi. They recognized certainly that much of the propaganda was

true, attacking the corruption of the government and generally the parties on the right. When a group of “*Pathet Lao*” took over a village, it meant that the peasants had to provide rice and chicken. But in the long run, the good Laos people, optimistic by nature, hoped that all would finish with an agreement being reached one day thanks to the entente between the two stepbrother princes, Prince Souvanna Phouma, the irremovable Prime Minister, and Prince Souphanouvong, one of the chiefs of the opposing side.

Christian Fears

If the Christians shared at the same time the apprehensions and hopes of their compatriots, they had however reasons to harbour special fears. They knew what happened in China at the time of the installation of the communist regime. All the foreign missionaries had to leave the



Hmong Catholics.

country very quickly without even awaiting the cultural revolution which brought real persecution. They also knew of the exodus chosen by hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese Catholics who fled the regime from the North in 1954, in order to protect their faith. They themselves would not be able to escape in the same manner.

Objectively, the reasons for fear were quite real because it was well known what the communists thought of religion in general and Catholicism in particular. Even if in the propaganda meetings they spoke of respect for the faith of the people, they did not hold back on attacking beliefs that they regarded as superstitious and which, in fact, they wished to destroy as against Marxism-Leninism. Another angle of easy attack consisted in putting the blame on the religion of foreigners and especially, colonialists. Was it possible to be a Catholic and still have the “*Lao heart*”?

And yet, the first Catholic priest put to death by the communists was indeed a genuine Laotian, of the Thai Deng ethnic group. On June 2, 1954, some weeks after Diên Phu, Father Joseph Tien, the only diocesan priest, from Sam-Neua, was apprehended, put in a sack and beaten to death. During the four years which preceded the provisional return of this province to the national community, the Christians had to continue to live according to their faith, but the communist authorities forbade any Church



School is Much the Same all over the World.

meetings. Was this persecution or not? There was at least a foretaste of what could threaten the entire Catholic community.

One wonders also what could have been the attitude of the missionaries in these circumstances. It is not too difficult to speak for those years of 1954-1959 with real enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of youth. The personnel was young, its most senior member the Vicar Apostolic, was not yet fifty years of age. Each year new missionaries arrived, and the Mission developed. One could still rely on a lasting peace which would not fail to favour the work of evangelization.

Troubles Begin

The troubles appeared during the summer months of 1959 when the “*Pathet Lao*” battalion, integrated into the regular army in accordance with past agreements, withdrew. Sporadic fighting began in Sam-Neua where the mission had started just the year before. It then became clear that difficult days for the missionaries were starting. But had not that been their lot since the beginning? However, there was no panic. It was necessary for the future to prepare the Christian communities to live their religion in the faithfulness of baptism, even without the support of the priest, and emphasis was put on the formation of catechists.

At that time, there were instructions from Rome, that in case of a takeover of power by the communists, the missionary should remain at his post in the midst of his people. The matter was not up for discussion. But could all the possible consequences be envisaged? Nobody spoke of martyrdom, a grand word which, it seemed, could only be used “*post factum*”, but each one faithfully fulfilled his task while admitting that given the circumstances, the possibility of capture would be followed by prison or even worse. Keeping this in mind, one can better understand what could happen to those among the missionaries who effectively were led to give their lives for the Gospel.

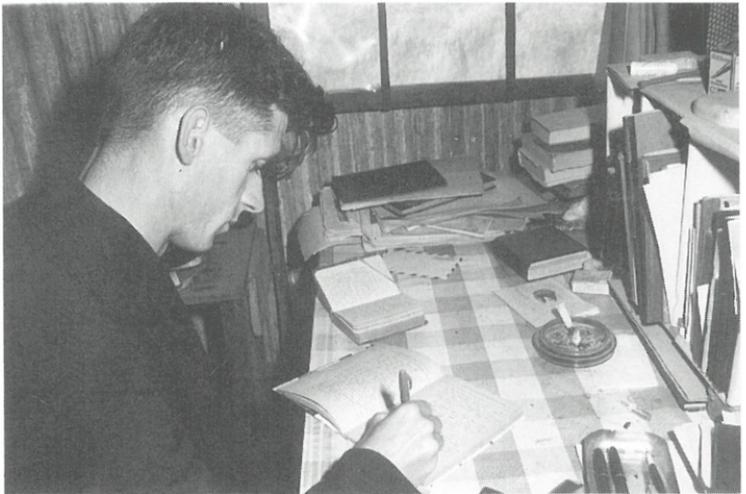
The Six Oblates

We shall consider here only the case of the Oblates, and some of their close companions, knowing well that others in Laos have also given the same witness by their blood. There are six of them - with their ages at the time of their death: Fr. Mario Borzaga (28 years), Fr. Louis Leroy (38

years), Fr. Michel Coquelet (30 years), Fr. Vincent L'Henoret (40 years), Fr. Jean Wauthier (40 years), Fr. Joseph Boissel (60 years). None, with the exception of Fr. Mario Borzaga, left a personal journal; however, some lines of the "Codex" of a mission station, or brief thoughts written by Jean Wauthier for example in his diaries, say enough of the devotion of these men to the people and to the work.

**Fr. Mario
Borzaga,
O.M.I.
1932-1960**

Mario was the youngest of six. A native of Trent, he had at first entered the seminary of his native town. It was there that a missionary vocation had ripened. According to what he himself wrote in his diary the thought of the martyrdom was in his mind. The Oblate Congregation that welcomed him in 1952 fully recognized this vocation, since, after his ordination at the end of his studies, and in accordance with his desire, he was sent to Laos with the first group of Italian Oblates to that mission. He arrived there in November 1957,



*Fr. Mario Borzaga, O.M.I., 1932-1960
Faithful to his Journal in Laos.*

and spent the first year studying the language and learning the missionary life in Paksane. In November 1958 he joined his confreres who were already working in the Louang-

Prabang sector and was soon assigned to the mission post of Kiu-Kacham. Mario was a strict religious, and especially he was a missionary full of zeal. He had proved this from his first months in the country by the ardour with which he had set about learning the language, seeking to mix with the people as quickly as possible, eager to teach to them the Word of God, eventhough he was not fully ready for that. He would show it better still in his new post.



Villagers unite in Crushing Sugar Cane

The Hmong

Kiu-Kacham was a small Hmong village where, eight years before, Fr. Yves Bertrais had inaugurated the mission among the Hmong. The foundations had been solidly set. It was up to Mario to build and develop the community and he took charge of it fully during the year 1959 after the departure of the French confrere who had supported him during the first months while he was learning the language. He took up this task with all his heart - teaching catechism, initiating prayer, visiting families, welcoming the ill who daily came to the door of the mission house which had a small dispensary. It was to this, as in most of the posts, that Mario consecrated his time and energy. He also had the plan to reach out further, to those that the Gospel had not yet reached. But if security in the village was relatively assured, it was not the same as soon as one set out on the

Astrid route. This, leaving Louang-Prabang some eighty kilometres away, divided - to the East to lead to Hanoi and to the South towards Vientiane. "Pathet Lao" elements had infiltrated into this zone and circulated there without hindrance.

The Hmong people of a village situated to the South of the route had already come several times to ask Fr. Mario to visit them. They seemed interested in religion, but also, without doubt, at the prospect of medical aid. Up to that time Mario had not been able to accede to their request, being too busy with the work on the spot and not wishing to leave alone his Oblate confrere who had been there for some months learning the language in the village. On Sunday, April 24, 1960, after Mass, while Mario was busy caring for the sick at the dispensary, a small group of Hmong arrived, again requesting him to go to their place. This time, Mario decided to take advantage of the situation, for there were two priests free from their teaching tasks



*Cures for
the Body
Too -
Fr. Mario
Borzaga
O.M.I.*

who had come there for the Easter holidays. The matter was not discussed too long it seemed, for Mario was a man of decision. He promised the Hmong to follow them the following day. His plan was to visit several villages in the same area and to return towards the West along the valley

A Journey to Death

of the Mékong to Louang-Prabang - a good missionary round before the rainy season.

The next day, Monday April 25, Mario set out accompanied by his young catechist Shiong. Those who were present saw him leave, with his sack on his back, his beret on his head, dressed entirely in black like a Hmong. Hardly several hundred metres away he disappeared at the bend in the road to plunge into the bush and descend towards the river Nam Ming. On going away, he simply said: “*In a fortnight I shall be at Louang-Prabang*”. In fact, he and his catechist were never to be seen again. What had happened? The search undertaken afterwards when the disappearance was obvious, yielded nothing certain. It is only known that he had indeed arrived at the anticipated village, that he had cared for the sick there, and then had left with the catechist. Every trace was obliterated. News came from time to time to indicate that he had been seen, a great “*Farang*” (foreigner) occupied in caring for the sick. But it is known that similar rumours have, in many other cases, followed the disappearance of missionaries.

There seems no doubt that Mario was put to death in the days following his departure. What remains to be determined is to know if those who came looking for him at the village were the advance party of a real ambush (which cannot be excluded), or else if he fell into the hands of a hostile group who took advantage of the occasion offered to them. But anyhow, the case of Mario must be understood along with what preceded - the assassination of Fr. René Dubroux, M.E.P. in his village in December 1959, and the events of the Xieng-Khouang sector in April and May 1961, and about which there is no doubt.

The Events of Xieng-Khouang

Civil war had started. A *coup d'état* sparked the flame on August 9, 1960, in Vientiane, and the country was divided into three factions each with its own army. The “neutralist” party with its Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma, was hunted from Vientiane by the party of the right, which

formed its own government, but the neutralists who fell back on Xieng-Khouang and the Plain of Jarres were in fact the hostages of the two quarrelling factions, the communist “*Pathet Lao*”. The latter took advantage of the disorganization which followed the coup to advance their pawns. From September 1960 they ruled as the sole masters of Sam-Neua which they made their undisputed base. The Fathers present in this province (there were still four) had to participate in the festivities of the “*liberation*” and they escaped only at the last minute from the army which came to arrest them. From there, the “*Pathet Lao*” progressed towards the Plain of Jarres and reached Xieng-Khouang in company of the neutralists who controlled all activities, while they tried to push their advantage. In the month of January 1961, the military “*Pathet Lao*” arrested two Fathers in their villages - Fr. Jean Wauthier, mentioned later, and Fr. Jean-Marie Ollivier - accusing them of spying and condemned them to death without a trial. These two priests were already facing the firing squad when they were saved at the very last minute by the unexpected intervention of a neutralist officer.



A Bishop and Three Martyrs, Xieng Khouang, 1957
L. to R. - Mgr Loosdregt, O.M.I., Fr. Michel Coquelet, O.M.I.,
Fr. Louis Leroy, O.M.I., Fr. Jean Wauthier, O.M.I.

It is in this context that one should see the assassination of the three missionaries between April 18, and May 11. We shall dwell more on the case of Fr. Louis Leroy, because it is typical of the conduct of the enemies of religion. In his case there is also more documentation.

Fr. Louis
Leroy,
O.M.I.
1923-1961



A Norman, of the diocese of Coutances, Louis was a solid countryman, joining religious life somewhat late. He entered the novitiate at the age of twenty. It seemed that the circumstances of his family had prevented him from responding sooner to a very positive missionary vocation. His secondary education had been salvaged thanks to the late vocation juniorate of Pontmain. Gifted with a sound practical

intelligence, he would never master the Latin language, and this was one of his disappointments, but he made up for this by the efforts he put into all that he did. All those who knew him would willingly agree with the testimony given by a confrere who was with him from the beginning of his studies up to the end of his scholasticate:

“Father Leroy was serious in everything, very diligent in his studies and his spiritual life. He was very cheerful and fraternal. He was a friend. His desire for the foreign missions was very strong. I have heard him several times express a desire to be a martyr”.

Such was Louis during his time of formation, such was he also on the missions when, to his great satisfaction, he was sent to Laos. He arrived there in November 1955, and

immediately was moved to Xieng-Khouang which was to be practically the only sphere of his apostolic life. He experienced some difficulty in learning the language because of incipient deafness. After a year he asked to spend some months in the valley of the Mékong to familiarize himself better with the Lao of the plains.

Returned to Xieng-Khouang in November 1957, he was put in charge of the village of Ban-Pha, a community of Thai Dam, replacing Fr. Joseph Boissel. It was there that we find him in April 1961. The “*codex historicus*” that he scrupulously kept each day, tells us at once his joys and pains as a missionary in the recently converted village. He gave there also the witness of an unshakeable faith and of limitless devotion. To know his story better we have just to read what was written by the Vicar Apostolic of the period. He wrote this account for the other missionaries based on the witness of a young absolutely worthy Christian woman of the village.

“On April 15, 1961, towards 17.00h, troops of Kong Lè (neutralists) and P.(athet) L.(ao) entered Ban-Pha, after two or three hours of combat in the surrounding area, and artillery fire. Sunday and Monday were calm. The military circled the village, the Pathet Lao began their propaganda and asked many questions concerning the Priest: “Is he in liaison with the Americans? Did he help the Phoumistes (the Right faction), the Méos (Hmong)? Did he ask questions? Does he not have a transmitter, weapons?”” Some came to look at the Mission, and exchanged some words with the Priest. On Tuesday morning April 18, Father Leroy said his Mass and took his breakfast as usual. Around nine thirty in the morning the Pathet Lao entered the Mission. They ordered Anna B. to call the Priest. She found him in the chapel. He came out and went to meet the P. L. chiefs at the door of the enclosure. They told him that a radio message from the government arrived for Father to return to the Mission centre at Xieng-Khouang. The Father



A Trusty Steed for Fr. Louis Leroy, O.M.I.

replied that he did not wish to leave his Christians, because he was the only one at Ban-Pha to take care of them, while at Xieng-Khouang there were already several priests. The P. L. then asked him to surrender his revolver. He replied that he had not got one, and never had one, that he was a priest. They asked to search him. He took off his cassock and shirt without an argument. In his pockets they found his rosary and handkerchief. That was all. Dressed again (sic), he returned home accompanied by two P. L. who took his hunting rifle, quickly searched the room looking for the famous revolver. They spoke to one another in Vietnamese. Anna wondered if the so-called revolver was not simply the large cross that the Father wore at his cincture ... Finally the P. L. left with some polite words. The Father went to the Chapel to pray and told Anna to pray a lot also.

Hardly a half hour later (11.30 a.m.) a large group of P. L. came to Fr. Leroy. Some moments later, Anna, who was preparing the meal at her house, saw everyone leave. The priest closed the windows and door, put the keys in his pocket and left ahead of five or six P. L. He was bare-headed and bare-footed, in cassock, with the cross in his cincture, and breviary under his arm. On the way in front of Anna's house, he replied to her question: 'I am going to see the commandant who asked for me'. Other P. L. remained in front of the house and forbade access.

Around 14.00 p.m. some Pathet Lao returned. They had the keys, and told Anna, who asked where the priest was: 'He left for Xieng-Khouang; we are coming to make an inventory and arrange his things'

(Anna succeeded in saving the Blessed Sacrament and the sacred vessels when the P. L. were making the inventory of the Church).

Around eight o'clock in the evening the population of the village were assembled for a "khosana" (a propaganda meeting). 'The Father has not been killed', they said, 'although he is a spy and a traitor. He is evil. He has been taken to Xieng-Khouang. Later another, a better person will come to take his place'.

Two or three days later the entire Mission was pillaged by the Pathet Lao. They tore down the images, and burned what they could not carry away.

On the day of the capture of Fr. Leroy, a Ban Pha Teu woman saw the priest surrounded by the P. L. in the paddy-field bordering the village. A little later she heard several shots and thought they killed Father not far inside the forest. In the afternoon, a group of women from the same village looking for firewood met some of the Pathet Lao soldiers who chased them away. They returned in haste to their homes, frightened. Some days later they discovered in the forest in the

same area, a fresh grave to which had been given the appearance of an old one by spreading twigs and dead leaves above it. They whispered that the Father was buried there, and no-one dared approach any more”.

Later, at the beginning of May, Anna B. recognized the tomb and was sure that the Father was indeed buried there. This was confirmed some years later when a priest was able to go back to the spot.

The document that we have just quoted at length is dated June 15, almost two months after the facts. It took all this time to find out what had happened. The “*Pathet Lao*”, who have never acknowledged their infamy, have tried to camouflage the truth about their intrigues by every means. One can read in the “*codex historicus*” of Xieng-Khouang the account of all the steps taken in vain by Father Superior to obtain information on the disappearance of Father Louis Leroy and that of his confrere, Father Michel Coquelet, of whom we shall now speak.

**Fr. Michel
Coquelet,
O.M.I.
1931-1961**



Originally from the North of France, from the diocese of Cambrai, the Coquelet family had moved to Orleans at the time of the exodus of May 1940. A numerous and poor family, his mother worked as a housekeeper in order to supplement the father's meagre wages. Michel did his studies at the college of Pithiviers, then entered the

Oblate novitiate at La Brosse-Montceaux, the same year as Louis Leroy. The same confrere who already gave an account wrote this of Michel:

“...I knew him from the novitiate. He was discreet, cheerful, and full of humour. He was a serious person, gentle and fraternal. He was certainly generous, full of faith, and endearing.”

Eight years younger than Louis Leroy, Michel Coquelet ended his studies at the scholasticate two years later, because of military service which he fulfilled as a nurse. He arrived in Laos around Easter around 1957.

Like many others he first of all taught for some months at the seminary of Paksane to help while learning the language. From the end of the same year he was sent into the district of Xieng-Khouang. A photo appeared on the cover of the magazine *“Pole et Tropiques”* showing him leaving for his village, barefooted, wearing a safari hat and a big smile, leading behind him his pack saddle horse. He was assigned to a poor village of recently converted Khmuh whose instruction, owing to the circumstances, had not been regular. The thoughts of Michel on this subject, noted in the *“Codex historicus”* are full of significance. They show the depth of his missionary suffering, but also of his great spirit of faith, coloured with a sense of humour which we already knew was one of the captivating traits of his character.

Another Mystery

The circumstances of the disappearance of Michel Coquelet are not known for certain. It happened, however, in the same period and in the same area as that of Louis Leroy. Their two villages were not very far from one another. Ban-Pha is a day's walk to the south-west of Xieng-Khouang. Phôn-Pheng, the village of Michel, is further away, directly south and on a different road. The latter would not have been able to know what had happened to the former unless the *“Pathet Lao”* who arrested him had not informed him of it. Here is what the superior of the district wrote:

“On April 30, I received a letter from a catechist of Sam Tom (one of the stations of Michel), announcing on the one hand that the Sam Tom chapel and house had been pillaged and destroyed by a passing military detachment and, on the other hand, that Fr. Coquelet had disappeared. The inhabitants of Nam Pan had seen his abandoned bicycle at the side of the road to Sop Xieng. The bearer made it clear that everyone thought that he had been taken by a passing Lao-Viet detachment that day in the area. It was at the time of operations in Ban Pha”.



On Tuesday, May 3, the catechist from Ban Nam Pan, with Samien the secretary, and a group from Phôn Pheng arrived at Xieng-Khouang. The information above was confirmed and filled out. A letter from the catechist N. gave the following points: Father Coquelet would have left Phôn Pheng on April 17 to and look after a wounded person at Ban Nam Pan. On April 20, he was returning home by bicycle when he was taken at Sop Xieng. On the 24th, N. and the Nai Ban village chief seeing that the Father had not arrived, left to make enquiries. The soldiers in charge at Sop Xieng (Lt ...P.L.) told them that the priest had been taken to Xieng-Khouang at the same time as the Father of Ban Pha. The bicycle had also been evidently taken the following or next day. That is all I have been able to find out about Father Coquelet”.

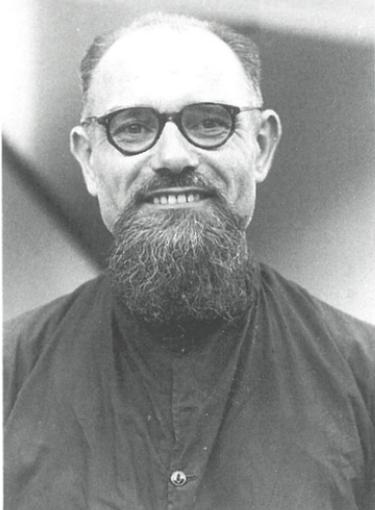
The picture of these events did not unfold in as clear and regular manner as we have just described. The rest of the Mission received only fragmentary news and by guesswork. It is interesting to give here a reaction to this case. It is from the “*codex historicus*” of the Minor Seminary of Paksane, May 3, 1961:

“In the morning Fr. O’Rourke, returned from Vientiane. A letter from the bishop, another from Rev. Fr. Superior (Fr. Paul Sion) let us know the serious events concerning the Mission. Fr. Coquelet has been missing since April 15. His bicycle was found along the road between Xieng-Khong and Sop Xieng, and according to all appearances, Father was captured by a group of Pathet-Lao. Such is the content of a telegramme which arrived yesterday morning at the Vientiane Mission. Two others had already preceded it the previous week, announcing that Father Leroy had been made prisoner by the Pathet-Lao, and accused of spying. The Father had remained continually in his village of Ban Pha even after the retreat of the royal troops. He is presently

detained in Khang Khai (that is what we wished to believe!), in the hands of the P. L. Perhaps he could be taken from there and he would be safe, at least thanks to the cease-fire (that was then announced), but Father Coquelet(?) disappeared like Father Borzaga a year ago. What hope can we have? Prayer; reliance on Providence, and the Kingdom of God are sown in tears and sacrifice. The tragedy in the fight against atheistic communism, is that they work to destroy even that witness, in order to twist it into a political crime. This is indeed the worst perversion, the sign of the devil”.

And the story does not finish with Father Michel Coquelet.

**Fr. Vincent
L'Hénoret,
O.M.I.
1921-1961**



A Breton from Finistère, from that land fertile in missionary vocations, Vincent had entered the novitiate of Pontmain in 1940. He was witness to the events at the scholasticate of la Brosse-Montceaux - the massacre perpetrated by the Nazis which caused the death of five Oblates - two Fathers two Scholastics and a Brother. He experienced with his confreres the deportation to the camp of Compiègne, but was able

to continue his studies and receive ordination in 1946. The following year he left for the Mission at Laos.

He spent all the time of his first Laotian stay in the Paksane sector. An attentive pastor, somewhat severe, he knew how to make himself liked by these Christians that one would call third generation. On returning from his first stay in November 1956, he was in the same apostolate for a year,

but in November 1957 he had to leave the Mekong to go into the district of Xieng-Khouang.

Ban-Ban is a small town on the road which leads towards Viêtnam at the end of the Jarres Plain. It consisted only of a few Christians, but on the outskirts were several villages of Thai Deng refugees who came from the Sam-Neua region. The pastoral and missionary work was not easy there. These people had suffered from the endemic war which hardly spared them over the years. There was a lot to do there, particularly in order to get the dispersed families back on their feet again. Vincent set to work courageously with the support from the beginning of 1959 of the young Father Jean-Baptiste Khamphanh, the newly ordained diocesan priest.

We have seen how, in the final months of the year 1960, the communists had spread their control over all the region around Sam-Neua. The system had been achieved with the cycle of meetings of indoctrination, and constraint upon the free movement of the people. In order to visit his mission stations, Father had to obtain each time a pass demanded by the authorities. However this was given without too much trouble. Vincent had known that following some fears in the beginning, a sort of “*modus vivendi*” had been established between the new authorities and the Fathers, and that worked rather well.

The Shooting

On Wednesday May 10, Vincent asked for and obtained a pass to go to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension in a mission station. It was before Vatican Council II, and the Feast of the Ascension was still obligatory on a Thursday for all Indochina. He hoped to return to the centre the following day. And so on the morning of Thursday 11 May, he took the road towards Ban-Ban on his bicycle. He was still several kilometres from his goal when he was arrested by the “*Pathet Lao*” military. A countrywoman who was working in her field was witness to the first part of the scene. Father L’Hénoret took out his papers, including the pass, and this seemed to satisfy the military because the



Grave of Fr. L'Hénoret, O.M.I.

Father straddled his bicycle again and went on his way. The peasant woman did not see what occurred next, but she heard shortly afterwards some shots and was afraid that they had killed the priest. Struck with fear she did not dare say anything or do anything for the moment. Later in the day she came back to the spot with others and easily found the place where the body had been summarily buried. Some days later the Father Superior of Xieng-Khouang, having been advised of the situation, came to the grave, arranged it and placed a cross on it. No explanation was ever given for this assassination, as for the preceding ones. It was purely and simply denied by the "*Pathet Lao*", and their neutralist partners had not the courage to acknowledge the evidence, much less dare attribute them to the Pathet Lao.

**Br. Alexis
Guémené,
O.M.I.
1924-1961**

It would be difficult to finish the story of the series of misfortunes which struck the Missions of Xieng-Khouang during these tragic weeks without recalling at least what happened to Brother Alexis Guémené. He was also at the novitiate at the same time as Frs. Louis and Michel.

Arriving in Laos in 1955, he had first actively participated in Paksane in the building of the new seminary and there had made his perpetual oblation on May 1, 1956. From March 1957 he had been assigned to the Xieng-Khouang centre where his savoir-faire, his devotion and gentleness were appreciated by everyone, especially the Sisters for whom he had built a house.

On Sunday June 4, 1961, Brother Alexis Guémené had returned to the military infirmary to visit some invalids, a shot was fired (it was not known how) and the bullet hit him in the heart. The Superior, who recorded a fourth death in seven weeks, described the affair as “*a stupid accident due to the thoughtlessness of a young recruit*”. No doubt. One cannot however stop oneself from thinking that, given the circumstances, Alexis, like his confreres, was ready to give his life for the Gospel, and that effectively he did give it.

The years passed and in spite of the forming of a national government of union in 1962, communist pressure did not cease. It succeeded from May 1962 in eliminating all forces other than their own in Xieng-Khouang and the Plain of Jarres. Massacres of fleeing villagers took place on the roads, and it is difficult to say the number of Christians who were killed in that year. The survivors established themselves as well as they could on the hills by the Plain of Jarres, but most of the time without the possibility of undertaking work in the fields which required a certain stability. This is especially true for the Khmuh populations which included quite a number of Christians. It was this moving situation which was going to be the occasion of a new assassination.

Born in the diocese of Cambrai, in the North of France, Jean Wauthier had experienced in his youth the torments of the 1940 exodus, and had found himself in the south-west of the country where he did his junior seminary. Returned to the north, he entered the novitiate of Pontmain in 1944.



Of a robust physique, and unfailing moral uprightness, it is not astonishing that, called to military service, he choose the parachute corps. On returning to the Scholasticate of Solignac, he was one of those who was not discouraged by manual work, and God knows there were some finding it difficult in these years of converting the old abbey of St. Éloi to house some hundred scholastics. He asked to go to the missions, and he had the good fortune to be sent to Laos.

The Khmuh

He arrived in 1952 and was quickly put to serve the mission among the Khmuh. He remained almost continuously with the same people of the same village whom he followed through their displacements. In fact it was he who urged them to leave Nam-Mon, where they were baptized, for Khang-Si, a better area where they would be able to benefit from the flooded ricefields. There Jean constructed a system of water conveyance by means of bamboos which became a source of joy for the villagers who were thus freed from the constraint of looking for water further away. Alas, this installation lasted only a few years. From 1961 the entire village had to withdraw to the edge of the Plain of Jarres, to Ban-na first of all and then to Hin-Tang. Jean, after the January 1961 alert, had returned for a time to this area, for a two year period at Paksane (October 1961 to December 1963). The people had confidence in him for any work which was asked of him, be it teaching, sport or music. Each Saturday he went out from the seminary for week-end pastoral work in the surrounding villages. But it was quite clear that he longed to be with his dear Khmuh as soon as possible.

In December 1963 he returned to his apostolate with the Khmuh, now installed at Vientiane where they worked firstly on the formation of catechists who would be sent into the villages. In the mountains among all these refugees that the war had chased from their homes, misery had become firmly established. It was not possible to obtain regular harvests, and when they succeeded in planting a



House of Fr. Wauthier at Hintang.

field of rice, there was no certainty that the harvest would be gathered, owing to new attacks, and mines laid everywhere along the paths. The same applied to the shortage of medicines. Jean in fact remained the greater part of his last years at Hin-Tang and he devoted himself a lot to the difficult task of sharing out fairly humanitarian aid which was the key for the survival of these people. Thus it was there that the drama unfolded, for even in the worst misery there are the exploited and the exploiters. The poor Khmuh were always on the side of the exploited. Jean tried to defend them, without favouring them however, for he knew how to put himself at the service of all. He had not however, the good fortune to please everyone. The special military forces seeing that, assumed the right of controlling the distribution of food and medicine and served themselves and their own first.

Death
of
Fr. Jean

Were there arguments, indeed threats? Jean did not seem to have said anything about it in Laos. However, during his stay in France of that year 1967, he had said at least once that if ever he were killed, it would be because of his work for the Khmuh of Hin-Tang. The Hmong of Ban-Na had never pardoned him for moving the Christian Khmuh to Hin-Tang which had deprived them of a part they coveted. They had therefore decided to be avenged.

In that week before Christmas, Jean wanted to visit a small group of Khmuh in the area of Ban-Na. He set out there, having alerted the military chief of his journey. The occasion was good. Under the cover of a simulated attack of the Lao-Viêt, he was attacked while he was coming to Hin-Tang on the evening of Saturday December 16. Two bullets in the chest and he collapsed. His body was transported to Vientiane the next day. The government was quick to put the blame on the communists, and such was the official truth. The truth based on the facts was quite another thing. It was known very quickly, but could not be mentioned in the circumstances then. Let us transcribe what was written at the time:

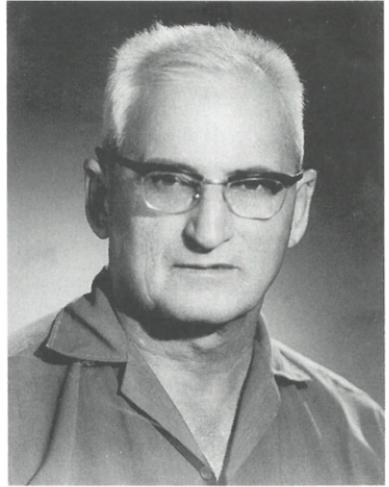
“Why was he killed? Without doubt nobody will ever know. The sense of organization and ingenuity that he used to safeguard and distribute human aid were upset, and that help, fallen for heaven, certainly sharpened the appetites and excited covetousness. What is sure is that he was killed in the exercise of the apostolic ministry and because of it”.

On the following day one of the catechists wrote to his parents: *“Father Jean died because he loved us and did not wish to abandon us”.*

Fr. Joseph
Boissel,
O.M.I.
1909-1969

A Breton from the Marches of Brittany, from a small village between Rennes and Pontmain, Joseph Boissel was a countryman, a hard worker with uncommon strength, which would later be the admiration of the Laotians. Ordained at la

Brosse-Montceaux in 1937 at the age of twenty-eight, he was sent to Laos the following year. He was therefore part of the experienced group who had undergone the rigours of the war since the beginning. He had arrived at Laos in October 1938 and had been directed quickly enough towards the developing Xieng-Khouang mission sector. Subsequently he spoke with regret of the Nong-



Het mission, an advanced station almost at the border of Vietnam which was abandoned because of the war and which was never reopened afterwards. In March 1945 he was made prisoner of the Japanese and brought to Vinh with Bishop Mazoyer. On returning to the Mission in 1946 he was again at Xieng-Khouang, and for several years he had to watch over the catechumens and then the neophytes of Ban-Pha. He left this village in November 1957, leaving Father Louis Leroy in charge.

Paksane

Having returned to the missionary district of Paksane, Joseph applied himself there until his death, firstly in charge of the ricefield village of Nong-Veng, then from 1963, some four kilometres from Paksane, the famous Lak-Si, he took charge of several refugee Thai Deng and Khmuh villages. He went by jeep to these villages, in spite of his bad sight, for he had lost completely the sight of one eye. During those years it was still risky to take the road. It was 1969, and since the end of March the dangerous situation meant that he had to forego celebrating Holy Week in these villages. It was only at the beginning of June that the Father again dared to venture out on this road known for its ambushes.

On Saturday, July 5, going up along the Nam San river, he had decided to spend the night at the village of Hat-I-Et,

some twenty kilometres from Paksane. He left around 4.30 pm, and took with him two young female Oblate Missionaries (OMMI) who were to help him in the visits, the care of the sick and the religious service. Let us read the account written by a confrere on July 9:

“...And then at 6.25 the terrible news. We were shocked, we rushed to find out more. A coach coming from Muong-Kao passed the Father’s car shortly after the outrage. The driver saw the dead priest, the car in flames, women’s belongings scattered by the road. Scared, he did not dare stop, since what good would it do, all seemed ended ...”
(Arriving in Paksane, he alerted the military).

Replying to the pressing request of the Fathers and of the relatives of the Oblates who wished to know what happened to their daughters, the officers agreed to mount an operation to go and see the place. At night with armoured vehicles, the convoy, accompanied by one Father and a friend of the mission, set off carefully. The two Oblates (OMMI) were discovered first, wounded but alive, and then the half charred body of the Father in the car.

“The wounded O.M.M.I. missionaries were able to give some information on the ambush. Three armed men had suddenly appeared. The first burst of shots was to the tyres of the jeep which climbed the embankment and turned over on its left side. Two further blasts, and Father was killed outright. The two lady Oblate missionaries had rolled over Father Boissel, and it was then that a blast from a B.40 (a sort of bazooka) exploded at the back of the car, splattering the two Oblates. They succeeded in getting themselves out of the car. One of them (Thai Deng) stated having heard the firing commander say in Vietnamese “It was time”. The jeep was burning because the petrol tank had been pierced. The two escaped, reaching the forest close by and hid. The assassins could have finished them off but did not do so. The O.M.M.I.’s could see

them contemplating their task, weapons poised, and then they disappeared. ...”

“Father Boissel, you remain among us ... This violent death disturbs, a harsh death, in your apostolic mission, a death that you had been within a hair’s breath of twice, a beautiful missionary death. But what must be said is that your life impressed us; the life of an apostle with a fiery heart, a life given, a life spent by a man of God, so that nothing else mattered than to announce Jesus Christ to the poor. This life, so well fulfilled, so rich in activity, so briskly led, of a heart so young that it takes no account of white hair, and makes us hope to keep you always with us ...”

The praise that we have just quoted is certainly strongly marked by the emotion of the moment. It is nonetheless sincere, objective, and valid. It can be applied to each of the missionaries whose lives and final oblation we have retraced summarily - Mario Borzaga, Louis Leroy, Michel Coquelet, Vincent L’Hénoret, Jean Wauthier and Joseph Boissel, and we shall add Alexis Guémené to this list. Each was in his fashion, with his character, his talents, his limitations, also, a man of God who had taken the measure of work to accomplish for Jesus Christ and for the poor, who knew the risks of the undertaking, but did not hesitate to go to the extreme of love.

Departure of the Missionaries

At that time a good number of foreign missionaries had to leave the country. The story of these departures would need to be treated more at length. It was the end of the old mission and the birth in suffering of a quite local new Church. We must remember that the revolution commenced on May 1, the day after the fall of Saigon, and that the process was set in motion in the entire country in a very organized manner. By the progressive elimination of all that might have been able to have the appearance of opposing the new order of things, the monarchy was abolished and the Popular Democratic Republic was installed on December

From mid-May, the three French Bishops, among them Bishop Etienne Loosdregt, O.M.I., had resigned. They were quickly replaced by Laotian bishops. A Vientiane, Bishop Thomas Nantha, named auxiliary bishop the preceding year, was enthroned on June 9. Bishop Alessandro Staccioli, O.M.I., whose vicariate had only one diocesan priest, was not affected by this and remained in place up to his expulsion in September 1975.

From a distance, we have often poorly understood the departure of the missionaries, in particular that of the Oblates. These departures took various forms, according to the places and circumstances, between May 1975 and July 1976:

- The work of the apostolate ceased - the Minor Seminary at Paksane, for example, had to send away the pupils and close its doors in May. Church buildings, houses and churches, were confiscated, as the presence of these were no longer justified. It is especially true for the Vicariate of Vientiane where, because of circumstances, many were concentrated.
- Furthermore, missionaries were expelled individually from their posts where a numerically weak Christian population could not assure their protection. Such an example was the launching of a grenade at Vang-Vieng where the missionary could not even stay at the leper village of Somsanouk, or a popular demonstration, manipulated as at Phôn-Hong. The result was the same - the missionary, stranger or Laotian, had to leave.
- Formal expulsions of an entire group, on the order of the local authorities, had taken place in two cases. In August-September all the Italian Missionary Oblates were hunted from Houei-Sai, Sayaburi, and finally from Louang-Prabang. This occurred despite marks of support from the population and the Buddhist monks, especially the Supreme Patriarch. Likewise, the French missionaries of Paksé were formally notified to leave the country in February 1976.

- In March 1976, there remained only a small Oblate group (five Fathers, including the Provincial, and a Brother) in the Vicariate of Vientiane, and some French missionaries in Savannakhet. An urgent meeting of the missionaries and laity with the bishop decided on the departure of these from Vientiane on April 3, 1976. Why was such a decision made? The Bishop, priests and Christian Laotians gave the reason - the continued presence of foreigners among them, which they had seen for a time as a sort of guarantee for themselves, had become an insupportable problem for the Church. Only one would remain for two more years to serve the international community of the capital. A similar decision was taken in July for the Vicariate of Savannakhet.

**One Sole
Oblate:
Bishop
Khamse,
O.M.I.**

Of the three Laotian Oblates still present at that moment, two would soon take the road to exile, following the example of the more and more increasing number of their compatriots. Now only one Oblate remains - Jean Khamse, ordained priest on January 26, 1975, who in June became Vicar General. He was ordained a bishop on January 16, 1983, and is presently Vicar Apostolic and Administrator of the Vicariate Apostolic of Luang-Prabang.

**Laos:
an
Oblate
Mission
Heritage**

During the forty years from 1935 to 1976, more than one hundred Oblates of all nationalities worked, laboured, prayed, and sometimes poured out their blood in this Northern Laos mission. Fifteen of them remain on Laotian land. Beside those whose too-brief career and final sacrifice we have traced, there were eight others, victims also of illness or river accidents, in the air or on the roads. Those also gave their still young lives - the average age of the fifteen was below forty years of age - in order that Church of that country could be born and develop. With more than twenty years of torment, it is only right to note that their work and prayers, their labours and their sacrifice have not been in vain. It is a beautiful page of the history of the Mission which was written there, and it is only proper to render thanks to the Lord who was indeed the sole Master of the work.

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