

Edict of Toleration

Issued on 8 October 1878, the "Edict of Toleration" was issued in response to an appeal to the King by Presbyterian missionaries of the [Laos Mission](#), northern Siam for permission to allow Christians to marry without having to pay the traditional "spirit fee," which was taken to be legal confirmation of the marriage by the officials of the semi-independent tributary states in the North. The missionaries refused to allow converts to pay the fee with the consequence that local officials used these fees to limit Christian conversion and expansion. The immediate cause of the edict was the demand that a young Christian couple pay the spirit fee in order to be married. The King referred the petition back to his viceroy in Chiang Mai who issued the edict on his own authority, although with implicit approval from the King. The edict was addressed to three of the northern states, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang. It affirmed the right of people to convert to Christianity, the right of Christians to observe the Sabbath, and the right of American citizens (the missionaries) to hire as servants anyone they wanted.

Although something of a historical icon among northern Thai Christians, the edict had only limited consequences at the time. It did give greater freedom for people to convert in some places, but in others persecution of and pressure on Christians continued as before. The edict also had political consequences, as it marked a step in Bangkok's gradual expansion of power over the Northern principalities.