

HeRD #83 - Padroado

Thai Protestant history represents less than half of the total of Thai Church history. Thai Catholic history, unfortunately, remains a largely unexplored field. It is a rich one, one that I suspect is full of lessons for us Protestant johnny-come-latelies. Here's a bit of background, taken from the doctoral thesis of Fr. Surachai Chumsriphan, a church historian.

Catholic history in Siam begins with the "Padroado." All of the missionaries who came to Siam in the 16th & 17th centuries came from Malacca, Goa, Macao, or Manila, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the Padroado. Padroado is a Portuguese word meaning patronage. It was an agreement made between a Catholic country's government and the Catholic Church that gave those governments control of Catholic overseas missions in their colonial territories. In return the governments provided the Catholic church support of its missionaries and missions. Both the Spanish and the Portuguese made extensive use of Padroado in their colonial empires. Evidently, these rights of patronage were first granted in the 15th century to Prince Henry the Navigator. Spain later obtained the same rights in its colonies. Eventually the Kings of Spain and Portugal obtained the right to nominate candidates for the office of bishop and other church offices and wielded considerable power over the Church. This aided these empires in legitimating and sustaining their power. The Catholic church benefited from governmental support for its overseas missions. Fr. Surachai notes that this system was actually a Medieval one that emerged out of Europe's struggle with Islam. The first Catholic missionaries in Siam, Dominicans who arrived in 1567, were representatives of the Portuguese Padroado.

HeRD #84 - Propaganda Fide

The Padroado [HeRD #83] form of Catholic missions proved itself successful as an instrument of Portuguese imperial policy in East Asia. It was much less useful to the Catholic Church as a means for creating a viable church in Siam and elsewhere. In 1622 Pope Gregory XV took steps to bring foreign missions back under church control. He established the Propaganda Fide as a mission agency directly under papal control. That same year he sent an Apostolic Vicar to Ayudhya in Southeast Asia, who decided to make Ayudhya, the capital of Siam, his center. The Padroado missionaries in Ayudhya claimed the Vicar was an intruder and usurper. They refused to accept his authority. In 1664 a second Vicar arrived. They called for a Synod, known as the Synod of 1664, to respond to the situation in Ayudhya. The Synod deplored ecclesiastical conditions there and called for reform measures, among them the founding of a seminary to give proper training to priests. A Fr. Lambert was the key voice at the Synod. He founded the seminary, the first in all of East Asia, in 1665. He later started a woman's seminary and founded a hospital in Ayudhya. In 1669 the Pope gave the two Vicars full power over all Catholic work in Ayudhya and established that work as a separate papal mission. The Pope appointed Fr. Laneau, one of the two Apostolic Vicars, as the first Bishop and Apostolic Vicar of Siam in 1674. The Padroado missionaries continued to resist Laneau until 1682 when the Pope finally ordered them directly to submit to him.

HeRD #85 - Catholic Evangelism

In HeRDs #83 & 84 we looked at the foundations of Catholic mission work in Siam. That work failed to establish a strong church, even though it began in 1567 and continued (with interruptions) on into the 19th century. Fr. Surachai in his doctoral thesis offers this analysis of the failure of Catholic evangelism. The Catholic missionaries of the 16th thru the 18th centuries themselves attributed their lack of evangelistic success to the supposed natural apathy, idolatry, lack of intelligence, lack of courage, and lack of conscience of the Siamese. Fr. Surachai observes, however, that the Siamese officials and people distrusted foreigners, including missionaries, and feared they aimed to take over Siam. All of the disputes and divisions we described earlier also took their toll. Catholic missions couldn't focus their resources effectively. Those divisions also created a bad impression of Christianity. Finally, French Catholic missionary participation in politics for the purpose of Christianizing Siam led to an anti-French and anti-Catholic attitude--which in turn led to the suppression of Christianity. Periodic governmental repression led to legal strictures on missionary work. They were eventually forbidden from using Thai or Pali in teaching Christianity. They were not allowed to evangelize the Thai, Mon, or northern Thai people. The government

prohibited them from criticizing Buddhism. When the Protestants arrived, beginning in 1828, there were only a handful of Catholics in Siam . Catholic work had to begin over anew.